

# Whether Naxalism is Maoism?

## Abstract

This paper compares the contemporary differences of Naxalism, originated in India and Maoism, which basically originated in Russia and China. The common thread between the two is “armed resistance” and “violence”. However, there are a few ideological differences, which were clearer in the beginning of the Naxalism, but now it's very difficult to perceive those differences because Naxalites have turned themselves to Maoists. This paper compares both the movements i.e. Naxalism and Maoism in nature as discussed below.

**Keywords:** Naxalism, Maoism

## Introduction

In Bhagwadgita Sukdeva tells Parikshit the son of Abhimanu that in Kalyug wicked citizens will dominate the earth and people will suffer from hunger and other worries. The poor will not get justice and rulers will become robbers and poverty will be the sole criteria for deciding the guilty. Such social conditions form ideal ground for Naxalism or Maoism.

In 1967 the Naxalbari village in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, broke into a revolutionary struggle. Poor and landless peasants, tea plantation workers and tribals rose up against years of oppression and poverty. The uprising may have been bubbling under the surface for years, but it was instigated by the attack against a tribal youth who happened to be ploughing his land.

Before this uprising, the communist movement in India was dominated by revisionism or phony communism. The criticism was that the Communist Party of India (CPI) had given up its roots of revolution in favour of a 'parliamentary road' to power. In light of the revolutionary practices of Mao Zedong and the Communist Party of China in the early 1960's, certain cadres of the CPI were influenced. They set up a revolutionary opposition to the CPI leadership. They began training the cadre of Darjeeling district, and thus in 1967, the Naxalbari revolution took place. This revolution was the origin of the naxalite movement. Initially, the naxal movement has its origin in West Bengal, but after that it spread into more than 18 states, through the activities of the underground groups of various political parties like Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist).

## The actual difference between the terms:

1. The difference between Maoists struggle and the Naxalite movement is that both trace their origin to the Naxalbari uprising of 1967.
2. But while the Naxalite movement thrives on the original spirit of Naxalbari; the Maoist struggle is an outcome of the 1967 uprising.
3. Maoists work with an agenda and use weapons to achieve their aims.
4. Naxalism focuses on mass organisations while the Maoism relies mainly on arms.

## Objective of the Study

The objective of the article is to provide clarity to understand the difference between Naxalism and Maoism. However, in present scenario both movements have almost the same objective, but still there is a difference in their ideology. What makes the article an interesting one is that the armed struggle which has taken place in the biggest democracy in the world, confused people whether it's Naxalism or Maoism. The article highlights the pattern, ideology and organizational different between the movements. The various governmental and non-governmental studies have revealed that the causes and affects of these movements are deep rooted in the objective conditions of life and respond to the people's frustration. The both movements, which began in different place and different times, have almost the same objective.

## Hypothesis

In finding the answer of the above study the following hypotheses have been developed:



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1. Naxalite movement in mainland India constitutes a grave challenge to democratic governance.
2. Failure of political mechanism and concept of social justice is root cause of naxalism and threat to internal security and constitutional governance.

#### **Naxalism**

Former Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh described Naxalism as the most significant threat to internal security being faced by the country today. The threat has existed since long though there have been many ups and downs. The term 'Naxal' derives its name from the village Naxalbari of Darjeeling district in West Bengal, where the movement originated in 1967 under the leadership of Charu Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal. It refers to the use of violence to destabilize the state through various communist guerrilla groups. However, its roots are found from the late Mughal period and British period in which the peasants are not only harassed by the landlords or so called Jamidars, but also victimised by the various so called rich peoples. The East India Company strengthens the existing structure of intermediaries and created its own Jamindari system to extract surplus and revenue from agriculture. Some of the landmark movements of the naxalism are-

#### **The Tebhaga Movement (1946)**

In 1946, The Tebhaga Movement spread from Rangpur and Dinajpur in the north to 24 Parganas in the south. This movement demanded that the share of landlords be reduced from one half to one third. When their demands were not heard, the Kisan Sabhas, dominated by the Communist party, encouraged peasants to forcibly take two-thirds of the harvested crop from landlords. This resulted in bloodshed between the peasants and the landlords. However, the movement petered out with the repression of the landlords and the local administration.

#### **The Telengana Insurrection (1946-1951)**

The Telangana Rebellion, a Communist led peasant revolt, was also took place in the former princely state of Hyderabad between 1946 and 1951. The Communist Party of India led this revolt. The revolt began in the Nalgonda district and quickly spread to the Warangal and Bidar districts. Peasant farmers and labourers revolted against the Nizam and the local feudal landlords (jagirdars and deshmukhs) who were loyal to the Nizam.

