



Research Paper

## Drivers of Naxalism in India: Key to Successful Resolution of Naxal Problem

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**ABSTRACT:** This article reviews drivers or factors responsible for growth of Naxalism in India. Different factors of Naxalism will necessitate different approaches for handling it. Drivers of this problem have been defined / looked at differently by different authors depending on background, source of information and position (government official, security expert, victim, business house employee or volunteer or ideologue or Naxal himself). The views differ from a Socio-economic, legal or mere state level law and order issue or governance issue to a grave national security concerns. This review will provide insight to future researchers to research different facets of its drivers, linkages between various drivers motivations of stakeholders and arrive at a suitable strategy or convergence approach to tackle Naxalism.

**KEYWORDS:** Naxalism, Drivers, Stakeholders, Linkages

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Naxalism is a generic word used to describe the activities used by a group of activists forming part of various organizations functioning primarily under the Maoist ideology in a number of states in India. The Naxal activists use this ideology to garner the ground – level support from the oppressed masses. Though revolutionary in its basic idea, over the past few years, it has slowly hinged more on extreme violence against the state machinery to achieve its aim of overthrowing the sovereign Indian State.<sup>[1]</sup>

Naxalism is also known as Maoism/Left Wing Extremism (LWE). Its growth and spread can be gauged from the fact till 19 Nov 2019, a total of 10488 casualties have been reported in the LWE affected areas as per details available on South Asia Terrorism Portal<sup>[2]</sup>. Out of which 3769 are civilian casualties. This article has studied / analysed the drivers or the factors responsible for birth, rise and growth of Naxalism from different angles of pro-government, anti-establishment, neutral social, economic, legal and security experts.

A cross-section of works done by large number of experts on this problem, stakeholders involved in its perpetuation or containing it, Naxal Watchers or Naxal leaders etc by Indian and foreign authors have been analysed / studied to understand the problem in totality to identify difference in perception, common ground and the multi-pronged drive required to tackle it.

### II. DRIVERS OR FACTORS SUSTAINING NAXALISM

A number of researchers / authors both in India and outside have written large number of books/articles on Naxalism/Maoism/Left Wing Extremism (LWE) some of them have painted them as terrorists or criminals/bandits, while other depict them as Robinhoods undertaking the cause of socially and economically underprivileged. Some authors feel they are not anti-national but anti the prevalent system of governance and want to usher a 'Red Revolution' through an armed struggle. Some feel that the issue is a law and order problem which needs to be handled with iron hand; some feel it is essentially lack of development or poor development in Naxal affected areas which needs emphasis on development works; others look at it as an issue of socially marginalized, disadvantaged, dispossessed, poor and neglected population needing humane approach and still others feel that it is a fallout of poor governance and pro corporates administration facilitating / aiding economic exploitation of tribal areas<sup>[3]</sup>.

In order to find an effective response and remedy to the menace of Naxalism we must understand as to what is driving or fuelling Naxalism which has sustained the Movement over such a long period. Most of these are theoretically well articulated. Yet there have been sea-changes in the complexion of the movement at the ground level. Therefore; the causes/ reasons for its growth and persistence need to be understood by all of us in order to address the root cause of the problem and find a lasting solution to this grave security challenge to the very existence of our nation. These drivers of Naxalism have been deliberated upon in proceeding paragraphs.

### 2.1 Ideology.

The Naxal ideology is a strong reflection of Maoist ideas from which the hardcore cadres derive their strength. The ideology revolves around overthrowing the established government by armed rebellion of the masses in three distinct phases, viz, **Strategic Defence**, **Strategic Equilibrium** and **Strategic Offensive**, and so to establish a rule of the proletariat<sup>[4]</sup>. Naxalism in India, though inspired and lead by this basic ideology, is also in many ways different; dominance of caste and, tribal influence and empathy with common man for example. It is noteworthy that unlike the insurgencies in the North-East, J&K and Punjab, Naxalism is not a separatist or externally driven movement<sup>[5]</sup>. The Movement takes its roots from the dissatisfaction of the people with the societal values, system of governance and functioning of state institutions in the country. Globalisation of economic activity and the democratic process, due to decades of unscrupulous exploitation by traders and manipulative power brokers, are seen not as opportunities but as threat to well being and the traditional way of life by tribal population. The failure to respect these sensitivities has contributed to the growth of this problem. At the ideological level, issues by which the cadres are drawn into the Movement, are as follows:-

