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Naxalbari Movement in West Bengal

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Abstract: India has witnessed a rich history of peasant movements, both before and after independence, driven by factors such as colonial exploitation, agrarian distress, and socio-political transformations. In fact, Indian society has been replete with the manifestation of numerous peasant movements across the time both in pre-independent and post-independent India. This paper tries to give an extensive overview of the Naxalite movement. The Naxalite Movement in West Bengal, ignited by the Naxalbari uprising in 1967, stands as a significant chapter in India's socio-political history. The movement began in the village of Naxalbari in Darjeeling district, where a peasant revolt against local landlords escalated into a broader call for land redistribution and social justice. Led by figures like Charu Majumdar, Kanu Sanyal, and Jangal Santhal, the uprising was influenced by Maoist principles, advocating for a protracted people's war to dismantle feudal structures and establish a classless society. Rooted in Marxist-Leninist ideology, the movement emerged as a radical response to deep-seated agrarian inequalities and socio-economic injustices faced by marginalized communities, particularly tribal sharecroppers. This paper provides a comprehensive knowledge about the root causes, characteristics and faulty policy of the ruling left parties in West Bengal responsible for overwhelming atmosphere of violence and terrorism pictured mainly as a Naxalite phenomenon. The first part deals with the history of the movement by describing its origin and development until today. Part two deals with the strategy and actions of the Naxalites and sets its focus on the root causes. The paper begins by focusing on how the land of Chaitanya, Rabindranath, Kirtan, Baul-Bhatiali became hot-spot of violence. After successful completion of this Paper, we will be able to



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- i) know the inner causes, characteristics of Naxalbari movement, lack of unity of the leaders,
- ii) how the sons of soil (Adivasi) were exploited and deprived of their rights and demands.

Keywords: Naxalite movement, Development, Violence, Marginalized Communities, Adivasi, Rights and Demands.

Introduction: Rabindranath Tagore said, Bengal has always been free from the burden of traditional mores. Her soil has been very sensitive to the demands of humanism. Any clarion call for humanity would touch the people's heart. In ancient days too shastric (scripture) authorities and religious leaders abhorred Bengal for, her, humanistic content and one had to expiate for his sins in coming here even if it was on a pilgrimage. That indicates that Bengal has even

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remained a land free from conventional superstitions Protestant creeds like Buddhism, Jainism, Gaudiya Vaishnavism found its root in Bengal and surrounding places. Historically, Bengal could maintain her autonomy and independence for a long time, from the rule of invaders. Vaishnavism and Bauls carried the spirit of freedom to every nook and corner. Their literatures and songs never carried ornamental or scriptural exaggerations. The simple humanness and finer sense of beauty of the Kirtan Baul-Bhatiali groups' songs are indeed, remarkable. In spite of this historical background of Bengal, land of Chaitanya and Rabindranath, become a hot bed of violence since pre-independence period group rivalry between Anushilan and Jugantar parties (Two revolutionary groups) may be mentioned in this context.

Especially to the ruling class. British Authority and Zamindari forces were always violent in suppressing poor peasants, labourers or any dissenting groups. Inhuman police torture on freedom fighters, forceful eviction of peasants by the standing forces of Zamindari, suppressing the labourers by the hired goondas of employers, all these violent processes existed. But unfortunately, the tradition of this monopolised violence of State Authority and ruling clique has been sidetracked by organised propaganda, and recent violence in West Bengal has been equated with anti-government movements. Even the post '69 developments, viz. the overwhelming atmosphere of violence and terrorism have been pictured mainly as a Naxalite phenomenon. This is due to organized State propaganda, which also tried to assert, that the chaotic situation in West Bengal has been perpetrated by the left parties since '67.

The overwhelming atmosphere of violence in West Bengal during 69-72, excited serious concern to all down from the state authority to the people in the street. The period of this all-pervading atmosphere of violence reached its peak during '71-72. By some quarters it has been said to be initiated in March, '66, when a violent **Bangla Bandh** and its casualties led to a semi-upsurge position in West Bengal. It all started with a police firing and death of two boys at **Bashirhat** and **Krishnagar**, who were in a peaceful and spontaneously organised procession demanding immediate supply of kerosene and rice. That led to a sui generis breakdown of normal life in the state for 15 days, even the train service had to be abandoned for a week. The violent situation was pacified with the release of C.P.M. leaders (who were held under D.I. Rules). But this situation and pre-'67 general election period or even up to the mid-term election of '69, armed combats were limited to political parties.

