



Naxalite movement in West Bengal- A brief outlook on its resurgence and containment

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Abstract- The present paper looks at the nature regarding the resurgence and proliferation and put forth an overall perspective on Naxalite movement since 2005. The paper also look at the strategy of present government in dealing with naxalite movement considering the fact that it successfully control the naxalite activities via calculative use of both force and various development initiatives and programs. However timely review of ground reality should give utmost emphasis while making any comprehensive plan in relation to Naxalite issue keeping in the mind that indulging in any form of war and calculating it from profit and loss perspective will definitely not work in any one's favour rather it will further escalate and glorify the violence to extreme extent

Key words- West Bengal, Naxalites, development, resurgence, approach

Introduction-

Prior to India's Independence, undivided Bengal remains to be one of the important centers of various forms of movement and revolutionary activities against the exploitation carried out by colonial regimes. Witness to that, state has experienced similar kind of social movement in post-independence period. The movement this time was started by those who were not much satisfied with the function of liberal democracy (which believes to bring social changes through step by step process) that country has wedded after attaining the status of Independent nation. These people had no faith in functioning of various state institution under the liberal democratic frame work and were vehemently against of pace and outcome of social changes that put to place on contemporary period. Hence going against the functioning ideology of liberal democracy; these radical section of people strived to bring social changes by adopting rather a different method. These people had in fact challenged the existing structural disparities in terms of social, economy and tried to provide an alternative ideology.

Defining Naxalism is rather complicated because of its dynamic character that it embraces since its inception in 1967 in place named Naxalbari in the state of West Bengal. The movement was initially started by sketching up of alternative society by

eliminating the class society through advocating of what its leader Charu Majumder stated about the 'annihilation of class'. The movement has marked profound influence on its own way. The expert group set up by planning commission (2006) on topic entitled "Development issue to deal with the cause of discontent, unrest and extremism" define Naxalism as "a political movement with a strong base among the landless and poor peasantry and adivasis" which, "in its day to day manifestations support base is seen as "basically a fight for social justice equality protection and local development".

Essence of resurgence:-

The Naxalite movement that proliferated in recent times (since 2005) differs from what it was in initial phase and in 90's. No doubt during its in initial phase and in 90's the movement got tremendous support from both the rural and urban people. However the present day Naxalite movement suffers in this context mostly because its disconnection with wider section of Indian society and to be more particular with the urban masses. It will not be out of place to jot down that Naxalites has used people sympathy to wage war against state. And it contributed in creation of disenchantment which surfaced amidst the common masses. Naxalites unlike in its initial phase of starting of movement fails to expand in urban areas and have remained confined mostly in rural and tribal areas. Naxalite movement which revived in 90,s and onwards, put itself in more sophisticated place than it was before in all forms and manner. The revival of naxalite movement in 90's onwards and the development strategy (economic reforms) that the country has adapted to coup up with problem of contemporary time has direct connection and it cannot be denied at any cost. The critics' views that the reforms have aggravated the situation further and made the situation even worse than it was before. They often linked it with alienation of tribal from their originality in terms of social-economic status and by identity. Further there was very minimul credibility, links, and attention of state-level or higher leaders in a local context during left front regime.

Jungalmahal region of West Bengal provide the scope and opportunity in term of fertile geographically advantages for carrying out the Naxalite activities. As a result of which Junglemahal region of West Bengal turned out to be the hotbed of naxalite activities during since 2008 onward till May 2011. The surge in Naxal violence since 2008 in west Bengal has established that naxalite movement is no longer a mere law and order problem. The perceived administrative inefficiency and relative underdevelopment areas of Junglemahal is undoubtedly one of the most socially and economically backward region within state .The area that were plagued by Naxalites includes part of west Midnapore, Binpur 2 and Binpur 1 Shalboni Jhargram some area of Purulia and Bankura. According to the Human Development Report 2004, of West Bengal Bankura and Purulia respectively possess 11th and 16th rank among the nineteen districts of West Bengal.

In 2004 the PWG¹ and MCC² has merged to boost up for the overall condition of naxalite movement across the different regions of various state in India including Junglemahal region of West Bengal. Many commentators in the media pointed out that West Bengal government could have saved these territories from falling in to the hands of the Naxalites if they had woken up from their slumber when reports of Naxal activity began trickling in around 2004. K.P.S. Gill, former DGP of the State of Punjab and former president of Institute for Conflict Management argue that the "state denial, appeasement and progressive error; paralysis in the face of rising Naxalite violence," which allowed the group to spread its operations further in to Bengal.

