

# **NAXALITE INSURGENCY IN INDIA - CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES**

**Anil Kamboj**

## ***Introduction***

The genesis of the naxalite insurgency in India is rooted in peasants' movement and agrarian discontent. The movement began in March 1967 when a group of revolutionaries led by Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal launched a peasants uprising at Naxalbari after a tribal youth, who had a judicial order to plough his land, was attacked by the goons of local landlords. The tribals retaliated and refused to part with the land owner's share of their produce and lifted the entire stock from his granary. It ignited a fire that spread in the state. This was brought down by use of force and simultaneously bringing in some land reforms by the state government and could be termed as phase one of the movement. Later on, the phase two of the Naxal movement spread to 9 states that is, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Orissa, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh; posing a challenge to the nation. In the predominantly tribal areas, naxals hold Kangaroo courts; impose levies on contractors, mine owners, businessmen and even on government officials. The movement has thrown up leaders, a legion of workers and sympathisers who believed that guerrilla warfare tactic would liberate India.

The 'Red Corridor' stretching from Nepal through some of the most backward regions of the country up to Andhra Pradesh and even up to Tamil Nadu, is the territory where the Naxalites take on the state might on a daily basis. But what do the Naxals want to achieve? Their first aim is to establish a base area inside the Dandakaranya forest, spanning Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Orissa and part of Maharashtra. As per naxal leader Gopannah Markan, "once the base area has been established, there would be no presence of the government elements. Only the CPI (Maoists) would be present and the people would rule through Janatana Sarkar..

The Naxals are against any development inside the forest area. The government wants to build pucca roads inside the villages and forests but the Maoists discourage any development work in the area. They know that once the development takes place then perhaps they may lose support of the people. Therefore they have been misleading the innocent people that the government wants to take away their mineral wealth and their forests.

Though the tribals and the peasants form the main part of the cadre strength of the Maoists. But it is also learnt that few doctors, engineers and educated persons are also joining the movement and are providing the technical expertise. Many of the senior leaders operating in states like Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh are from Andhra Pradesh. Little is known about the whereabouts of the Headquarters or even the training centres of the Naxals. It is believed that they are located at Abhujmar plateau in Central India. That area, approx 5000 sq kms, is perhaps the only area which has not been surveyed so far. The administration has no idea as to what is located inside that forest.

The Home Ministry believes that it not only law and order problem but has deep socio-economic dimensions. They also believe that Indian Maoists have fraternal and logistic links with the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists). Their cadre come to India for administrative support.

The annual report of MHA for 2004-2005 puts the number at 9300 hard-core underground cadre, holding about 6500 weapons besides a large number of unlicensed country-made arms, of which around 3000 to 3500 are in Chhattisgarh alone. Reports suggest that from 76 districts in nine states two years back, the Naxal sway has increased to 12 states, which is a rapid rise by all accounts. In 2005 alone, 510 people died in Naxal related violence including 89 security personnel. Besides this, weapons, communication set and literature captured from the Naxals reveal their growing reach, expanding tentacles and sophistication over the years. The Naxal violence in the country, accounts for about 91 percent of country wide violence and 89 percent of deaths. With exception of Andhra Pradesh, which had initiated a peace process with CPI-M in 2005 following an

election promise, Naxal violence grew in various parts of India at a rate of 15 to 29 percent.

### ***Maoists' Modus Operandi***

Today Maoists are not a band of disgruntled illiterate have – nots who have taken to arms. They are a regular force, with squads that are patterned on army platoons who are highly trained and motivated. The way they plan and execute their attacks, the way they understand and use complex circuitry for detonation of improvised explosive device (IEDs), the way they improvise their tactic; clearly projects that they are being trained by experts. This leads to the fact that retired men from armed forces, when they return to their villages, find themselves completely overrun by naxalites and getting sued by Maoists doctrines. These ex-armed force persons are imparting sophisticated training to the Maoists.