Two significant developments posed serious problem to the U.F. Government in '67. A pocket revolt by a group of C.P.M. cadres at Naxalbari, who defied the leadership and gave a clarion call for forceful grabbing of the land, and the forceful capture of sister parties' Unions, initiated by C.P.I. (M). The first political murder which shook the U.F. was that of B.P. Jha, a leader of S.S.P. in Asansol colliery belt, by the C.P.M. Gherao in factories and firms, and land grab movement in the rural belt sharpened the internal crisis of the ruling U.F. Even then people remained unaffected by these internecine quarrels i of U. F. parties for extending spheres of influence. The post '67 violence and combats were mainly internecine struggles. Even the so much debated Naxalbari movement was originally an inter-party struggle, first between the ruling group of CPM and its more militant section (later which formed C.P.I.-M.L.) who were against the tactics of sharing power in a Bourgeoisie system then between the Militants and the S.S.P. The post



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'69 March, violence took a sharp turn, from being a purely political one, into a complex milieu of gangster-politico and social orientations. A significant fact to be noted here, in the violent political struggles during '67-69, i.e., during two times of U. F. regime and Governor's rule, not a single major event of attack or combat against Congress took place. All combats were between likeminded sister left parties in power.

India has been a hot bed for the manifestation of various types of social movements. Peasant movement has been one of such varieties for a long time. In fact, Indian society has been replete with the manifestation of numerous peasant movements across the time both in pre-independent and post-independent India. Several accounts are regarding the emergence, coalescence, and decline of those movements by the sociologists, anthropologists, historians and political scientists. Right from the Indigo cultivators' movement (Mishra, Girish: 1968), to the Naxalite movement in West Bengal (Dasgupta: 1974, Banerjee: 1980, Mukherjee: 1979) have been strong treasures of historical evidences of radical peasant movement in India. The studies spell the genesis of those movements along with the issues and participants involved in those movements. The processes of collective mobilization, ideological underpinning, leadership and organization of those movements present a very detailed explanation regarding the nature and extent of discontent and the remedies called for and ultimate manifestation in the movements.

Yet the supposition that democracies normally do not lead to the growth of violent movements does not seem to be working in India where democracy has continued for 72 years without interruption. Moreover, the Indian economy is stable and has fared well; the graph of its progress continues to maintain an upward trend. The agrarian society of independent India experienced a new epoch in history of peasant movements with the peasant uprising of May 1967. Naxalbari uprising was an armed peasant revolt in 1967 in the Naxalbari block of the Siliguri subdivision in Darjeeling district, West Bengal, India. It was mainly led by local tribal and the radical communist leaders of Bengal and further developed into Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) in 1969. The event became an inspiration to the Naxalite movement which rapidly spread from West Bengal to other states of India creating division within the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) party. Immediately after the country's independence, the government of West Bengal enacted the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act (1953) to abolish the zamindari and other intermediary systems and the West Bengal Land Reforms Act (1955) to put a ceiling on landholdings. The act created provisions for a scope to reserve sixty percent of the produced for the sharecroppers and put a restriction to evict the sharecroppers indiscriminately. But, due to the shortage of political will, the progressive provisions could not be implemented and most of the clauses remained locked in the statute books only. The eviction of the sharecroppers remained a permanent reason for peasant unrest. This entailed a strong economic insecurity and a sharp downward mobility of the peasants became evident. Due to indiscriminate eviction, unemployment grew up and the agrarian society became the worst sufferers despite their best participation and performance in agricultural production. The percentage participation of the sharecroppers declined sharply. The sharecroppers who constituted sixteen percent of the rural households in 1952-53 came down to 2.9 percent in 1961-62. Malafide transfer of land ignoring the ceiling small and marginal farmers increased among the rural population in absolute terms, but in real terms poor peasants



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were undergoing a desperate situation caused by their livelihood insecurity. The increase of agricultural labourers from 15.3% in 1961 to 26.2% in 1971 and the decline of the actual cultivators from 38.5% in 1961 to 32% in 1971 (Census of India 1961, 1971) explains the situation quite hard for the peasants in those areas. The Report of the All India Credit Committee also expressed their anxieties regarding sharp polarization between classes in rural areas which was threatening the very structure of the rural societies including the Naxalbari region under Darjeeling District of West Bengal. Moreover, the uprising occurred in such a situation that a great turmoil was going on within the communist organisations of the world and also the Indian nation following the Sino-Soviet split. The leader and ideologue of the uprising Charu Majumdar presumed that the time was ripe for launching an armed protracted people's war in India following the Chinese Revolution (1949), Vietnam War and Cuban Revolution. Charu Majumdar wrote the Historic Eight Documents which became the foundation of the Naxalite movement in 1967.

In this backdrop, while the economic condition of the peasantry was deteriorating, the political happenings in West Bengal took a new turn. In February 1967, the United Front (dominated by the communist parties like CPI, CPI(M), RSP etc.) came out with the slogan of 'land to the tiller'. The United Front pledged to implement the land reforms which was there only in statutes and promised land to all landless households and invited for a militant initiatives from the peasantry as an organized force (Banerjee: 1980). The Left political parties had initiated rigorous mobilization of the peasantry in Naxalbari areas since the early 1960s when the landowners of the Naxalbari region started large-scale eviction of the sharecroppers. The CPI(M) Darjeeling District Committee started to organize the peasants on a militant footing after the United Front Government was formed in West Bengal.

The Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, on more than one occasion described the Naxal insurgency as the biggest threat to the internal security of the country. This is a serious matter and deserves international attention as the rebellion can have a long-term and long-range destabilizing effect in the region and beyond. India is home to one sixth of the world's population. The growth of extremism in a country of this size cannot be dismissed as a local matter; also, particularly, a stable democracy like India's should not have nurtured such developments.

What is Naxalism? Naxalism is an extremist ideology which doesn't believe in the ideology of democracy and democratic process. Democracy has been hailed as the true and authentic voice of people, working for both their tangible and intangible interests. In a meaningful democracy, political stability and working within the conventional framework of law and ethics are the two most desired virtues. People across the country have long cherished the dream of living under healthy governance, which has led to their reaffirming the mandate for constitutionally approved governments irrespective of their efficiency levels or experience. Widespread practice of social discrimination, untouchability, domestic violence, and atrocities against the weaker sections is an index of the failure of the promises made to the oppressed people of this country. In this situation it should not cause surprise that a large section of the people are angry and feel alienated from the polity. It is in this context that it has become necessary to identify the variety of causes of discontent and to seek ways by which the State could answer them in a humane,



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caring and democratic way. If the emphasis of this exploration is on the Naxalite phenomenon it is not because other modes and forms of agitation are less important but only because the method of struggle chosen by the Naxalites has brought the problem to a head.

In the view of Naxals, the crux of Naxalism stands and based only on violence, which is generally imposed by the ruling class. When the forces go inside to search the naxals, they don't know who is a Maoist and who isn't — and they sometimes resort to huge human rights violations. And it is going to increase, as more forces will go inside now. Now thousands of people have died in several huge massacres and a regular feature of Naxal attacks, and there was no human rights violation? Nobody is thinking that father, mother, sister, brother, daughter and son have been killed together; drivers and police personnel have been killed. What happens when people are killed in village courts? A small violation by the police goes a long way, but what about the Maoists...? Will this continue in a democracy, will they not be criticised by society? Cases of illegal detention and torture of Naxalite prisoners in Indian jails is also a grave matter of violation of human rights. In a democratic country like India the state is primarily responsible to provide secure environment of living. But in the case of Naxal affected areas the state has failed to do so. When we talk about judicial inquiries, the conviction rate is very low due to lack of evidence. In any Naxal affected area, where any incident takes place, there is an atmosphere of fear. People get picked up but they cannot talk against them (Maoists). They know they'll have to stay in that place. So while people get identified, it's a problem to make them talk in court. One major issue of discontent against the Govt. among the tribals is arrests. They are picked up randomly and remain for four, five, six years in jail as under-trials. The judicial process is slow and families suffer, they get frustrated. Maoists campaign that innocents are kept in jail for no reason. Still a huge number of innocent villagers and tribals are languishing in jail, and this the matter of major violation of human rights. The Naxalite movement came into being as a result of prevailing social and economic issues. In fact, while conducting an enquiry into the uprising, the West Bengal State Secretariat of the CPI (M) stated, —Behind the peasant unrest in Naxalbari lays a deep social malady- malaise transfers, evictions and other anti-people actions of Tea Gardeners and JOTEDARS. These issues were longstanding and there was no dearth of reform legislation.

What caused Naxalite Movement?

Many observers have found the incomplete agrarian reforms as the reason behind Naxal movement. Extreme poverty, exploitation of landless tillers - often from Dalit and tribal communities - and denial of social justice by the administration gave birth to extreme discontent among the masses and left wing leaders. After Independence, the government abolished zamindari system as part of agrarian reform but redistribution of land was not undertaken amid protest by some groups. Meanwhile, attempts were made to improve agriculture, which led to better returns from farms. The combined effect of the abolition of zamindari and improved practices in agriculture produced many neo-rich farmers, who were not ready to share their profit with the tillers and labourers, who put the real hard work in the fields. While the landowners prospered fast, the landless continued to struggle for food. In several agriculture-dependent areas, the poverty levels were reportedly as high as over 95 per cent. Discontent was simmering. Naxalbari only gave vent to the socio-economic anger.



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Ideology and Dissention

Charu Mazumder was the inspiration of the early Naxal leaders. Charu Mazumder was, in turn, inspired by the success of Mao Zedong of China. Mao had shown brilliant acumen in organising and leading the ordinary and exploited masses of rural China to overthrow the ruling elite.

Charu Mazumder interpreted Mao's ideas in the context of West Bengal and framed strategies to suit his surroundings. His Historic Eight Documents propounded the Naxal ideology and was instantly popular among the early rebels. In the next four-five years, Naxalbari movement spread across West Bengal. '*Amar bari, tomar bari, Naxalbari, Naxalbari*' slogan filled the campuses in the then Calcutta and other places of the state.

But, differences started cropping up in the ranks. Several groups came in Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. The various splinter groups again reunited in September 2004 under the banner of Communist Party of India (Maoist), which an outlawed outfits in the country. At the time of the merger, three groups were active. These were the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI-ML), the People's War (PWG) and the Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI).

