

Rise of Naxalism and its Implications for National Security

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If the country does not belong to everyone it will belong to no one.

Tupamaro Manifesto.

I would like to state at the outset that I hold the firm belief that in any insurgency, the first step that the government should do is to study the economic background of the insurgency, assess the causes and then dovetail the security strategy with the plan of setting right the economic, social and development failures by the government so that the economic and social injustices are set right as the security operations progress. I believe that handling an insurgency is best left to the professionals. It is absolutely necessary to leave politics out of it. I also believe that psychology has no role in the counterinsurgency module. I am, therefore, basing my paper on two factors only—security and delivering economic and social justice. I feel that when this is done the insurgency will wither away because there will be no cause for any of the people of the affected area to fight with the government.

I have always held that the best model of a counter-insurgency that succeeded was the campaign conducted by President Magsaysay of the Philippines against the Huk guerillas. In fact, the leftwing extremism or Naxalite insurgency that we are facing in this country strongly resembles the situation in the Philippines, when the Huk insurgency erupted before the Second World War and continued after the country was given freedom by the United States. The issue in the Huk insurgency was land. Tenant farmers were being squeezed by big land holders and were getting a raw deal in tenancy rights. Regrettably, the government sided with the landlords and set the police and the military against the Huk guerillas. The police and the military were blundering around committing excesses against the tenant farmers for supporting the guerillas, so much so that when President Magsaysay went touring the affected areas, the people told him again and again that they

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hated his corrupt police and brutal Army and corrupt civil servants who sided with the landlords against the poor tenant farmers. Magsaysay went back to his capital, amended the tenancy laws in favour of the tenant farmers, reigned in his Army and ensured that no excesses were allowed to be committed. After a year when he toured the affected areas, the scenario had changed. The people now told him that his soldiers were behaving well, the police were fair and the civil servants were not sucking the blood of the tenant farmers any more. The Huk insurgency gradually withered away.

In India, the obstacles hindering the counter-insurgency effort are easily identified. They have bad politics and not just bad politics but rotten politics. One of the major obstacles is something that the Philippines did not have. This is caste, at the root of the Naxalite problem. The third problem is a peculiar concept that was introduced into the body politic and administration of India during the emergency and perpetuated thereafter by all political parties without exception. This is the concept of committed bureaucracy not just to the party in power but to the family heading the party in power. When you have a situation of the caste factor being conjoined with the political factor, then you have a stranglehold where on the basis of caste the oppression of the poorer economic communities continue and economic and social justice is continually denied and the concept of committed bureaucracy protects the perpetrators who are oppressing the lower castes. Denied economic and social justice, the oppressed classes are motivated by the left wing extremist (LWE) parties and you have an insurgency in your hands.

Let us now examine the incidents of Left Wing Extremism (LWE) in India briefly assessing the cause of resorting to violence in each case.

1946. The Tebhaga movement in undivided Bengal

The demand was for the share of the landlords to be reduced from one half to one third. The movement spread from Rangpur and Dinajpur in the north to 24 Parganas in the south. When their demands were not heard the *Kisan Sabhas*, dominated by the Communist party, encouraged the peasants to forcibly take two thirds of the harvested crop from the granaries. As a result, there were bloody clashes between the peasants and the landlords. The movement petered out when the landlords with the help of the local administration let loose a wave of repression.

1946-51. The Telengana Insurrection

The movement was directed by the Communists from the very beginning. The peasants launched their struggle on economic issues against forced labour, illegal exactions and unauthorised evictions. It soon developed into an uprising against the feudal rule of the Nizam. More than 4000 lives were lost before the Communist party withdrew the struggle. The Telengana insurrection (1946-51) was broad-based and had no parallel in Indian history since the 1857 war of Independence.