In a war, you win or loose. But the important thing is to learn lessons so that you can convert your loss into victory later on. The question is that who has learned lessons fatal. At the moment it seems that Maoists have been better learners. Apart from their indoctrination, their training program is very good. Learning from their early encounters with the police, they have improved their policing aspects and have developed their cadre as a professional force. The cadre operates with maps and sophisticated communication sets. They are intercepting the police communication network and even hacking into their system. They have excellent intelligence network which is both shadowy and effective. The drawback with the security force personnel is that except for very few top people, they can not recognise the underground and lack in intelligence. After the merger of Maoists Communist Centre of India (MCCI) and Andhra based Communist Party Maoists – Leninist or People's War Group into Communist Party of India (Maoists), have made this group very strong. This has also inspired the Communist Party of Nepal Maoists. During this time the state administration in most of the places made no attempt to counter this. The bad administration left a vacuum which the Maoists easily moved into. Since the Maoists know no state borders and only geographical barriers, they now easily slip from one state to other. With their merger, funds have got consolidated which has increased their buying capacity as far as weaponry is concerned. In their area of

dominance, they run parallel government complete with local courts called as Jan Adalats, taxation systems, schools, primary health centres and so on. Nobody from the government machinery can dare to enter these areas.

Unlike Nepal, where Prachanda is an iconic figure, whose collapse may end the movement, Indian Maoists are not taking that risk. There are two reasons for that: one, creating icons is against the spirit of the revolution which depends on the cadre; two, Indian Maoists want the cadre to understand that leaders are unimportant, the movement is. Therefore, if a leader or few top leaders get eliminated, the movement should not get affected.

### ***Present Situation***

The Maoists movement has now entered a crucial phase. The unification of revolutionary forces has been a recent phenomenon in India. In addition there has been an expansion of the Maoists movement, bringing more areas under its fold. The re-unification has ushered in a paradigm shift in employment of strategies and tactics by the Maoists, which have direct bearing on the vast populace and on the security forces. The severity of violence has now increased many folds. The infamous Vempenta incident in Kurnool district, where 9 dalits summoned by the Maoists to attend a Kangaroo court, were tied and beaten to death by lathis. In Chilkaluripete police station, Maoists hacked to death a police officer and shot dead mother of another police officer, who escaped the attack. C. Narsi Raddy, a Congress legislature in Narayanapet of Mehabubnagar district was gunned down along with 10 other while they were attending the Independence Day function in 2005. The brutality of the incidence and subsequent justification of the killings indicate the clear shift in tactics that these cadres are following. Their ideology is that the manner of killing should frighten more than the killing itself.

The Maoists rebels elsewhere in Jharkhand, Bihar and Chattisgarh have been experimenting with the new strategy. They are trying to involve the people's militia in military raids. The Giridh and Janahabad raids where militants in large numbers were drafted for the attacks are some examples. Chattisgarg now is another example where the

Maoists have let loose a reign of terror through several attacks which left hundreds of tribal dead.

### ***Impact on Society***

Earlier in 1980s and early 1990s, a revolutionary violence was indeed selective and the rebel's focus was on issues concerning the people, like: Issues of bonded labour, enhancement of wages, increase in rates for Tendu leaves collected by the tribals, minimum wages, struggles against the feudal and exploitative sections of the society, formation of agriculture labour associations etc. That was the time when a large section of people, mostly the middle class and the deprived sections had accorded a tacit approval for the violence and turned into strong supporters of revolutionary politics. The exploitative sections began to dread the people's will to assert their rights and demand justice rather than the armed squads. But this situation was to change as the revolutionary politics strengthened. As the PW began concentrating on militarization and had begun guiding the movement in the light of guerrilla zone perspective, particularly in North Telangana, people began distancing themselves with the movement.

The spread of Maoists movement to newer areas is passing through a very critical phase. A phase, where a large section of society is not actively associating itself with it. A phase where the rebels are depending more on the weapons or the claymore mines, to muster support for their activity, rather than politicising the masses to take to revolutionary politics. It is a phase where masses have been reduced to being mere receivers of justice rather than fighters for justice.