Emotional young people including students of 16 to 28 years old mostly belonged to well-to-do middle or lower middle-class families were a part of initiators of Naxalbari movement. They were also very good or brilliant students of renowned institutions. Primarily this group of youngster's initiated the movement and gained public sympathy due to their bright educational backgrounds. But later on this idealistic young group were isolated from the movement because of their non-linking of active and ground level politics. The glory of freedom movement and the sacrifice of great leaders of the country were valueless to them. Co-existence of high and low existed in the society but they did not pay any heed to this situation. They were whimsical and did not maintain any discipline. They used to show their disrespect to old and aged people due to their difference between ideology and real life. But ultimately these youngsters became scape-goats of the clever and seasonal politicians who took the control of the movement. These youngsters were also ignorant of basic class arrangement of the society.

Elder brothers or fathers of this group of aspirant youngsters in many cases were either active members of the left parties or local leaders of any either political party. Consequently, these youngsters were aware of their guardians', opportunistic nature and behaviour, difference, between their moral sayings and practices. The hypocrisy, incompetence and failure of the established political leaders made this group disappointed and they inclined to do something new. At this point of time Naxalbari movement attracted them and they took the opportunity to be part of it.

Idealistic group of young leaders of C.P.I. (M) were totally neglected and became prey to the groupism and whimsical activities of high-ranking party officials. To pacify the cadres and to console them the leaders often used to utter some slogans in favour of arms revolution and war against revisionism. But these illusions of the young and aspirant cadres were totally destroyed after the L.F. came into power.



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Some eminent dramatists, actors, intellectuals and few working Babus, entertainers also inclined to the revolutionary idea at that moment to gain popularity and to enhance their images. Naxalism to them became a matter of discussion at their luxurious drawing rooms and tea-tables. At the first stage they supported Naxalbari movement but after observing the terrorist activities lashed out by the so-called activists and indiscriminate murders, stabbing, heinous acts like breaking of historical statues of noble personalities the Babus became mum. They have to be disappointed after secret killing of some brilliant student's young men and police atrocities towards educated young persons and small merchants who opposed the movement.

How can a movement like the Naxalite grow in a country like India?

This question acquires intriguing importance under such circumstances. Neutral observers therefore emphasize the need to know the causes of this phenomenon as without addressing those the menace of terrorism and extremism cannot be contained effectively. Realising the importance of an in-depth and objective study based on the situation on the ground and direct and indirect observations, analyses and comments by observers on the causes of this insurgency, and its rapid spread, the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) has undertaken this study. Asghar Ali, Research Fellow at IPRI, has sifted through a great deal of available material in the form of news reports, official and non-government surveys in India and statements of high officials reported in the vernacular press to thumbnail facts for this study. This distinguishes his work from more formal academic exercises and gives its findings a freshness and immediacy of its own.

The Indian ruling classes insist on their claim that India is the world's largest democracy. Considering the size of the populace of India it would be difficult to disagree with this claim. As a result, in spite of all of its reservations, it is no wonder that world opinion at the international level does not totally reject this Indian claim. In any case since winning freedom from British rule on 15th August 1947 governments in India have changed through the ballot, that in itself can be termed a great achievement, notwithstanding the hiatus of emergency rule (from 25 June 1975 to March 1977) imposed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, a hard-to-erase blot on the face of Indian democracy. The roots of the Naxalite movement lie in India's communist movement. The Communist Party of India (CPI) was born shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution. After the degeneration of the Bolshevik Revolution and the rise of Stalinism in Russia, a very small current in the movement was sympathetic to the Left opposition led by Trotsky. The bulk of the CPI went with Stalin not because of any specific admiration for Stalin or his policies but out of loyalty to the Soviet Union, considered then as the mother country of communism. Stalin's influence on the CPI's policies and strategy continued until his death in 1953.^{vi} The Soviet Union's role in defeating Nazi Germany ensured that Stalin was well regarded not only by CPI members and sympathizers but also more widely in India. This broader social approval in its turn reinforced the communist movement's admiration for Stalin and the USSR.

Naxalbari is a small village in the southern part of India's Bengal province. In a remote village



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called Naxalbari in West Bengal, a tribal youth named Bimal Kissan, having obtained a judicial order, went to plough his land on 2 March 1967. The local landlords attacked him with the help of their goons. Tribal people of the area retaliated and started forcefully recapturing their lands. What followed was a rebellion, which left one police sub-inspector and nine tribals dead. Within a short span of about two months, this incident acquired great visibility. Observers and analysts of the world over acknowledge that the Naxalite guerrillas not only enjoy influence over 40 per cent of India¹³ but they have full control in a 'Red Corridor' of some 92000 square kilometers. According to India's premier secret agency RAW, the Naxalite 21 movement employs some 20,000 guerillas and has 50,000 regular members in outfits associated with it.¹⁵ and there are tens of millions across the country among the populace who can be called its supporters and sympathizers. But what is of utmost concern is the dangerous way the Naxalites' influence is growing. It is not for nothing therefore and few would dispute it when Manmohan Singh identifies the biggest threat to India's internal security coming from the Naxalite movement.