This movement was directed by the Communists. Peasants launched their struggle against economic issues against forced labour, illegal exactions and unauthorized evictions. The most strident demand was for the writing off of all debts of the peasants that were manipulated by the feudal lords. At the same time the Nizam was resisting the Indian government's efforts to bring Hyderabad into the new Indian union. The government sent the army in September 1948 to incorporate Hyderabad into Indian Union. The Hyderabad merged into India and the movement has a set back.

#### **The Naxalbari uprising and the birth of the movement**

Naxalism gets its name from the May 1967 peasant uprising in the village of Naxalbari in

Darjeeling district of West Bengal. On May 24, 1967, three sharecroppers, along with 150 Communist Party of India (Marxist) workers armed with sticks, bows and arrows looted 300 mounds of paddy from the granary of a jotedar. The mob also attempted to take over land documents from the Jotedar. Consequently, a state enforcement inspector raided the houses of these share croppers leading to the death of the inspector. In retaliation, the Assam frontier rifles next day killed eleven of the sharecroppers' family members who were protesting against the jotedar at Naxalbari bazaar. The massacre by the state agency was the key which started the Naxalite uprising by hundreds of tribals and peasants. The movement last for 52 days before the state responded with unprecedented suppressive measures such as torture, disappearances and extrajudicial killings to crush the rebellion.

During this period the Naxalite movement was no more than a collection of individuals and groups who were united in their opposition to Communist Party of India (Maoist), (CPI (M)), and loyalty to the Chinese path, but who differed amongst themselves on tactical issues. Their activities were co-ordinated by the All India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries. The formation of Communist Party of India (Marxist Leninist), (CPI (ML)), was made on 22nd April 1969, as a party dedicated to peasant armed revolution.

When Charu Mazumdar died in police custody in 1972, the 'revolution' appeared to be over. The revolutionary movement has risen again and again because the factors that lends it credence and give it life persist, most importantly the continuing denial of justice and human dignity to Dalits and tribals across the country. The line of the Movement set out in the 1970 Programme of the CPI (ML), and largely repeated in that of its eventual successor the CPI (Maoist) in 2004, adopts Mao's view. The immediate task of the communist party is to organize landless labourers, poor peasants and exploited middle peasants in armed struggle against their oppressors.

By 1980, over 30 Naxalite groups had surfaced, including the People's War Group (PWG) which operated in rural regions of eastern India. The cadre profiles also began to change from Hindu upper caste youth to members of the rural masses, even as the leadership remained high-caste Hindus. For instance, the PWG was formed in the impoverished and underdeveloped Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh. Its key objectives were to punish and kill class enemies, and police informants. The PWG also set up people's courts to sentence its enemies. The state government of Andhra Pradesh reacted with harsh measures to suppress the PWG movement especially in north-west Andhra.

The PWG spread from Andhra Pradesh to neighboring states of Madhya Pradesh (MP), Orissa, Jharkhand and Maharashtra to the tribal regions. Although the deprived and dispossessed adivasis (tribals) did not share the overall political objectives of the Naxalites, they supported the movement as they were victims of caste and class related feudalism,

especially in those parts of Madhya Pradesh that now make up the state of Chhattisgarh. In addition to the PWG, the other major naxalite group that emerged in 1980 was the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) of Bihar. During the 1990s, the state governments did not devote significant resources to combating the armed threat and therefore the MCC grew.

By 2000, the Naxalites had strengthened their bases in a number of States. Consequently, the state government administration, particularly, the Panchayat, Public Works Department (PWD), Agriculture and Irrigation department came to a virtual halt in many regions. With their growing control, the Naxalites imposed taxes on the movement of raw material, including iron ore and bauxite in order to finance themselves. In 2004, the two violent factions, the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) which had influence in Bihar and the People's War Group active in Andhra Pradesh joined to form the CPI (Maoist).

After 2004, the violence increased in the Maoist dominated areas leading to frequent confrontations between the Maoists and their collaborators on the one hand and the security forces on the other. The Naxalite insurgency has emerged as a dangerous threat mainly due to its geographical spread, growing support base in tribal and underdeveloped areas and its cadres' enhanced fighting capabilities. The government of India mainly views the insurgency as a problem of law enforcement and of economic developments and has responded with more measures by way of funds for development along with increasing police forces to the affected states.

Since 1967, it has grown mostly from displaced tribal and natives who are fighting against exploitation from major Indian Corporations and local officials whom they believe to be corrupt. Naxalites are far-left radical communists who derive their political ideology from the teachings of Mao Zedong, the Chinese revolutionary leader. They have been operating in various parts of the country since the early seventies. At various points of time, different areas of the country have been seriously affected due to overt violence resorted to by naxalite groups, who are active in those areas.

West Bengal being the centre of the movement initially, Naxalism spread to the lesser developed areas like Jharkhand, Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh. The CPI (ML) has been fighting elections in several states across India. Most prominent among these groups are the CPI (ML) (Liberation), CPI (ML) (Kanu), CPI(ML) (Jan Shakti), CPI (ML) (New Democracy) and others.