1967. Naxalbari

The revolt was in the area of three police stations-Naxalbari, Kharibari and Phansidewa. About 65 per cent population of these three police stations was scheduled castes and tribals. They worked as agricultural labour or in mines, forests and plantations. A small percentage owned small holdings. The majority cultivated on agency basis (*baghchash*). The *baghchashis* were exploited by the *jotedars*. When the land reforms act was passed in 1955, the *jotedars* started *malafide* transfers of land. Santhals armed with bows and arrows forcibly occupied the lands of the *kulaks*, lifted stocks of hoarded rice and killed an inspector of police. Thereafter, there were a number of such incidents. After this, there was a major deployment of police forces by the CPI (M) government and after several operations the movement was squashed. The leadership of the movement was by communist cadres who were following the path set by Mao Tse Tung after the Cultural Revolution. This culminated in the formation of the Communist Party of India Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML) on 22 April 1969. Not more than a score of people were killed in this uprising, but it left a far reaching impact on the entire agrarian scene throughout India. It was like the throw of a pebble bringing forth a series of ripples in the water.

1968. Srikakulam

Girijans or tribals comprised about 70 per cent of the population of Srikakulam district living in the agency area of the Eastern Ghats. They were mainly involved in agriculture, while some collected minor forest produce. The British, conscious that they may be harassed by the plainsmen decreed that no land could be transferred from a *girijan* to a plainsman, without the permission of the District Collector. The Act was, unfortunately, observed more

in the breach. The traders and money lenders took full advantage of the poverty of the *girijans*. They gave them daily requirements like tobacco, kerosene, salt and cloth on credit and also lent money for purchase of seeds. Those unable to clear their debts were made to part with their land. Thus, most of the fertile land was alienated from the *girijans* and passed into the hands of the plainsmen. The landlords squeezed them to the utmost and paid subsistence wages. Lease holders had to give two-thirds of their produce to the landlord. It was in 1967 that one Vempatapu Satyanarayana started work among the *girijans*. The movement he led was able to make substantial gains for the poor *girijans*. Wages of farm servants rose, the landlord's share of harvest was reduced from 2/3 to 1/3, 2000 acres of land was wrested from the landlords and more than 5000 acres of wasteland came under the possession of *girijans*. Then on 31 October 1967, a clash took place between a large group of tribals going for a meeting of the Marxist party and a group of landlords. The landlord group had guns and they shot and killed two tribals. The *girijans* were incensed and the movement became violent. Vempatapu Satyanarayana organized the *girijans* into guerilla squads called *dalams*. At this stage, the Srikakulam leadership who had joined the CPI (M) faction of the Communist party broke away from the CPI (M) and joined a group that split from it to form the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries which in due course evolved into the communist Party of India, Marxist-Leninist CPT (ML). There were a series of raids on houses of landlords and money lenders; their houses were burnt down and cash looted. There were a number of encounters with the police. From December 1968 to January 1969, twenty nine policemen were killed in action by the *dalams*. Charu Mazumdar, the CPI (ML) leader visited Srikakulam and gave a fillip to the movement. During 1969, the Naxalites committed 23 murders and 40 dacoities. Some of the murders were gruesome. For example, on 11 May 1969, a landlord, P Jammu Naidu of Ethamanuguda was killed and slogans were painted with his blood by the members of the *dalam* that executed him. He was a notorious man who had grabbed the land of the poor tribals and forcibly taken the daughters of the tribals as his wives. When he was killed he had seven wives, two of whom were little girls he had forcibly taken from tribals. This showed the extent of exploitation of the tribal people by the upper caste landlords. The exploitation of the forest tribals who collected minor forest produce is evidenced by

the account of a trial of a *sahukar* by a Peoples Court. The *sahukar* or usurer used to go into the Agency area to collect tamarind from the forest *girijans*. The list of borrowers which he brought showed that he had lent a sum of Rs. 280/- to peasants of 4 villages. Against this he proposed to collect from them 40 bundles of tamarinds which at the market rate was worth Rs. 1600/-. This meant that the peasants were to pay back nearly six rupees for every rupee they had borrowed! The usurer was arrested and tried before a Peoples Court. He repented and promised to behave and not fleece the peasants. He was let off.¹