### ***State Response in Naxal Affected Areas***

The government has approached the Naxal problem in terms of counter-insurgency with little attention to developmental issue. Naxalite activity has spread to over 170 districts because of rising agrarian distress, destruction of forests by timber mafia, uprooting of adwasis due to predatory mining, irrigation and metallurgical projects and regional disparities. It is important to know that more than 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the severely naxalite affected

districts lie in the tribal belt. Naxalites activity has grown because of unemployment, growth which benefits only 1/10<sup>th</sup> of the population.

The response from the state has generally been found wanting. No doubt the state has acted but generally late. The response is late mainly because it has to pass through a long channel of approvals. At times, these even get politicised. There is involvement of too many agencies. At times, there is an application of wrong strategies and tactics in a particular situation. Unity of thoughts and action is the most crucial component of any counter-revolutionary strategy, we find this missing. When Maoists were proscribed in Andhra Pradesh for a long time, it is found that Orissa is enforcing the ban as recently as in June 2006. When Andhra Pradesh set across the table holding talks with the naxalites, rest of the affected states were watching the unfolding scenario with their fingers crossed. If one state was cracking down on the rebels, the other state did not know what course of action to be followed.

Notwithstanding the joint coordination meetings between officials and home ministers, the rebels have always found that an inefficient response from a neighbouring state a God sent opportunity to escape the military onslaught of another state. For example: the Greyhounds (Special trained commandos) of Andhra Pradesh, assault on the rebels have sent the undergrounds to take shelter in the neighbouring states. Perhaps such a situation is arising since the law and order is a state subject and the Centre does not want to intervene, lest it be misunderstood. The Centre is providing all help to the states in form of granting funds for Police Modernisation Schemes, armoured vehicles, latest equipments required for operations and for any other development schemes required by the state. Centre has also provided extra central paramilitary forces. The states facing the Maoists problems are left on their own to device their own strategies without taking into consideration, the efficiency of the strategies being employed elsewhere and trying to replicate them.

The proactive approach by the police in mobilising the people to air their grievances and somehow getting things done to help the people had reduced the relevance of the revolutionary politics. The success of North Talengana can be replicated. But the state

has generally remained reactive rather than pro-active. There are indications that there is some dissatisfaction among the Maoists groups, perhaps a new group may emerge. The situation could be exploited to the advantage of the government.

The following states have been examined to illustrate the extent of Naxal problem.

### ***Jharkhand***

Vast open borders and hills covered with dense forests make Jharkhand a security nightmare. 21 of its 22 districts share borders with other states like: West Bengal, Chattisgarh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. All states affected by the naxalite movement. The situation is complex and un-natural. The CPI Maoists come in at will, carryout its tasks and flee. It is difficult to pin them down. They are a formidable organised force with effective command. Jharkhand is a mineral-rich country side. These Maoists have imposed levies on coal mines (Rs 70,000 per annum from each coal firm), petrol pumps (Rs 25,000 per annum from each petrol-pump), transporters (Rs 25,000 per annum from each transport company) and businessmen. Heavy taxes are also imposed on contractors involved in building national highways, forest trade and sale of Tendu leaves. The money raised has been pumped into funding its standing army. Each person has a fixed salary of Rs 1000 to Rs 3000 per month and their families are also promised an insurance of Rs 1.25 lakh, if they die in an encounter. They have strength of approximately 50 highly trained platoons consisting of 35 to 40 men and women. They are backed by technical and surveillance support forces. This is apart from the people's militia and local guerrilla squads. They have weapons like .303 rifles, 7.62 SLRs, 9mm pistols, INSAS rifles, sten guns, rocket launchers and local made weapons which are manufactured at MCC gun factories. They have also sufficient ammunition which is either illegally purchased at a high cost or snatched from the police/armed forces. In addition to this, they have also explosives seized or purchased from various mine contractors of the Central Coalfields and the BCCL. They also get explosives illegally from India Explosive Ltd (IEL) Gumia. The naxalites use Improvised Explosive Device (IED) very effectively to strike fear in the minds of the police.