- a) **Mistrust of Democracy.** Naxalites propound that the parliamentary form of govt in India has failed to meet the aspirations of poor and down trodden tribals and feel that a communist form of regime will be well suited in India.. They also don't trust the Indian constitution.<sup>[6]</sup>
- b) **Abhorrence of the Capitalists and Industrialists.** The cadres consider rich capitalists, big farmers and industrialists as "class enemies" who are out to exploit their inheritance of natural resources and destroy their society<sup>[7]</sup>.
- c) **The Informed and Knowledgeable Rebels.** Some highly educated and well read personalities have joined the cause of Naxalites due to irresistible romantic appeal of pro poor Marxist, Leninist and Maoist philosophy. They command respect due to their empathy with the poor and thus attract cadres to their fold, besides providing leadership at various levels. Mr. Kobad Gandhi<sup>[8]</sup> presently on bail from Tihar Jail is an example of strong intellectual base of Naxal movement and the romantic appeal that it carries equally for poor and uneducated; and rich and educated.
- d) **The Instinctive Rebels.** Naxalism is an escape route from the woes of being unemployed, social and economic exploitation by rich and influential landlords and govt machinery.<sup>[9]</sup> These people, who constitute the bulk of the cadre, are generally vague about the ideology and hardly ever relate to Mao De Zong, China, Lenin or Russia. It gives them a sense of power, recognition in their community and ability to fight back those who have exploited them or their kith and kin.

### 2.2 Land Reforms/ Rights.

Agriculture is the largest source of daily employment in rural India with 70% of the population being dependant on it for its daily bread earning. However, major challenge and point of great concern is that over the years, agriculture's contribution to GDP has steadily declined from 1951 to 2011[10]. Most of the agriculture in India is being done by landless and poor, hoping to become owners of land which they have been tilling for rich landlords. This is the cause of friction and fight between poor tillers and the rich landlords who have raised their private 'senas' and used their political clout to retaliate besides preventing implementation of land reforms. Naxalism has sprouted from this situation and has found favour amongst the poor and the perpetually marginalised tribals. In Naxalism affected areas, fields belonging to the erstwhile 'Zamindars', now big landholders, are forcibly distributed to the poor and the landless by Naxal leaders; if resisted, bloodshed follows. This strengthens the appeal of the Naxals over the masses.

### 2.3 Lack of Social Infrastructure and Development.

Naxalism affected areas are endowed with rich forest produce and minerals. . But surprisingly there has not been any infrastructural development, These areas highly backward. This has lead to disenchantment of locals with government machinery, thus facilitating the spread of Naxalism.<sup>[11]</sup>

Economic and social infrastructures have to complement each other to uplift the conditions of the masses. Therefore, there is a need to provide social infrastructure like housing, power, telephony, sanitation, and roads connectivity that can give economic growth a human face. Availability of infrastructure is a positive requirement for developmental process. It has been generally observed that the states with higher index of

infrastructure also have the lower head count ratio of poverty, suggesting the development – both economic and social – is a means of poverty alleviation.

- a) As compared to 96% of urban India having access to electricity, only 66% of rural India has access to it, which is well below the national average of 75%.<sup>[12]</sup> Here again, there is a large gap between the rich and the poor states, with poor states being the ones afflicted by Naxalism.
- b) Telephone Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) in its 2008 report has observed that “if a country has one percent more mobile subscribers than another, than its GDP per capita will be about US\$ 200 higher”. Telephone density has increased at a very impressive pace over time, from 26% in 2008 to 66% in 2010. However, a look at the telephone density of the Naxal affected states (except Andhra Pradesh) paints a grim picture, when the statistics are compared with the other states of the country<sup>[13]</sup>.