The Naxalite movement, now known by many other names, is supposed to have originated from here. The CPI (Leninist-Marxist) emerged when the Indian Communist Party broke up into several factions in 1967. In its initial years this faction championed the cause of local farmers and laborers and its influence was confined to West Bengal. Gradually, however, this movement spread to nearly all rural areas of central and eastern India, in particular Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Bihar and Jharkhand which became its main root. The second line mainly professed and propagated by the Andhra Secretariat, drew heavily on the Chinese experiences and the teachings of Mao, in building up the struggle of Telangana. The Andhra leadership, while successfully managing to spearhead the movement against the Nizam, failed to tackle the complex question of meeting the challenge of the Government of India. The Nehru government embarked on the road to parliamentary democracy, conditioning it with reforms like the 'abolition of the Zamindari system'. All these objective conditions facilitated the dominance of a centrist line, put forward by Ajay Ghosh and Dange. This line characteristically pointed out the differences between Chinese and Indian conditions and pushed the party along the road to parliamentary democracy. The Naxalite movement was born that day and the peasants killed that day became the martyrs of the movement. The CPM was further split. One section supported the 'revolutionary peasants', while the dominant section supported the party against the 'left-wing adventurism' of the Naxalbari activists. Beijing Radio and the People's Daily from China hailed the Naxalbari rebellion, calling it 'a spring thunder in India'. The formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist- Leninist) (CPI (ML)) was formally declared at an impressive rally in Calcutta on April 22, 1969 (Lenin's birthday). The CPI (ML) declared its open allegiance to China and Mao-se-tung thought and announced that its aim was the overthrow of the Indian state through an armed uprising of the Indian peasantry that would liberate the rural areas from class enemies. The liberated zones would be used to create a red army that would eventually surround the cities and take them over, leading to the overthrow the Indian state. The CPI (ML) proclaimed itself to be the revolutionary party that would lead the revolutionary march of the red army from the rural to the urban areas. It denounced the CPM as 'neo-revisionist' implying that the CPM merely talked about revolution but in practice was following the same reformist parliamentary path it had denounced when it split from the 'revisionist' CPI.



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Factors responsible for growth of Naxalism:

Political Factors

- Nature and apathy of the political system towards tribals remained one of the most important factors that led to such uprisings.
- Inability of political authority in India to provide avenues for structural uplift to the deprived sections of society in the affected states.
- Lack of political participation by the tribal community

Economic Factors

- Poverty and economic inequality and underdevelopment in the Naxal affected regions.
- Entry of mining companies in Tribal lands and forests, posing threat to the livelihood of the tribals.
- Indigenous tribal population deprived of their lands, uprooted from their traditional source of livelihood.
- The benefits of the resource exploitation are not passed on the tribals.

Environmental Degradation

- Environmental degradation in the form of destruction of land and water resources due to mining and industrial activities

Lack of basic facilities

- Lack of basic facilities like education, freedom, sanitation and food.
- The socially backward tribals form the major support base for Naxalites because of inequality, illiteracy and lack of opportunities.

To understand the genesis of the Naxal movement, one needs to locate it within the framework of the Communist movement in India. To be more specific, any study on the Naxal movement cannot overlook the importance of the rise and fall of the Telangana Movement (1946-51), since

Telangana will always remain the glorious chapter in the history of peasant struggles for Indian communists. In fact, it was the first serious effort by sections of the communist party leadership to learn from the experiences of the Chinese revolution and to develop a comprehensive line for

India's democratic revolution. On the other hand, the experience in Telangana also facilitated the growth of three distinct lines within the Indian communist movement. The world has known Charu Mazumder as the precursor of the Naxalite movement; it was Kanu Sanyal who actually led the armed action in the "Naxalbari" belt. "He has condemned Charu Mazumder's role and has tried to emphasize the point that his activities during the movement in Naxalbari were not above board. There was constant propaganda since 1967, that eight documents written by Charu Mazumder, is the creator of Naxalbari. How far this claim is justified can be seen from the events of the Communist movement in the Darjeeling district from 1965 to 1967. The role of Charu Babu in this movement was peculiar. Though he was not