## ***Orissa***

Orissa is a safe hideout for naxal on the run from Andhra Pradesh where Grey Hound Force is carrying out successful anti-naxal operations. The area of red operation is spreading fast in the state. Out of 30 districts, 14 are affected by the naxals. There are 30 zonal dalams (platoons) with 600 armed cadres. Each dalam is equipped with an AK 47 rifle, 3-4 SLRs, few INSAS rifles (snatched from security forces) and .303 rifles. 25 percent of the total strength consists of women.

## ***Bihar***

It is exactly 40 years since Bihar had its first experience with the naxalites in district Bhojpur. Sahar had ignited spark in 1976 under the CPI-ML (Liberation) banner. While the liberation group stepped away from the frontline after joining the political main stream, the former people's war, in combination with MCC, is giving Bihar sleepless nights in form of CPI Maoists. Recently the arrest of CPI Maoist cadre with GSM mobiles sparked renewed interests in the technological edge acquired by the new formation

## ***Andhra Pradesh***

After the beginning of naxalite movement in Bengal, it was Andhra Pradesh where the movement spread over the entire rural belt. It is also the birth place of People's War Group. The leaders emerged and exploited the policies of the state government which was not suiting the rural areas. These leaders even exploited the situation in the surrounding states of Chattisgarh, Orissa, Maharashtra and even Tamil Nadu. Almost all the top Maoists leaders in Chattisgarh, Jharkhand and Orissa; are from Andhra and are preaching their policies. Approximately, 50 – 60 top naxal leaders (including some Central Committee and some Commissioned members) from Andhra Pradesh, are calling the shots in the adjoining states. Their job is to provide expert tips, to guide the cadre to build up a mass organisations and waging wars against the state governments. Under the broad strategy, the leaders, many of them with 10 – 15 years underground experience would be stationed in these states till the local leadership gain experience and take over the command of their respective states. This is the reason as to why there is slightly a lull in Maoists violence in Andhra.

The government has intensified the war on Maoists by setting up new units of greyhound at Visakhapatnam and Kurnool in addition to the one in Hyderabad. The government, who had earlier rejected the Maoists problem as a socio-economic malice and treated it as a law and order problem, have realised their mistake. Development work in these remote areas has started like building of roads, hospitals, providing water, electricity and other needs of the people. These efforts by the government are paying off and it is becoming difficult for the Maoists to rope-in fresh faces. The educated youth is being attracted towards the IT sector where well paid jobs are available. As claimed by the government, that the state has setup a unique Special Economic Zone (SEZ), but its effects are still to be seen. The naxal problem in the state is however far from over.

## ***Bengal***

From Naxalbari to the skirmishes in Midnapore, Purulia, Bankura and Burdwan, Naxalism has come a long way in Bengal. After a five month lull, Maoists in Bengal struck again in July 2006, attacking a camp of India Reserve Battalion in Belpahari in West Midnapore, scattering the growing complacency of the police. Maoists were growing in strength and enjoying support of a section of people. Their recruitment drive was going on all over the state. By 2010, Maoists plan to fill a major junk of opposition's political space as the political parties are becoming ineffective and inactive in the Left Front ruled Bengal.

## ***Maharashtra***

The movement in Maharashtra is relatively new. Unlikely in West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra has not been a traditional red base. It was during the Eighties that Naxals from neighbouring Andhra Pradesh made inroads into the state. They managed to strike a rapport with the poor tribals by regularly interacting with them. Their first stop was the eastern part of the state, where Maoists have now carved out a guerrilla zone. There are about 250 full- time armed members and

a strong contingent of 3000 local supporters. The platoon dalam of Tipagarh dalam and the Khobramenda dalam are the vicious. Gadchiroli is considered as the nerve centre, whereas Chandrapur, Gondiya, Yavatmal, Bhandara and Nanded districts are Naxal prone areas. All these districts border Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. The terrain suits the underground. They have LMGs and other hi-tech weapons. An arms factory was unearthed in Nagpur.