1967-71. West Bengal, Midnapur and Birbhum

The Midnapur district of West Bengal bordering Bihar and Orissa witnessed a well planned and well organised Naxalite movement in the Debra and Gopibhallavpur police stations. The district has a sizeable tribal population of Santhals, Oraons and Lodhas. The majority of them were landless labourers. A small proportion owned small plots of land or cultivated the *jotedar's* land under the *Barga* system. Gopibhallavpur has a long forested border with Orissa and Bihar. After the Naxalbari uprising in 1967, a section of CPI (M) workers in Midnapur started propagating the extremist line. They supported the *kisans* and *bargadars* and worked for a movement against the *jotedars*. Santosh Rana, Ashim Mukherjee, both first class postgraduates of Calcutta University and a host of students from well to do upper caste families from Calcutta lived and worked among the tribals, identifying themselves wholeheartedly with them. From September 1969, big tribal groups armed with spears, bows and arrows attacked the houses of *jotedars*, killed some of them, looted cash and burnt all deeds of land. The State Government alarmed at the spate of killings sent several companies of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and state police and by March 1970, the area was brought under control. The Naxalite uprising in Birbhum district was also masterminded by several students from Calcutta University. The State Government reacted by deputing CRPF, State armed police companies and an army infantry company for cordoning and searching the area. Nearly 150 CPI (ML) cadres were arrested and the movement died down.

1968-70. Bihar and Uttar Pradesh

The Mushahari block of Muzaffarpur district of Bihar covered 12 villages with a population of about 10,000 people. There were

various forms of oppression by the upper classes on the peasantry. In April 1968, the peasants of Gangapur harvested the *arahaar* crop of the landlord in broad daylight. Retaliation was quick. Bijli Singh the *zamindar* of Narsingpur organised an attack on the peasants with 300 men armed with *lathis*, swords and firearms with the landlord leading on an elephant. In the fight that ensued, the landlord and his hoodlums were routed. The humbling of this powerful landlord by the *harijan* peasants had a magical effect on the surrounding villages.² *Kisan Sangram Samitis* were formed and there were incidents of seizing of land by the peasants. In April 1969, landless peasants forcibly harvested the crop on 14 acres of land of a landlord. There was a clash in which the retainer of the landlord was killed. In June 1969, an attack was made in Paharchat village. The landlord and two associates were killed. Hundreds of peasants gathered after the raid. In their presence, all the deeds and documents were burnt and the pawned ornaments returned to the owners. A series of incidents followed. Alarmed, the State sent police forces and after several combing operations, the movement died down. The Mushahari struggle caused ripples to spread into Dharbanga, Champaran and Chota Nagpur. Here in May 1970, 54 *Adivasis* were arrested in the Jaduguda forest during police operations. A British girl Mary Tyler was found among them. Later she wrote poignantly about the movement-"The Naxalites crime was the crime of all those who cannot remain unmoved and inactive in an India where a child crawls in the dust with a begging bowl, where a poor girl can be sold as a rich man's plaything, where an old woman must half starve herself in order to buy social acceptance from the powers that be in her village; where countless people die of sheer neglect, where many are hungry while food is hoarded for profit, where usurers and tricksters extort the fruits of labour from those who do the work, where the honest suffer, while the villainous prosper, where justice is the exception and injustice the rules and where the total physical and mental energy of millions of people is spent on the struggle for mere survival ."³

The Naxalite violence that erupted in Singhbhum and Ranchi had more serious dimensions. Jamshedpur became a mini Calcutta, with instances of attacks on schools and, government offices and police piquets. Schools were also attacked in Jamshedpur. There were also large scale attacks in Ranchi. In Uttar Pradesh, the Palia area is part of the Lakhimpur district in the Terai region. It was inhabited by Tharu tribals. The state government encouraged

poor peasants to go to the Palia area, allotting 10-12 acres of land to each family. In actual fact landlords forcibly occupied big chunks of land, ejecting the poor peasants. This provided the Naxalites with fertile grounds for agitation. Their object was to clear the area of big farmers, *thugs*, corrupt political leaders and moneylenders.⁴ A series of attacks and raids on landlords ensued in which a number of firearms were also snatched. Deployment of the armed police in the area brought the situation under control.