In the Malayan campaign, the British gave high priority to surface connectivity to develop the remote areas, by way of constructing roads and airstrips. India’s road network of 3.3 million kilometres is the second largest in the world. Rural and other roads account for maximum share of the road network at 2.65 million kilometres. A study carried out by the International Food Policy Research Institute on linkages between government expenditure and poverty in rural India has revealed that an investment of Rs. 10 million in roads uplifts 1,650 people above the poverty line.<sup>[14]</sup> In spite of substantial growth in the road coverage in the past decade or so, there still exist wide inter-state variations. The national average of road connectivity is 81.2 kilometers per 100 square kilometre of area. States like Chhattisgarh (54.7), Jarkhand (14.8), and Madhya Pradesh (53.6) are quite below the national average in terms of road connectivity. The lack of connectivity therefore, cripples the overall socio-economic development of these state, resulting in adverse effects on public distribution system (PDS), education, medical services, training for vocational skills, marketing facilities for agricultural produce, veterinary cover for animals, and other vital public services.

#### **2.4 Archaic Tribal and Forest Policies.**

The policy of “isolation” followed by Britishers with the aim of preserving their unique culture, language and traditions has proved to be counterproductive and has resulted in their being illiterate, backward and alienated from rest of the country<sup>[15]</sup>, the tribal states continues to follow this policy in the name of ‘social preservation’. Blind observance of this policy seems to have given to the states a liberty to neglect these areas. In effect, this has led to non-development and exploitation of the tribal’s at the hands of forest and mineral mafia who are aided by callous and corrupt government officials - all of them non-tribal plainmen. To compound the problem further, the new Forest Regulatory Act is seen as placing another regime of denials upon the tribal traditional means of survival without any corresponding compensation<sup>[16]</sup>.

#### **2.5 Social and Economic Disparities.**

The rebellious areas are severely afflicted by economic and social inequalities. The high caste and the landlords do not treat the poor and tribal people with dignity and exploit them socially and economically.<sup>[17]</sup> The lower castes are employed for menial jobs and not allowed certain social privileges like sitting outside and entertaining guests, drawing water from wells meant for upper caste etc. The women folk of poor classes are often ill treated and sexually abused<sup>[18]</sup>. Such inequalities create a sense of deprivation and injustice; and force the marginalized sections to seek protection of the militant outfits and join their cadres to take revenge and lead a dignified life.

#### **2.6 Economic Exploitation.**

The issue grows out of unscrupulous exploitation of unlimited natural wealth of the areas on one hand, and its people’s growing poverty on the other. If the map of India is superimposed with its minerals, its watersheds, its forests, it will depict exactly the area covered by the spread of the Naxal Movement. As per Hindustan Times dated 10 Jan 2020 director of CSE( Centre for Science and Environment) had said in the top 50 minerals rich districts in India 40% are badly affected by Naxalism. It appears that the Naxals have been slowly and gradually spreading their influence in mining establishments<sup>[19]</sup>. Yet, the Min Wages Rule is absent in these areas, and the practice of the landlords giving “Half Kachhi Paseri” (i.e. 1.75 Kg of coarse rice for one day’s labour or one bag of paddy for every 21 bags of paddy harvested) is still widely followed; obviously, that is rather meagre to sustain a family. Thus the youth, both boys and girls from poor and lower caste families, revolt to join the Naxal cadre.

#### **2.7 Unemployment.**

India has a largely young age profile. While this is a great advantage to the Nation, but in the Naxal affected states where almost 60 percent of population consists of the youth, there is tremendous void in education facilities and other trade-skill opportunities. With increasing awareness and rising aspirations for

better life, and fired by exposure to the media glitz, energies of the unemployed young get diverted to the only 'trade' which they can easily find - that is the path of Naxalism.