The Home Ministry's Annual Report (2004-2005) showed that there has been a 15 percent increase in Naxal violence in Maharashtra in 2004. The tribals are caught in the crossfire. In and around Gadchiroli, the poorest district, police records show that more than 80 percent of those killed were tribals.

### **Chhattisgarh**

After the ambush on a CRPF contingent on 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept 2005, which killed 24 jawans, the Chhattisgarh government banned the CPI(Maoist). The ban ironically emboldened the outfit. There were more than a dozen attacks from the Dandakaranya region – particularly Dantewada, where the government experimented with a counter resistance movement. Salwa Judum (peace force), added a new dimension to the conflict. The key to the problem lies in breaking the cycle of terror. Government tried to approach the socio-economic aspects of the problem. It says that it is not a law and-order problem, but the social and economic woes underlying it must be addressed. In Dantewada district more than 350 persons have been killed, and nearly 50,000 moved into camps. It is remote, sparsely populated, under-developed region. It is here that India's widespread Maoist rebellion is most intense.

To counter the naxalites problem, a movement called as Salwa Judum (peace hunt or movement) was first started by school teachers led by K. Madhu Karroa, at Karkeli village in Bijapur on June 4<sup>th</sup> 2005. It was supported by Congress leader Mahendra Karma who has become the Chief Judum protagonist. He is the main brain behind the movement. Since the beginning of this movement, 17 camps, housing more than 50,000 tribals have come up in and around Bijapur and Konta. In the 35 km belt from Dornapal to Konta, about 25,000 Judum activists live in 4 camps. The layout of the camps and the

security is a tough task. This movement has the support of Chattisgarh Government who have sponsored and funded the organisation. The active members of this movement generally comprise the local elite, rich Adivasis, traders and contractors. The main purpose of this movement is to protect the tribals from the Naxalites and to prevent the Naxal movement from spreading. It is a movement to highlight the bad effects of naxalites and to resist it. It had an aim to start the people's spontaneous resistance or uprising against the naxalites. It has an armed wing consisting of 3, 200 Special Police Officers (SPOs), widely seen as the tribal face of the police. They consist of youngsters in their 20s and are called the soldiers of the campaign against the naxal reign of terror in the dense forests of the region. Many have joined the campaign willingly after suffering the bad experience with naxalites, but some of them have been forced to join the movement. These youngsters are paid Rs. 2000 per month. The basic aim of this movement was very good but, somehow there has not been a proper control over the functioning and organising the movement. Somehow, it appears that this movement is losing its direction.

The Salwa Judum violent operations have turned the tribal belt of Bastar into a virtual war zone, in which adiwasis are pitted against adiwasis and forced to fight the Maoists to whose retaliation they become vulnerable. The Maoist guerrillas are trying to win over the local population or intimidating them against the Salwa Judum.

The leader of the Salwa Judum, Mahendra Karma, Congress MLA from Dantewada and leader of the Opposition informed that the Maoist had opposed modern development. They are opposed to any development in the area. Since there was a limit to how long the adiwasis could live under the terror of the Maoists, the local population had chosen to rebel in a 'repeat' of 1910 rebellion against the British known as 'Bhumkal'. The Maoists have also laid claim on the Bhumkal.

Approximately 46, 000 people are living in camps organised by the activists of Salwa Judum movement. These camps have been sighted along the road sides. There are plans to establish 581 new villages. But, no provision has been made for suitable employment or access to their land. The government has appointed about 3,500 special police officers

equipped with lathis, bows and arrows, and .303 rifles to counter the naxalites. These weapons are not enough to fight the automatic weapons used by the Maoists. Some of these SPOs regret joining the Salwa Judum as they are feeling immensely vulnerable to retaliatory action by the Maoists. Some of the people have fled away from the camps and are taking shelter in the neighbouring states. Unfortunately, villages have been divided into two sections, one in favour of the Maoists and other in favour of Salwa Judum. The Maoists are controlling the remote areas of the jungle whereas the activists of Salwa Judum are controlling the areas along the road side.