In all these states, the Naxalite movements were organised and coordinated by various CPI (ML) groups. Unfortunately, the top Marxist-Leninist leaders like Charu Mazumdar in West Bengal, Satyanarain Singh of Bihar, were not tactically sound in their approach. They thought that there would be mass uprisings and they could build up a Peoples Liberation Army from the rag-tag band of peasants who had revolted against the atrocities of landlords and money lenders. Charu Mazumdar succeeded in arousing the students of Calcutta, who left their studies and went and lived in the forest villages and shared the tribulations of the tribals. The vital element of building up a guerilla force training and equipping them to take on the might of the state was lacking. One by one the movements fizzled out as the Central Para-Military forces with the state police were deployed in the interior areas and well planned raids and search operations were carried out. The CPI (ML) leadership lacked the vision to organise the poor peasants against the might of the state, though the cause was just. Also, lumpen elements infiltrated the leftist groups and affected the discipline of the groups.

According to a rough estimate, there were about 4,000 incidents of Naxalite violence from the middle of 1970 to the middle of 1971, with the break-up as follows-West Bengal-3500, Bihar-220 and Andhra Pradesh-70. The Government of India made a plan for joint operations in West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa with the Army, Para Military Forces and the state police. This was undertaken from 1 July to 15 August 1971. This was *Operation Steeplechase*. The broad strategy was to surround an area that was a known stronghold with an outer cordon of the Army, an inner cordon of the CRPF, and local police operating inside. The operation disrupted the network of the naxalite cadres and the movement stalled. Meanwhile, internal dissensions between the factions of the CPI (ML) also disrupted the movement. A number

of top leaders were arrested, including Charu Mazumdar. When he died shortly after, it marked the end of a phase of the Naxalite movement in India. However, it was only a lull. The movement was to surface again, for the Indian Government had not removed the causes of the insurgency. This movement was not going to be finished with cosmetic remedies. The causes were deep rooted in caste, the crucial factor behind the exploitation of the poor and the downtrodden.

1980. Peoples War Group (PWG) Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra

Andhra Pradesh has a radical tradition going back to the Telengana struggle of 1946-51. The *Girijan* awakening in Srikakulam had preceded the Naxalite movement. The forces of the state squelched the uprising by 1970. The movement, however, continued to simmer. After Charu Mazumdar's death, his associates Kondapalli Seetharamiah, KG Satyamurthy and Suniti Kumar Ghosh formed a Central Organising Committee (COC) in December 1972, concentrating on organising and mobilising the masses. They decided to eschew militancy until such time as the party was strong enough to embark on a course of violence. Kondapalli Seetharamiah encouraged the party workers to commit money actions- an euphemism for dacoity or robbery. He was arrested on 26 April 1977, but jumped bail and thereafter organised underground activities on a large scale. He broke away from the COC of the CPI (ML) on 20 April 1980 and formed the CPI (ML) Peoples War Group. For the next ten years, he moved from strength to strength and the Peoples War Group emerged as the most formidable Naxalite formation in the country.⁵

What led to the resurgence of Naxalism in the Telengana area? The basic reason was the continued economic exploitation of the tribals by the landlords, traders and government officials especially those of the Forest Department. As PS Sundaram wrote- "The tribals owning small pieces of land are expropriated and sharecroppers impoverished. They are all kept under perpetual bondage towards repayment of a small debt supposedly taken generations ago. The forest wealth is freely smuggled out by contractors in connivance with the forest staff. The tribals get neither a remunerative price for their produce nor a fair wage for their labour."⁶

The social dimensions of exploitation were far more revolting. The landlords of the region were commonly known as *dora* (lord). C Lokeswara Rao has described the high-handedness of the *doras*- "The tyranny of Doras in Telengana is unmatched. Tribal girls working on the Dora's land are forcibly taken in his household and are at the disposal of the master and his guests. She is forced to have abortions when she gets pregnant. She has to subsist on the leftovers passed on by the cook, but has to satisfy the appetite of any male in the master's household. Naxalite songs are replete with references to rape by landlords and to girls growing up with the knowledge of the inevitability of rape that awaits them. Only a few such practices have disappeared and the pace of change is slow."⁷

On 20 May 1981, the Naxalites had called for a meeting of tribals at Indraveli in Adilabad district. More than 30,000 tribals had turned up. The administration refused permission for the meeting, apprehending a clash between landlords and tribals. The tribals were determined to have the meeting. There was a *lathi* charge and firing and 13 Gond tribals were killed. The PWG exploited the anger of the tribals and consolidated their hold on the area. Kondapalli Seetharamiah was arrested for the second time on 2 January 1982. He escaped from hospital on 4 January 1984. He now concentrated on organisation of the PWG cadres. He constituted Forest Committees for the forest areas and Regional Committees for the plains areas. Armed squads or *dalam*s comprising 6 to 10 members were formed. About 50 *dalam*s were soon active in Telengana.