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directly connected with this struggle, he arbitrarily declared withdrawal of the struggle at the instruction of the State Kisan Sabha leaders without prior consultation with the participants of the struggle". Kanu Sanyal raised all these issues to question the leadership of Mazumder only after his theory of class annihilation was vehemently opposed, leading to a split in the CPI (M-L). Even before the decision of forming the new party, many groups of the Co-ordination Committee of the Revolutionaries opted for remaining outside the party. The allegations against Mazumder for taking the anarchist line, isolated terrorist guerrilla action, duplicity in taking a clear-cut "stand about fighting the revisionist CPI (M) leadership, Cheist foco technique of precipitating the formation of revolutionary bases through small organised groups, withdrawing from frontal organizations, all these were raised by these groups at the very inception, of the new party. Like their party leaders in the undivided CPI, they took up cudgels in the name of Mao, while their old group leaders took the name of Marx and Lenin to corner the factional opponents. History was repeated this time, as most of Mazumder's followers, like Sushital Roy Chowdhury, Ashim Chatterjee, Kanu Sanyal etc. came out openly to denigrate him. Group alignments in the Communist Party have been determined by militant shows of revolutionism, either in the name of Marx, Lenin, Stalin or Mao. The attachments of earlier days to a particular group leader or Dada also contribute much to the pattern of group alignment. The new party CPI (M-L), did not face this Dada-based groupism because most of the leaders and activist cadres were either new or less prominently placed in the hierarchy of group alignments in the party leadership. But the old technique of an artificial build-up of a cult that symbolises militancy of extremism, prevailed. So when a particular individual could mobilise, this 'militancy symbolism', either through strong group support or by manipulating contingent factors, even strong critics of the cult failed to mount any reasonable opposition lest they were branded as less revolutionary. Sanyal, Jangal Santal and others who had every reason to feel disgusted with the planned, machinations of the Mazumder clique for taking all credit of the Naxalbari struggle, were obsessed about such militant sentiments. So their later statements against Mazumder's role in Naxalbari could not impress the people who care little about the factional squabbles of the parties. From the very beginning of the movement, bhadralok's (elites), with their factional feuds; held its sway. Right from the outset, Charu Mazumder was intent on carrying out a crusade against the official line of CPI (M), which was pursuing 'a class collator actionist and revisionist ideology', deceiving the revolutionary section of the party and acting, secretly as a 'stooge in the interests of US imperialism, Soviet revisionism and Indian reactionaries. Stressing these points, he was giving the clarion call to the cadres of CPI (M) to defy their leadership and join hands with him in their struggle for correcting the party, line. This was nothing exceptional in the intra-party politics of West Bengal, where all leftist parties are divided into moderate and, extremist lines of thinking. CPI (My also had its factional groups, on this pattern even before the official split of 1964. And it, is widely known how the middle of the road leaders like, Jyoti Basu, Bhupesh Gupta etc. were taken into their respective parties through non-ideological channels. The extremist faction led by Mazumder was disillusioned with the CPI (M) cases only after, the violent action by CPI (M) against them, armed with Governmental weapons and party resources. Before that the then Naxalites displayed the same sort of factiousness as seen in their resisting the capture of the office of the Party organ Deshitaishi attack on CPI (M) cadres in colleges and universities and, similar other activities indulged by factional groups of every party



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including Congress in West Bengal on the eve of a party split. The in-built process of factionalism was in work from the very beginning of the party formation and gradually this led to splits and sub-splits within CPI (M-L). Police inaction at the initial stages and the helpless attitude of the administration may not be part of a centrally planned machination, as the CPI (M) alleged. During UF rule, the police was also riddled in the partisan squabbles for extending spheres of influence, the more so as the police portfolio was with CPI (M). A section of the police served CPI (M)'s interests and a CPI (M) backed Association also became decisive in the working of the police administration. Before the 1971 election, the CPI (M)'s hold on the general administration and police contained the Naxalites, who either took the shield of local Congressmen or other anti-CPI (M) forces. By that time, the State was under the grip of terrorism with a daily casualty of 10-12 men. Political murders or any murder was overlooked by lodging the blame on the extremists, and people never dared to report crimes and murders lest their own security be in danger. The insecure atmosphere of individual violence was manipulated by the police and the status-quo forces to erode the aspiration to legitimacy of the Naxalites. Upper caste urban bhadralok's bias for the students coming from Presidency College and other reputed institutions had lent some legitimacy to the movement. The journalists and their papers for their own separate interests had eulogized the movement inspite of the terrorist record at Naxalbari. But these urban bhadralok's, obsessed with pseudo-revolutionary abstraction, soon withdrew their vocal support as soon as their own security was threatened by the generalised -terror of the urban Naxalite combat groups. The first resistance, however, was offered by a carpenter at Beliaghata in 1970, who was murdered on the spot while he tried to ward off the murder of a target person who was saved. Police atrocities against the Naxalites took very brutal shape from November 1970. During the period of unrestricted terrorism, general opinion was silent. The intellectuals and journalists kept mum, as many of them became the target of specific terror. Even organising protests or issuing statements against the murder of a Vice Chancellor, Judge or prominent man seemed impossible. Political parties which generally rouse public opinion, stood helpless, even their leaders with their armed body-guards; could not move freely in their own areas. The police and administration utilized this total loss of credibility of the parties. None of the contending left parties could claim themselves to be above board. Though the much publicised Jyotirmay Bosu led mission, of Parliamentarians, exposed the ghastly police act of murdering Naxalites at Beliaghata and issuing a fabricated story, the Attack on D. L. Sen Gupta, M.P. and his associates and the withdrawal of some local political leaders complaint letters against police action in Beliaghata concerning the murder of some young Naxalites, reveal their helpless predicament. The parties failed to agree about setting-up of an Enquiry Committee, or the way in which the ghastly Cossipore incidents should be condemned. The Maoist leaders are motivated largely by their desire to seek political power through a Maoist style of People's War, similar to the war waged by their counterparts in Nepal, their cadres and foot soldiers fighting for them are largely motivated by genuine grievances arising from the political, economic and social hardships. It is India's long neglect to develop the tribal areas which has created large pockets of alienation against the government and these pockets have become the spawning ground of Maoist terrorism. Maoists mainly attack police stations, police lines, camps and arms storage depots of para-military forces in order to demoralize the security forces and capture their arms and ammunition. In May 2006, the Planning Commission