Naxalite movement in west Bengal since 2005:-

Naxalites were active in 18 of 28 Indian states, targeting security forces and civilians alike, and their activity is accelerating. From 2005 to 2010, the number of civilians killed in terrorist acts in Kashmir decreased by 93 percent, while civilians killed by Naxalites increased by 116 percent in the Indian state of Bihar, and increased by 6,460 percent in the state of West Bengal.³ In fact, West Bengal has witnessed a dramatic spurt in Naxalite related fatalities in 2010. *According to data available from South Asia Terrorism Portal*⁴ (www.satp.org, launched in March 2000), 425 people, including 328 civilians, 36 security forces personnel and 61 Naxalites, including cadre of the Naxalite backed People's Committee Against Police Atrocities, were killed in West Bengal in 2010 till December 26, as against 158 people, including 134 civilians, 15 security forces personnel and nine Naxalites killed in the State in 2009. With this, West Bengal has now earned the dubious distinction of recording the highest Naxalite related fatalities in 2010, dislodging Chhattisgarh which had topped the list since 2006. However the killing of Kisanji (in 2011) had tremendous impact in the overall picture of Naxalite activities taking place in West Bengal and other state. He ruled the Dandakaranya forests in Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh for 20 years before shifting base to West Bengal and Jharkhand. Kishenji had played an instrumental role in the merger of the Maoist Communist Centre with the PWG to form the CPI (Maoist) in 2004.⁵

However loss in the form of Kisanji death definitely will have its impact on the course of Naxalite movement. His killing has subsequently weakened the impact and the base of the movement in the state. The state of West Bengal has witnessed a complete turnaround in Naxalite activities since May 2011 as it clearly evident from the number of fatalities in following year. The state recorded around 640 deaths between 2009 and 2011. But this number scale down tremendously after 2011. In last seven years from 2011 to 2018 (till 18th February) there were 59 naxalite related fatalities. And in last four years (from 2014 to 18th February 2018 as per data reveals by SATP)⁶ state has recorded negative fatalities related due naxalite movement with one incident and no death

Annual Fatalities in Left-wing Extremist Violence in West Bengal: 2005-2018

Years	Civilians	SFs	Terrorists	Total
2005	5	1	0	6
2006	9	7	4	20
2007	6	0	1	7
2008	19	4	1	24
2009	134	15	9	158
2010	328	36	61	425
2011	41	2	10	53
2012	2	0	2	4
2013	0	0	2	2
2014	0	0	0	0
2015	0	0	0	0
2016	0	0	0	0
2017	0	0	0	0
2018	0	0	0	0
Total*	544	65	90	699

SOURCES: South Asian Terror Portal (SATP), Data till February 18, 2018

Present government in dealing with Naxalite movement: -

If we look into the data summed up, government's performance since May 2011 then we find there has been a drastically decline in Naxalite movement related incidents of violence and casualties as compared to pre May 2011. The Naxalite movement however seems to be in a dismal position since May 2011 mostly due to the approach of the present government that includes a dialogue process between state governments and the Naxalites, release of political prisoners, stress on the importance of local politics, development initiatives, rehabilitation policy etc. The Chief Minister of West Bengal Mamta Banerjee initiated a dialogue process with the Naxalites to resolve all problems in Janglemahal by interlocutors who were engaged in a dialogue with Naxalites. One cannot deny the fact that the movement proliferated again in 2008 is also because of the failure of state politics in the region and thereby led to the creation of a vacuum mainly because of the failure of state political structures for negotiation. Unlike the left front rule, the present government prior to the panchayat election 2008