The PWG is believed to have redistributed nearly half a million acres across Andhra Pradesh. The modus operandi was to forcibly occupy excess land of big land owners and give them away to the landless or to the labourers working for the landlord. As per the State Government's own admission, counter affidavit 68/82 filed by the state against the Naxalites, the radicals had forcibly redistributed 80,000 acres of agricultural land and 1, 20,000 acres of forest land. I wonder that the court did not react to this. What was the government doing all this time since the land ceiling act came into being? This is the crux of the matter in Andhra Pradesh and in many states of India. The land ceiling act is not enforced. The party activists insisted on a hike in the daily minimum wages from

Rs. 15/- to Rs. 25/- and the annual fee for *jeetogadu* (year long labour) from Rs. 2000/- to Rs. 4000/-.⁸ The poorer sections were particularly happy at these two measures. They found that what the politicians had been talking about and the government promising year after year could be translated into a reality only with the intervention of the Naxalites. *Gorakala Doras* (Lord of the Bushes) is how the Naxalites came to be known in the interior forest areas. Revolutionary writers helped in furthering the Naxalite ideology. The moving spirit of the *Jana Natya Mandali*, the cultural front of the PWG was Gummadi Vittal Rao, better known as Gaddar. This wandering ministerial's ballads inspired the simple tribal. He became a legend in Andhra Pradesh.

The PWG fought a running battle with the Telugu Desam Government. When the Congress came to power in 1989, they took a soft line with the Naxalites, freeing a number of Naxalite who were under detention and in prison. They, however, did nothing to control the exploitation of the tribals like enforcing the land ceiling or controlling the moneylenders. The Naxalites began organising, extorting money and running peoples courts, giving the general impression of a parallel government. The Congress resumed the hard line. Soon the PWG had spread to the adjoining areas of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and into some areas of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. They also acquired 50-60 AK 47 rifles probably from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Naxalite violence was gradually stepped up peaking in 1991 with several attacks on railway and electrical installations and police stations and patrols. On 8 May 1992, the PWG was banned and coordinated operations commenced against them by the Central Para Military Forces and the state police. The results were good with 3500 cadres being arrested and 8500 surrendering. By 1993, the Naxalites surged back with violence again rising.

They now spread to the Bastar district of Madhya Pradesh, which till then was a sleepy forest outpost. The tribals of Bastar were used to a life of deprivation. They made the truant teacher to take classes regularly and the absentee doctor to attend to his patients. The tribals began to look at the Naxalite cadres with awe and respect. The Peoples Union of Civil liberties wrote about Bastar- "A lopsided socio-economic development of the district caused by exploitation through cheating and duping was an ideal setting for

the Naxalites to take root in the area. With their idealism, free of corruption or other vested interests, they could win the confidence of the tribals. They punished corrupt officials, made the tendu leaf contractors to increase the wages.⁹ The movement spread to Balaghat and Rajnandgaon districts.

Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra is largely inhabited by tribals. The jungle is spread through 10,495 square kilometres out of the district area of 15,434 square kilometres. The entire life of the tribals revolves around the forests, yet the tribals were denied access to the forests due to a stupid interpretation of the Forest act and rules. With the coming of the Naxalites, the forest officials abdicated their jurisdiction. The best testimonial of the presence of the Naxalites was given by an innocent tribal who got a lift from the Commissioner of Scheduled castes and tribes during his visit in Gadchiroli district. The Naxalites are called *Dadas* in Gadchiroli. When asked about the *Dadas*, the tribal replied-"There is at least one change since the *Dadas* have come. The government atrocities are over and the police cannot harass us."¹⁰ There were 113 incidents of Naxalite violence in the district in 1990 with 16 deaths. On 12 November 1991, ten State Reserve Police Force (SRPF) personnel were killed and 13 injured in a landmine explosion under their vehicle. The PWG has attained a high degree of expertise in making and detonating improvised explosive devices (IED).