#### **Maoism**

Maoism is a political theory developed in India around 1950's and 60's. It is derived from the teachings of revolutionary Chinese leader Mao Zedong. It is often considered as an anti-revisionist form of Marxism-Leninism, and was widely applied as the political and military guiding ideology of the Communist Party of China and as a theory guiding revolutionary movements around the world. Holding that "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun", Maoist thought emphasizes the revolutionary struggle

of the vast majority of people against the ruling classes and the state structure. Mao called this the People's War: Mobilizing large parts of rural population to revolt against established institutions by engaging in guerrilla warfare. The followings are the great leaders who started the ideology of Maoism/Leninism-

#### **Karl Marx**

Karl Marx was born in Treves, Germany, on 05 May 1818. His father was Jewish and mother from a Dutch family. Marx got his early education in Graman School of Traves. In 1836 he went to Berlin University and studied law, history. In 1843 he became the editor of the Franco-German year Book. Here, he was first exposed to Frederick Engles views and was attracted to them. Marx was impressed by Engel's economic and military writings. In 1847, they together produced the Communist Manifesto. In 1849, after being expelled from Prussia, Marx went to London and wrote numerous books, including 'Das Capital'. But, he could not complete it or revise it. The first volume published in 1867 and the remaining two volumes were published in 1883-85 and 1890-94 after his death, by Engles.

#### **Engles**

Frederick Engles was born in Barmen, Germany, on 28 Nov 1820. He was son of wealthy cotton manufacturer. He was graduated from Barmen High School. In 1841, he served in the Guard Artillery in Berlin. He first met Marx in 1842 and then again in 1844, when the two became lifelong friends. During 1845-1850, he organized the revolutionary movements in France, Germany and Belgium. After the failure of Revolution of 1848-49, he returned to England. In 1869, he retired from business to advocate himself entirely to literary and revolutionary activities. He observed that "insurrection was as much an art as regular warfare, with its own rules of procedure that if neglected, would lead to defeat and ruin". His basic advice was never to play with insurrection unless fully prepared to face the consequences which might ensure. Once an insurrection had been started, it was absolutely essential to maintain the offensive. Marx and Engles regarded guerrilla warfare to be of limited applicability. They noted that guerrilla bombs had been most successful when they remained small. Engles felt, that Asia, as compared to Europe was better suited for guerrilla warfare.

#### **Vladimir Lenin**

Vladimir Lenin was born in Simbirsk, Russia on 10<sup>th</sup> Apr 1870. He was deeply influenced by the revolutionary political views. His father was school inspector. He expelled from college for taking part in illegal student assembly. He had finished university education without attending classes. Received first class degree and admitted to practice law. He became a Marxist in Jan 1889. He started practicing law in bars after police waived their political objections. Clients were peasants and artisans. He used law as a cover for revolutionary activist. He moved to St Petersburg in Aug 1893 to work as a Public defender. He, with other Marxists, unified Marxist groups as union for the struggle for the

liberation of the working class. He was arrested and jailed for this activity. He exiled in 1897 to Siberia for three years after prison. He set up elite group to lead revolution. Germany helped Lenin return to Russia. Lenin made his move to seize power in Nov 1917. Bolsheviks (Red Army) over through provisional Government. New Symbol of Government – Red flag with hammer and sickle symbolized union between workers and peasants. Bolsheviks renamed Communists Party in Mar 1918. Civil War was fought in Russia between 1917 to 1920 'Red' v/s 'Whites'. It was the complete breakdown of Russian Army and Society.

#### **Mao-Tse-Tung**

Mao-Tse-Tung is someone who can direct and influence a group of people to work towards and achieve a goal. He had born in an affluent Buddhist family of China. His parents were peasants. He graduated from the First Provincial Normal School of Human in 1918. He registered himself as a part time student in Beijing University. Poor condition in China at that time made Mao a resentful young man. In 1917, he joined the University of Peking as an assistant librarian. There he began to take part in communist activities. Later he became a founder member of Chinese Communist Party. Between 1922 and 1923, the party organized over a hundred big and small strikes, in which more than 300,000 workers took part. In 1934 Mao's forces began one of the most extra ordinary marches in human history. This was known as the 'Long March'. About 100,000 people set out on a journey that covered some 6000 miles. It was more a running battle than a march, only 35000 survived. In spite of heavy losses Mao come in contact with other communist groups. In 1935 Mao became chairman of the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party. In Sep 1949, Mao succeeds in defeating the Nationalist forces and establishes the People's Republic of China (PRC). He regarded war as the highest form of struggle between nations, states, classes or political groups. He supported the Marxist Leninist principle of 'seizing political power with arms and solving problems with war.' According to Mao, the objective of war is to preserve one and to annihilate the enemy, which is the basis of all war activities.