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appointed an expert committee headed by D. Bandhopadhyay's, a retired IAS officer instrumental in dealing with the Naxalites in West Bengal in the 1970s. The expert committee has underscored the social, political, economic and cultural discrimination faced by the SCs/STs across the country as a key factor in drawing large number of discontented people towards the Naxalites. The committee established the lack of empowerment of local communities as the main reason for the spread of the Naxal movement. Choosing its words carefully, the report states that "We have two worlds of education, two worlds of health, two worlds of transport and two worlds of housing...". The repeated success of the Maoists in mounting large-scale surprise attacks on such hard targets speaks of the poor state of rural policing and intelligence set-up and the equally poor state of physical security. Unfortunately, instead of working out an appropriate strategy which will address these operational deficiencies and at the same time pay equal attention to the political handling of the problem, there is an unwise tendency to militaries the counter-Maoist insurgency management.

Conclusion: The new development model, which has been adopted and which is sharply embodied in the new economic policies of liberalization, privatization and globalization, have, led in recent years to a huge drive by the state to transfer resources, particularly land and forest, which are critical for livelihood and the survival of the tribal people to corporations for exploitation of mineral resources. SEZs and other industries most of which have been enormously destructive to the environment. These industries have critically polluted water, bodies land, trees, and plants and have had a devastating impact on the health and livelihood of tribal people. This has resulted in leaving tribals in a state of acute malnutrition and hunger which has pushed them to the very brink of survival. It could well be the severest indictment of the state in the history of democracy anywhere, on account of the sheer number of people (tribal) and the diabolic nature of the atrocities committed on them by the state, especially the police, leave aside the enormous and irreversible damage to the environment. It is also a glaring example of corruption- financial, intellectual and moral – sponsored and / or abetted by the state. The governments concerned have to take note of the genuine grievances of the tribals and deal with them in a sympathetic manner. There has to be a system for a prompt enquiry into all allegations of excess. Also, Maoist terrorism cannot be effectively countered without modernising and strengthening our rural policing and the rural presence and strengthening our rural policing and the rural presence of the intelligence agencies. The tribal areas, which have not yet been affected by the Maoist virus, have to be developed on a crash basis in order to prevent the spread of the virus to them. The capabilities of the security agencies deployed for countering Maoist activities also have to be different from those of the urban counter-terrorism agencies. The emphasis has to be given on greater mobility in the rural areas and greater protection from land-mine used extensively by the Maoists. The failure to develop the road infrastructure in the rural areas has facilitated the spread of Maoist terrorism. There is a widely accepted view that the Naxal problem can be tackled successfully through a combination of development and security related interventions. The problem is not to be viewed entirely as a law and order issue. Often, innocent tribals who live in the interior forest regions fall a prey to Naxal intimidation. Innocent tribal people are killed merely on the suspicion of being police informers. Thus, it is clear that the Maoists do not want the State to address root causes like underdevelopment in a meaningful manner since they resort to destroying school buildings,



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roads, railways, bridges, health infrastructure, communication facilities etc. in a major way. However, the Government and informed sections of society are optimistic of eradicating the problem through a multi-pronged approach and a strategic vision. It is note-worthy that due to the measures initiated by the Government, violence has significantly declined in the last ten years, from 2011 to 2021. The multi-pronged efforts of the Government are slowly showing positive impact and results.

The organised propaganda of the Establishment against West Bengal, regarding law and order situation does not stand, since during turbulent years the number of cognizable offence in West Bengal ranked far below U.P., Maharashtra, and M.P. Even in police murder West Bengal followed U.P., M.P. in -69% in murder figures U.P.'s 3147 murders in '69, was much higher than West Bengal's during '69-72, which was altogether 2417 (Source: AnandaBazar - 27.8.72). The ballyhoo about *Gherao* seems motivated as only 5 cases of closures were due to Gherao, which totaled about 1468 during 67-72. Still violence in W Bengal had its qualitative and organisational uniqueness for which it has acquired historical significance. The following figures would show why West Bengal attracted the attention of the world.