The Maoists have killed the village headmen, sarpanches and others who had opposed them. They have threatened the villagers that in case they join the Salwa Judum movement; their families will be wiped off. There is a propaganda being organised against the Salwa Judum. It is not surprising that this has endangered the support for Salwa Judum. The Salwa Judum movement has been described as the pilot project in Dantewada district and has the support of the state government.

After the formation of Chattisgarh, as claimed by Salwa Judum, there has been a concentered emphasis on industrialisation, taking advantage of the village rich mineral deposits. It was suggested that since tribals would consume any amount of compensation they are given, they should be instead given work in these industries along with some compensation. The tribals were therefore asked to leave their villages in the remote areas and shift to the road side. They were told that they would be compensated and given employment for their land by the industrialists. But in case they stay back in the forests, the naxalites would kill them. The naxalite on the other had argue for a new democratic economy based on increasing agriculture production through cooperatives, education, health, etc rather than large projects which displace them.

The other side of the story reveal that the majority of the villagers were forcibly brought out of their villages by Salwa Judum and security forces and have made them settle along the road side. These settlements do not have any basic requirements like, market, schools, employment, daily earning infrastructure, etc. Hence these people resort to looting and extortion. It is claimed by the Maoists that the villagers are unable to visit the weekly

markets for fear of Salwa Judum. Whatever the authority the government exercised over the villages and small towns on the main road, has now been ceded to the Salwa Judum.

### ***Future Trends***

As per Maoist's teachings, the naxals do not rest when there is lull but instead they re-cope, reorganise, carry out recruitment and strengthen their cadres. At present they are carrying out these activities. The seizure of huge quantity of rocket launchers, ammunition, explosives suggest that, they not only arming them-selves but are better armed than the police. Perhaps they have out sourced their production of weapons all over the country. The naxals have established strong contacts with LTTE. They have started a new base at Darjeeling and joined hands with ULFA (of Assam) and Kantipur Liberation Organisation of North Bengal.

There is a fear that the capital of \$85 billion earmarked for building huge mills and oil refineries could be at risk because the projects are planed in the red corridor – on naxal controlled swathe across India. Investments in 5 states, including foreign direct input (FDI) of about \$ 32 billion, could be at risk because of escalating Naxal (Maoist) violence. All this not an encouraging sign for India if this not coutered.

### ***Reasons for Naxalite problem***

- a) Illegal occupation of uncultivated public land by the land lords.
- b) Lack of irrigation facilities for rural poor mostly belonging to the scheduled cast.
- c) Improper implementation of the Minimum Wages Act and non payment of minimum wages fixed by the government for rural labourers.
- d) Absence of proper employment opportunities.
- e) Rigid cast based social structure.
- f) Atrocities on women of poor section.
- g) Lack of industrialization and other development programs.
- h) Denial of political rights to rural poor.
- i) Nexus between land owners and the police.

- j) Tussle over political domination.
- k) Cast and class violence in rural areas.

### ***Suggestions***

- a) The centre should take initiative in forming a national policy on naxalism. A policy that is not compiled from the status reports, but a policy that is formed after a thorough debate on what the Maoists are preaching. Each and every point being raised by Maoists should be answered while framing the policy.
- b) It may be ensured by all state governments that the policy thus framed should be implemented on the ground and follow up action may be taken accordingly.
- c) The counter revolutionary strategies should be area specific.
- d) Simultaneous counter actions should be taken in all fronts that is military, development, reforms, and mobilisation of public opinion against the Maoists etc.

### ***Conclusion***

The naxalites and their Maoists – inspired movement is the single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by our country. The response by the states should be based on an effective national policy which should be formulated. For this there is a requirement of a unity of thoughts in the political executive as well as in the bureaucracy. Essentially, such a national policy on naxalism would evolve only when the decision makers thoroughly understand the problem. A thorough understanding would be possible only when they study the problem with an un-biased view because un-biased study of a problem can lead to an un-biased solution. This policy should suit the real situation and needs to be implemented on the ground.