The New Left in Bihar

The best description of the dismal state of affairs in Bihar is summed up by Arvind N Das-"Bihar's economy has been at a stand still for decades. The discriminatory nature of public and private investments, the green revolution bypassing the state, principally on account of non-implementation of land reforms, the willful subversion of whatever social security system existed, all this has pushed the people into poverty, the economy into backwardness, the society into violence."¹¹ The resentment of the oppressed sections in this environment found an outlet in the emergence of a 'New Left' manifested in the form of three Naxalite groups in the beginning of 1980-The Maoist Communist Centre (MCC), CPI ML (Anti Lin Piao Group) and the CPI ML Party Unity. In May 1982, the Bihar Government reported that 47 out of the 857 blocks were affected by the Naxalite movement. Subsequently, the movement has grown enormously in the face of a corrupt,

casteist and incompetent administration.¹² When the CPI ML was formed, one Naxalite group *Dakshin Desh* had remained aloof. Amulya Sen and Kanai Chatterjee were its leaders. They considered mass mobilisation as a precursor to armed action. The group chose Jangal Mahal area of Burdwan, with a sizeable population of scheduled castes and tribals, for its operations. Agricultural land was inadequate, irrigation virtually nonexistent, and the wage rates dismally low, all conditions suitable for a Naxalite uprising. The landlords generally belonged to the upper castes, while the sharecroppers and landless labour were scheduled castes or tribals, the ideal cocktail for the Naxalite to enter. By 1973, the party had 37 militias who organised actions like looting of food grains, killing of class enemies and snatching of arms. In 1975, the group was renamed as the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC). The MCC gradually spread over central Bihar. Its membership exceeded 10,000 and they had stockpiled about 700 weapons including some AK rifles. There were gruesome slaughters of Rajputs by Yadavs in the MCC. These were more by way of the feuds between the two communities and because of the way the Rajputs had treated the Yadavs. On 29 May 1987, the Yadav cadres of the MCC slaughtered 42 Rajputs of Baghaura and Dalelchak villages of Aurangabad district. On 12 February 1992, 37 members of the landowning Bumihar caste were hacked to death by the MCC cadres in Bara village of Gaya district.

Vinod Misra formed the CPI ML anti Lin Piao faction in December 1973. It struck roots in Bhojpur district and spread to Rohtas, Jehanabad, Patna and Nalanda districts. They had 50 underground armed squads and some weapons, mostly country made guns, a few rifles and sten guns. The Indian Peoples Front was the political front of the anti Lin Piao faction. The CPI (ML) Party Unity was formed in 1982 by the merger of the COC CPI (ML) of Andhra and the Unity Organisation of CPI ML of West Bengal. The Party Unity has about 30,000 members. It has 25 armed squads holding about 150 weapons, including a few sten guns.

The third phase of Naxalite violence commenced with the holding of the 9th Congress of the Peoples War Group in 2001 in which it was decided to give more sophisticated arms to the Peoples Guerilla Army. This phase has extended the Naxalite war to nine states.

Conclusion

It will be seen that in all the theatres of Naxalite violence, there has been a diagnostic response only in one state-West Bengal. Here, the CPM government carried out operation *Barga* under which share croppers were registered and given permanent and inheritable rights on cultivation of their plots covering a total area of 11 lakh acres. Besides 1.37 lakh acres of ceiling surplus and *benami* lands were acquired by the state government and distributed among 25 lakh landless and marginal cultivators. The land reforms have seen the emergence of a new class loosely termed rural rich, weakened the social and political power enjoyed by the landlords in the countryside. This has not even been thought of by Andhra Pradesh or Bihar, where the Land Ceiling Act has not been enforced after more than 50 years of its legislation. And sadly this is not the end of the picture in these two states. The Law enforcing officers say openly that the Naxalites are a band of *thugs* and criminals and must be wiped out. There is no question of the Land Ceiling being enforced. What they have left unsaid is that it is the right of the upper classes to have hundreds of acres of land and it is the duty of the scheduled classes and tribes to slave on these lands for the benefit of the upper classes. In this regard, the case of land tenancy in Kerala is of interest. The upper classes in Kerala were generally landlords but with medium holdings. The majority of the landlords had tenant farmers on their lands who deposited half of the crop to their landlords. The landlords themselves and their progeny were educated and took up white collar jobs in the metropolises of the country. Then the CPI M was elected in the late fifties, they legislated land tenancy laws that transferred ownership of tenant holdings to the tenants who were having tenancy for 12 years. At one stroke hundreds of upper caste landlords lost their holdings and tenant farmers got ownership rights of the lands that they had tilled for long years. This is one reason why the Naxalite movement did not grow roots in Kerala. They had no cause.