No. of police died in Political disturbances	('70-71) - 413
No. of persons died by police firing	('70-71) - 199
No. of political cadres died in inter-party clashes	('70-71) - 130
No. of attack on Schools-Colleges	('70-71) - 331
Inter - party clashes in Calcutta	('69-72) - 451
Political Murders	('69-73) - 1771
Persons arrested without trial in Calcutta	('67-72) - 7462

Source: Assembly statement of Minister of State (Home), Detective Department, Calcutta Police, and Jugantar, 13.7.72.

The main actors of organised violence were State organs, political parties, and anti-social gangsters. State's traditional propensity to violence could not be changed as the structural configuration of the administration, viz. the police remains kinchanged since British days. Post independent Congress (I) practice of utilising police in suppressing democratic movements and-safeguarding the capitalist interest got a shakeup in '67, when U.F. decided not to use police in suppressing democratic activities of the people. But the subsequent developments viz. the inter-party struggle armed the police and the State administrators with manipulative powers. They could set the U.F. parties to fight against each other. The Naxalite Adventurists, at the initial stage was not dealt with proper measures with an eye to this strategy. When they shook up the Establishment itself they, were suppressed by excessive violence. Similarly, the major partner of U.F. viz. C.P.I. (M) baptized their cadres with ideas that accept violence as the only means of social change and they incited cadres to violent actions in liquidating other parties' cadres and organisations. But when the whole party had been made to-toe into the activities of violent gangsters, the party stood helpless in safeguarding their /cadre's lives, they had nothing left to do but to lie low before the State violence. C.P.I. (M) & C.P.I. (M-L) are the worst sufferers of this menace. '72 election, the most violent one in history, would bear that out.



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Summary: The term Naxal derives from the name of the village Naxalbari in West Bengal, where the movement had its origin. Naxalites are considered far-left radical communists, supportive of Maoist political sentiment and ideology. Their origin can be traced to the split in 1967 of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), leading to the formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist). The year 1967 marks a turning point in terms of the revolutionary armed struggle in India. On May 24th the persistent social and political tensions in the small village Naxalbari in the Darjeeling District of the Federal State West Bengal unloaded after a landlord was attacked and led to a full-scale peasant riot. This event was also deeply rooted in the socio-economic conditions, namely unequal land distribution and forced labour that had persisted since the British rule (Marwah 2009, 98). Amongst the disadvantaged rural population there was a big number of Dalits and Adivasis (Singh 2010, 6). CPI and later CPI (M) were active in mobilising the peasants in the area around Naxalbari since 1959 (Mehra 2008, 7). The peasants were armed with traditional weapons and engaged in bloody clashes. The uprising was spearheaded by a radical faction of the CPI (M) that was led by Charu Mazumder, a charismatic party worker who turned out later to become the ideological father of Naxalism. He had composed eight monographs, that later became known as the eight historic documents which are regarded as the inspiration for the uprising and the subsequent development of Naxalism (Ahmed 2003). Initially the movement had its centre in West Bengal. Meanwhile, revolutionaries in Calcutta, who had also been running a campaign against revisionism, took up a massive campaign in support of the Naxalbari uprising. The walls of college streets were plastered with posters saying: Murderer Ajoy Mukherjee (the Chief Minister) must resign. The revolutionaries [still within the CPI (M)] held a meeting in Ram Mohan Library Hall in Calcutta and formed the Naxalbari Peasants Struggle Aid Committee, which was to become the nucleus of the Party of the future. Simultaneous to the police action, the CPI (M) expelled a large number of their members. Sushital Roy Chowdhury, a member of the West Bengal state committee was expelled.

Despite the ups and downs, the Naxalite movement spread rapidly in many parts of the country, protracted armed resistance, declaration of liberated area, killing and arrest became a regular phenomenon in the rural areas of West Bengal. By the end of June 1967, the CPI (M) leadership came out against the Naxalbari leaders, calling them ‘an organized anti-party group advocating an adventurist line of action’. Several members were expelled from the party. The rift became complete and ultimately a more organized militant groups captured the movement by the aegis of ‘Naxalbari Peasants’ Struggle Aid Committee’ and a ‘Coordination Committee’ under the leadership of CPI (ML). Today, the Naxalite movement is not carried out by any single party. Countless groups espouse Naxalite politics and operate autonomously in their chosen areas maintaining, at best, tenuous links with some other groups.

Naxalism is now India’s biggest internal threat. Doubtlessly it is definitely a serious challenge. But the author Sudeep Chakravarti declared recently that the statement is an absolute myth. In fact Naxalism reflects merely India’s real threats like large scale poverty, hunger and injustice (Chakravarti 2010 (B)). The Naxalite movement is a symptom for the failure of the Indian state to provide human development for its citizens. Naxalism does not only threaten the flow of foreign direct investments but could destabilize the whole political order as many citizens lose their faith in the state



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and therefore its legitimacy is challenged. India, on its way playing a bigger role on the international level, needs to tackle its internal problems urgently.

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