

Brief History of Left Wing Extremism in India

Communist political movement, which first emerged in 1920, has grown into many streams. While all of its proponents profess adherence to the ultimate goal of building a classless society, there are disagreements about the appropriate political strategy for achieving it. They vary from election-contesting political parties like Communist Party of India(CPI), Communist Party of India (Marxist)(CPI-M) to underground armed rebels like Communist Party of India (Maoist). CPI joined electoral democracy in 1951. Some of the CPI's more radical elements broke away from the CPI in 1964 to form CPI-M. When CPI-M also embraced electoral politics, this was unacceptable to the more radical Maoist faction within CPI-M, who started the violent Naxalite movement.

A new party called Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) {CPI(ML)} was formed in April 1969, with Charu Mazumdar at the head. The CPI(ML) was totally opposed to the electoral process and advocated violent revolution as the only means of realizing its political objectives. While Naxalite activity and violence during this period were reported from across the country, it mostly remained confined to West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. By 1972, concerted and determined action by the central and state governments put an end to what can be described as the first phase of naxalite violence.

Naxalism remained subdued during 1972-1991. It was repeatedly fragmented on ideological grounds, strategies and personality clashes. This period was followed by a second phase of naxalite violence, which will be referred to as Maoist violence in order to distinguish it from the earlier

naxalite violence. The origin of Maoist violence can be traced to two factions of naxalites, namely, the People's War Group (PWG) of Andhra Pradesh and Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) of Bihar.

Historical Origins of the Maoists

While there were other naxalite groups opposed to CPI(ML) in Andhra Pradesh, Naxalbari movement led by CPI(ML) spread to Srikakulam and North Telangana districts of AP by 1971. The Andhra Committee split away from CPI-ML, became the People's War group (PWG) led by Kondapalli Seetharamiah in 1976, which formed CPI (ML) People's War group (PWG) in 1980. They decided to persist in armed struggle and during 1980-85, the party formed armed squads (Dalams). It spread its area of operation to other States. It indulged in attacks on the police, kidnapping, extortions, killing of civilians and political leaders. Its strength kept increasing, though through ups and downs.

Seetharamaiah was expelled from the party in 1991 due to ideological differences and Muppala Laxman Rao, also known as Ganapathi, emerged as PWG's leader. Guerilla Zones were formed in North Telangana and Dandakaranya. In 1998 CPI (ML) Party Unity, based in Jehenabad, Bihar, merged with PWG. People's Guerrilla Army was formed in 2000. PWG had spread their area of activities to through contiguous forest and hilly areas of Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharastra, Bihar and Jharkhand. In 2002 Tactical Counter Offensive was launched by the party by forming striking forces.

Meanwhile, the Dakshin Desh group had broken away from CPI-M in 1968 and became the Maoist Communist

Centre (MCC) in October 1969. It indulged in squad activities mainly in forest and mountainous regions of West Bengal (WB) and spread to undivided Bihar. Later on, it became Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI). On September 21, 2004 when PWG merged with MCCI to form Communist Party of India (Maoist) (CPIMaoist), Muppala Laxman Rao, aka Ganapathi, became its General Secretary.

Present Spread, Size and Structure

Maoists are known to have their presence in 21 States. Estimation of Maoist cadre strength varies from 10,000, 15000 to as much as 25000. Similarly, geographical spread of Maoist activities is estimated over 190 districts with Maoist violence is reported to be seen in 90 districts out of 627 districts in the country. This is somewhat exaggerated because for just one incident reported in one remote corner of a district a whole district is counted as affected. It is no surprise that less than 10% of police stations of the nine most affected states have reported Maoist violence, where as more than 50% of the districts are identified as affected by Maoist violence.

Areas Targeted by the Earlier Naxalites

The naxalites, like the the Maoists were supposed to have followed Mao's prescription of protracted war strategy in which in the first stage, the small revolutionary force starts in a remote area with mountainous and difficult terrain in which the revolutionary's enemy is weak. After growing in power, in the second stage, it was supposed to establish other revolutionary base areas and spread its influence in the surrounding countryside. Finally in the third stage, it was

expected to have enough strength to encircle and capture urban areas, gradually covering the entire country.

However, earlier naxlites seems to have followed the strategy partially. They created bases in remote rural areas close to dense forest areas, where the contradiction in landholding existed and the presence of government agencies, particularly police, was minimum. Normally, a protracted war strategy of slowly consolidating the countryside and proceeding towards the urban centre would have taken decades, but Charu Mazumdar seemed to have been in a hurry and targeted the state capital city of West Bengal within only three years of start of naxalism.

Areas Targeted by the Maoists

However, Maoists seem to have followed Mao and Che Gueverra"s thinking more meticulously. The overwhelming emphasis was on choice of place based on need for self preservation in the initial stage. The Maoists chose more forested, inaccessible and remote areas.