In India, Maoism is represented through the Communist Party of India (Maoist). Much like traditional Maoist thought, the CPI (M) aims to overthrow the Indian Government through peoples' war. The some of the silent points about the Maoism in India-

1. It originated in China as a form of communist theory derived from the teachings of Chinese political leader Mao-Tse-Zedong.
2. They are the loyal believers of the Mao's philosophy that "Power flows from the barrel of the gun."
3. After the rising of Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), a section of communist rebels retained a distinct identity. A new concept of Maoism started in India.
4. In 1966, Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) was formed in West Bengal. Keeping a low profile in

the earlier years, the group showed its existence in Bihar in mid-1980s when they killed 54 Rajputs in Dalelchak-Bhagaura village of Aurangabad.

5. There are two fundamental differences between the Naxalites and Maoists. One, the Naxalites take part in elections and many of them are registered parties with the Election Commission of India. Two, the Maoists do not support the elections at all.
6. The Naxalites may have an armed wing, however, the existence of the Maoists depend on their armed militia.

#### **Causes of Naxalism in India**

Naxalism is the cancer of the modern India. It is like a dynamic organism which attacks the healthy flesh of the surrounding society. It has essential hallmark malignant cancer: unless treated, and treated drastically, its growth is inexorable, until its poisons and engulfs the society on which it feeds and drags it down to destruction. Naxalism is the social reality which has its roots in societal conditionally and not in the naxalites's mental frame. The naxalites are products of society's differential conditions. The claim by police, military, politicians and administrators that they will eliminate violence by their strict dealings with the naxalite emerge in specific political and socio-economic condition which, if the changed in the new direction can help in tacking up the challenge of naxalism in future.

The lack of human development causes anger and resentments amongst the people. They feel alienated and excluded. In addition often local elites are engaged in exploiting, harassing and even torturing the tribal population. The Naxalites receive most support from Dalits and Adivasis. Together they amount for one fourth of India's population; most of them live in rural India. Their causes for supporting the violent movement are manifold-

1. Poverty
2. Food Insecurity
3. Failure of implementing the 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> schedules
4. Illiteracy and unemployment
5. Lack of representation
6. Deforestation
7. Political Maoist Nexus
8. Corruption
9. Different Political Approach
10. The Structural Violence

It is correct in not attributing the caste or tribal structure as a reason for the problem. The poor include various castes and not any particular caste or group of castes. However, their poverty and lack of ability to improve their lot due to financial constraints by accessing education, the government machinery or even legal remedies remains an important factor for their supporting thenaxalism.

#### **So what is the difference?**

There isn't much difference. Both movements believe the government should be overthrown, both believe the use of violence is necessary and both have used violence to exert their power.

The only real difference is that one is born of a movement in a remote village in India, whereas the other is derived from academic thought of a great leader in China. Both want to overthrow imperialist power structures and believe Western influence in the form of free markets and capitalism should not exist in India. They fight for the poor, the landless and the under-represented. However, the manner with which they do so has termed them terrorists and unlawful.

Naxalism which started as a peasant movement is not seriously following its ideology at present and is busy to causing a dent in the established authority of the government. The movement is now manifesting itself through unlawful activities and heightened violence. They are considered left radical communists and supportive of Maoist political sentiment and ideology. They believe in Maoism, however, they are also influenced by the Marxist-Leninist schools of thought.

In short, the easiest way to understand Maoism and Naxalism is this - All Naxalites are Maoists, however, all Maoists are not Naxalites.

#### **Conclusion**

Maoism is a Communist theory developed by the Chinese political and military leader Mao Zedong while Naxalism is an Indian Communist movement based on the teachings of Maoist advocate Charu Majumdar. Maoism has been the guiding principle of the People's Republic of China until 1978 when it was replaced by the teachings of Deng Xiaoping while Naxalism has been the guiding principle behind the struggle of poor Indians against their government and landlords.

Naxalism has been viewed by the Indian government as a terrorist movement while Maoism has been recognized by the Chinese government as the foundation on which the People's Republic of China was created. One side the Naxalites claim to be fighting for the poor and the marginalized, demanding loyalty and shelter from villagers, on the other side Government forces seek public support in protecting those same villagers from the Naxalites. The activities of the civil society activists on behalf of the impoverished and vulnerable local population put them at risk from the Naxalites and Government security forces alike.

#### **Suggestion**

The State must start to fight the conflict legally, minimize collateral damage, strengthen the leadership of the security forces and abstain from any human rights violation. The security forces should better start protecting the population living within the area of conflict instead of merely confronting the Naxalites on large scale. The Naxalite movement must be challenged politically by presenting better alternatives to the Maoist approach and offer new

perspectives. In this regard the State should start addressing the basic needs of the poor and fulfilling its main responsibilities to deliver human development to these disadvantaged areas.

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