The issue in the forest lands of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh and Jharkhand is different. Traditionally the forests here, have been the home of the tribals for centuries. Here again, the root cause is the caste factor. It is the *Vaisya* who trades. It is he who is the moneylender. In thousands of years of Hinduism the roles of the castes have been honed well.

You will find that in the forests of all the Naxalite affected states, the *bania* has had a vice like grip on the tribals. He lends money to them and collects minor forest produce against the loans, taking care to keep the tribal perpetually indebted.

When posted in Hyderabad in 1989, I had a chance to discuss the Naxalite problem with the state's Home Minister, who asked me how this problem could be solved? When I replied- "You have to enforce the Land Ceiling." The Revenue Minister of the state raised his hands and replied-"But that is impossible." What he did not tell me was that the two major castes of Andhra, the Reddy and the Kamma, both landlords would never allow the land ceiling to be enforced. And they were the main political force in the state. Here then is the crux of the problem. The same situation exists in Bihar, where the Brahmin, Bumihar and Rajput will have his land holdings in the names of his pet dogs and cats rather than allow the land ceiling to be enforced.

In the landed areas, the upper castes are the main political factor and they will not allow the lower castes to get their share of land. In the forested lands, it is the *bania*, the *Vaisya*, who is in league with the political class and who bribes the bureaucrat and keeps the poor low castes and the tribals in perpetual subservience. There can be no solution to the problem of the CPI ML leading a proletariat rebellion without solving the basic problem of giving rights to the lower castes and the tribals and putting an end to the exploitation by the upper castes. Measures like the *salwa judum* are clever ploys by the same upper caste political and bureaucrat nexus operating. Above all there can be no military solution to this problem.

The Way Forward

In the landed areas, the first step is to enforce the land ceiling. This has to be done, forgetting the political factor of particular political parties wanting to retain power in states like Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. The Central Para Military Forces and the state Police which are used in operations against the Naxalites should now be used to enforce the land ceiling, evict the landlords from their excessive holdings, and ensure that the surplus lands are cultivated by the lowest classes and tribals. They should ensure that the crops grown by the new land holders are secure and they harvest

the crop keeping the landlords away. Once this is done, the Naxalite cadres will not use landmines on the police forces.

In the forest tracts, laws should be legislated that only forest dwelling tribes and scheduled castes should have access to forest lands. Very strictly, upper castes should be prevented from entering the forests. Cooperatives should be organised of tribals who can be trained and only these tribal cooperatives should be allowed to trade in forest produce. Branches of banks with micro credit loans as operated by the *Grameen* bank in Bangladesh should be set up with forest cooperatives to sanction loans to the forest tribes. The Para Military Forces that were used to hunt the Naxalites should now be used to enforce the new laws for the forests. They should see that the *Bania* does not enter within 100 kilometres of a forest. They should ensure that all trade is carried out only by the Forest Cooperatives. They should guard the branches of the micro credit *Grameen* banks.

When this is done the tribal will know that the government is now with him at last and he will befriend the police force and stop putting land mines for them. The Naxalite problem will then wither away.

Notes

1. Liberation. May 1969. Page 83-84.
2. Naxalites in Bihar-Fight for Land. N.K.Singh. Patriot. 11 October, 1969.
3. My years in an Indian Prison. Mary Tyler. Page 191.
4. The Naxalite Movement in India. Prakash Singh. Page 72.
5. Ibid. Page 130
6. Causes of spurt in Naxalite Violence. Indian Express. 1 September 1987.
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