### **2.8 Inadequate and Poor Governance.**

In most of the affected areas, there is no stamp of governance at all. In this void, the writ of the Indian state simply does not exist beyond a few km from major towns. Civil administration, police, revenue department and the judicial institution have a rather tenuous presence as government officials do not find it remunerative to visit these areas and postings to remote and forested tribal areas are treated as punishment posting<sup>[20]</sup>. Grants, allocations and schemes announced by the state therefore are hardly ever implemented. Those officials who do have to stay in these areas, are obliged to pay 'taxes', and those projects which do get executed, have to shell out certain percentage to Naxals. This way Naxals continue to run parallel administration in these areas. The medium of 'Jan Adalats', distribution of land usurped from rich amongst landless poor, construction of welfare project like irrigation channels / canals / water storage facilities etc and the system of collection of taxes from locals by the Naxal cadres is their way of running the parallel government. This is also an indicator of abdication of responsibilities by the state and reveals the reach and writ of the Naxalism.<sup>[21]</sup>

### **2.9 Favourable Terrain.**

The region adopted by the Naxal in spreading their presence from Nepal to Tamil Nadu is forested and hilly<sup>[22]</sup>. This makes the movement and domination by the indigenously bred Naxals easier and that of the police forces coming from cities and plain areas that much difficult.

### **2.10 Availability of Arms, Ammunition and Explosives.**

The Indian sub-continent, being situated between the Central and South-East Asia, has been turned into a corridor for the global market of illicit small arms as well as drug trade. Manufacture of low grade country made weapons and ammunition is a cottage industry in the States of UP and Bihar, while the large scale mining industry has become a limitless source of explosives. The illegal trade flourishes as the Arms Act and other prohibitive laws are not enforced in this region. The successful raids by Naxal cadres on Police armouries and ambushing of PMF further increase their weapon and ammunition holdings<sup>[23]</sup>. Heavy influx of small arms and ammunition into violence prone areas in India is a big problem. The focus of security agencies and the government is primarily on in Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast. But Naxalism affected areas have been relatively off radar. The ease with which arms and explosives are easily available in Naxal areas is a causative factor responsible for survival, consolidation and spread of Naxal movement in India.

### **2.11 A Non-functional Judicial System.**

With the normal process of apprehension, prosecution and sentencing absent or non existent in Naxal affected areas primarily due to poor policing and judiciary, the authority of the state is severely compromised. There is no fear of law.

### **2.12 Financial Support.**

No organisation can survive without supply of regular income. By rough estimates, income inflow of the CPI (M) approximately Rs 500 700 crore per year. It is used for making payment to its cadres, buying weapons and propaganda activities and civic action. The main sources of funds are wealthy industrialists who carry out mining in these areas. To enhance their activities, the Naxalites "accept contributions" in the form of "taxes and levies", loot government treasuries and banks and also extort vast amounts from businesses, industries, political leaders, government officials, rich landlords and professionals. The extremists live by the gun, reaping a rich harvest of extortion and tax collection, with revenues to the tune of Rs.1,000 crore a year.<sup>[24]</sup> The quantum of collection varies from state to state. As per estimates, the total collection from Bihar and Chhattisgarh is around Rs 200 crore and Rs. 150 crore respectively, while that from Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh is about Rs. 350 crore and Rs. 100 crores respectively. In addition, the Naxalites are also engaged in, or control, significant levels of illegal economic activity,

Poppy cultivation covers an approximate area of 20,000 acres in Chatra, Hazaribagh, Ramgarh and Palamu Districts and sells at rupees 25,000/- per kg, and auction of 'Tendu' leaves are the other remunerative sources of income. As long as these finances do not dry up, the Movement will always find means and motivation to sustain and spread its influence.<sup>[25]</sup>

## **III. SUMMARY**

It is evident from the above review that Naxalism is eventually the result of human follies which failed to redress the genuine aspiration of tribals and alienated them. This resulted in an administrative, political, social and economic vacuum in Naxalism affected states creating ideal conditions for LWE cadre to step in.

The political, social, economic and security implications of tackling Naxalism are very serious. Large multitude of factors or drivers fueling Naxalism will need a simultaneous multi-pronged efforts for containing and eradicating Naxalism.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Naxalism is essentially the result of sense of deprivation in the poor tribal population, social and economic inequalities, exploitation of tribal resources, poor development, exploitative unconcerned administration and appealing Naxal ideology which gives a ray of hope to tribal people. Our archaic British era laws, geographical factors and political vacuum have further accentuated it. It is hoped that the study will act as a precursor for detailed quantification of each aspect of disastrous dimensions of Naxalism/ Maoism/ LWE so that we accord necessary seriousness for solving the problem that it truly deserves.

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