channelization the local politics in proper manner turn out as the effective way to deal with the issue that help in sustain of Naxalite Movement in Junglemahal region. Along with strong administrative action, present government judiciously makes political efforts to garner the support of common people that would manage to curb the Naxalites activities and restore peace in the region. While Naxalites held sway in Junglemahal during the CPM's time, with the Left doing nothing to make a dent in their support base among the tribals. Mamata made the first crack in that bastion by making some Naxalites joins her party and she make personal contact with the affected people. TMC Salboni MLA Srikanta Mahato and its Gopiballavpur MLA, Churamoni Hansda, are both former Naxalite cadres.⁷ At the same time she make sagacious move by choosing star icons from the different constituency in Junglemahal region more particularly from West Midnapore, such as Sandhya Roy, Dev Adhikari and Moon Moon Sen.⁸ Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has decided to use "development" as a means to combat the Naxalite problem in the State. She announced all Adivasis families living in the Junglemahal region would get the same benefits of ration (public distribution system or PDS) as those received by below poverty level (BPL) families.⁹ The Chief Minister further went to announced that all tribal families living in Jungalmahal would be declared BPL (below poverty line) and that rice would be made available at Rs.2 a kilogram to families with an annual income of up to Rs.42, 000. Along with this she has alloclated good amount for health, education, teacher recruitment, sports. The package also includes vocational training centres, industrial training institutes, an archery academy, a tribal culture academy, a polytechnic school and a separate 'employment bank' for the people of the region.¹⁰ All these social welfare and development initiative taken and implemented has contributed positively to build the confidence of people in ruling government and it further strengthen overall regional stability and peace by changing the face of 'Junglemahal' region where militancy of the Naxalites has been almost eliminated. The region is not only peaceful but has also witnessed unprecedented development and improvement in all development indicators.¹¹ Similarly the Govt. of West Bengal has accepted the revised guidelines of Govt. of India Ministry of Home Affairs. Naxal Management Division for Surrender and rehabilitation of Naxalites and the proposal for revision of incentives to the surrendered Naxalites for providing gainful employment and entrepreneurial opportunities and bring them to the mainstream and not to return to the fold of Naxal movement.¹² Apart from employment, surrendering Maoists get financial incentives as well as assistance for housing, medical and child education, as per norms set up by the government.¹³ And till date 328 Left Wing Extremists has surrendered.¹⁴

Conclusion -From the perusal of the nature regarding the resurgence and proliferation of Naxalite movement in the state of West Bengal since 2005 has definitely provides us an ample scope for the knowing its dynamic, sophisticated and aggressive character that it taken since 2005. The strategy of present government in dealing with naxalite movement via calculative use of both force and various development

initiatives and programs, has successfully control the naxalite activities which emerged basically due to the feelings of social and economic injustice within the region and there by considerably managed to handle the situation. The naxalite movement undoubtly also made people aware of the critical importance inclusive development the adoption and indeed present government been successful in weakening the Naxalite movement by implementation of strategy and policy and there sign left little prospect of any early recovery. And substantially one can say that the effectually dealing with Naxalite movement in Junglemahal region of West Bengal is one of the most laudable achievements of Present Government under Chief Ministership of Mamta Banerjee. However naxalites activities, nevertheless, continue, and their persistent presence in other States will remain an abiding threat to West Bengal because it cannot be ruled out at any cost that the Naxalites will always try to find an opportunity to make its base once again in Junglemahal region of West Bengal. Hence timely review of ground reality should give utmost emphasis while making any comprehensive plan in relation to Naxalite issue keeping in the mind that indulging in any form of war and calculating it from profit and loss perspective will definitely not work in any one's favour rather it will further escalate and glorify the violence to extreme extent

End Notes

¹ The People's War Group was formed in Southern Indian State of Andhra Pradesh on April 22, 1980 by Kondapalli Seetharamaiah, one of the most influential Naxalite leaders in the State. The PWG traces its ideology to the Chinese leader Mao Tse Tung's theory of organised peasant insurrection. It rejects parliamentary democracy and believes in capturing political power through protracted armed struggle based on guerrilla warfare. (retrived from <http://www.satp.org/satporgrp/countries/india/terroristoutfits/pwg.htm>)

² The Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) was one of the largest two armed Maoist groups in India, and fused with the other, the People's War Group in September 2004, to form the Communist Party of India (Maoist). (retrived from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maoist_Communist_Centre_of_India)

3 H.A.H Mullick, 2013, The Naxalite Rebellions, National Interest, pp. 2

4 The South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP, www.satp.org) is an indispensable resource to seek information, data, critical assessment and analysis on terrorism in South Asia that was launched in March 2000. SATP is the largest website on terrorism and low intensity warfare in South Asia, and creates the database and analytic context for research and analysis of all extremist movements in the region.

⁵ Retrived from <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/south/story/west-bengal-maoist-kishenji-profile-146820-2011-11-25>

6 SATP stand for South Asian terrorism Porter, is an indispensable resource to seek information, data, critical assessment and analysis on terrorism in South Asia. (www.satp.org)

7 Indian Express, 13 April 2014, retrived from <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/politics/law-in-the-jungle/>

⁸ Indian Express, 13 April 2014, retrived from <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/politics/law-in-the-jungle/>

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