



## RED CORRIDOR AND LITERATURE OF PROTEST

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Red Corridor is a term used to signify the region under the heavy influence of Left-Wing Extremists. This region is densely forested and is inhabited mostly by tribal population. Geographically, this region can be described as spanning from the foothills on India's border with Nepal, over dry plains and thick forests, sooty mining towns and railway tracks, crisscrossing several eastern states down to the southern state of Andhra Pradesh. In the Government of India's official terminology, it is variously known as Naxal, Naxalite or Maoist afflicted territory. In literature and media, it is referred as 'the red corridor'. The term might not be entirely accurate since the territories are not seamlessly connected, but is still effective in evoking both the ideological attachment and the gory nature of rebellion that sweeps large part of India's eastern states. The influence exerted by the Naxals has compelled various governments to declare that it is the biggest threat to India's internal security and stability.

The Naxals take their name from a village in West Bengal called Naxalbari where the movement began as an armed rebellion against India's government in 1967 inspired by Mao Zedong's communist ideology calling for armed peasant revolt against the upper classes and an egalitarian redistribution of land and wealth toward the ultimate goal of a classless society. The movement spread across India's central and eastern regions over the next three decades as it gained support from leftist intellectuals. Naxalite ideology has taken hold among various classes of economically dispossessed people in India aligning them against the middle and upper classes in a struggle to overthrow the Indian government and establish state power. As the Naxalite movement has gained support, their attacks on Indian state forces have grown in intensity, with reports of increasingly more advanced weaponry being used by the insurgents. Besides attacking police, the Naxals have targeted mining operations, industrial plants, government buildings, and cell phone towers, destroying equipment and attacking personnel in the process. They have also called for regional general strikes against industry. India's dense jungles combined with its extreme poverty create conditions favourable to a guerrilla insurgency, allowing the rebels to establish hidden jungle bases while receiving support from surrounding areas including villages and urban slums. The large number of groups engaged in armed conflict with the Indian government reflects a strong and widespread backlash against the establishment which cannot be attributed to a minor issue – a massive social, economic, and political imbalance exists in India which is reflective of overall global conditions of wealth disparity and vastly unequal power relations.

The Indian government is well aware of the socio-economic reasons for the Naxalite rebellion, although it has stuck with a counterinsurgency strategy that has led to an intensification of the violence. The reality of India's social conditions is summed up in the words of Bahukutumbi Raman, a former head of the counter-terrorism wing of India's external intelligence agency:

*“There are two Indias. The dazzling India which we see every day on our TV channels, in the spins of our political leaders and in the writings of our so-called strategic analysts. But there is another India which we rarely see or write about. This is the India of grinding poverty, a victim of social exploitation of the worst kind, where the inhabitants – mainly tribals – are treated like chattels and domestic animals by the upper caste political leaders, landlords and forest contractors... It is this India coming out from under the carpet, which is flocking to the banners of the Maoist ideologue”s (qtd. in Buncombe 2).*

Naxalism is a movement which has a long history and which over a period of time has expanded its influence and violent activities. It is now spread over 14 States covering about 160 districts. This really becomes a matter of concern and hence provokes one to identify the factors which are responsible for its widening base and the increase in its violent activities. In the literature, the factors that are normally identified with the emergence of this movement are political or economic in nature. The present study, however, without undermining the role of these factors, focuses on the psychological factor as vital in the emergence and increasing influence of this movement. But before that the present paper briefly discusses the history of the movement and then directs its efforts towards understanding the role of the psychological factors in the emergence of Naxalism. The term “Naxalite” refers to “all forms of armed struggle that have taken up the cause of socio-economic development of the downtrodden rural masses.” The Naxalite revolt has grown in magnitude and strength for many reasons, political or economic in nature. Some of the political factors which can be identified are: the emergence of the movement coincided with the formation of the first United Front Government in West Bengal (1967) with the Communist Party of India-M as its main constituent, and received increasing official support, attention and press coverage. The study of various factors indicates that Naxalism is the outcome of not just one factor but a number of various factors. One can really have a



proper grip of the problem by focusing on the psychology of the individuals who are a part of the movement. The psychological factors synthesise well the above mentioned factors - political and facilitate a clear understanding of the roots of the movement. Furthermore, if we are to delve deep into understanding and explaining the attitudes and behaviour of the Naxals, we can suggest, not demonstrate that they may have some hope in the future but it may so happen that in the future they do not receive any benefits from growth and further their situation can be worsened by a sudden change. All these make them feel that their present situation is worse than the past. All these provide the ground for the rise of psychological tension which erupts in the form of protest activities and thus enables people to establish a link between the real world and their expectations.

Actually, the whole movement is an ideological movement based on a mixture of three ideologies—Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. To put it in a simple way, the movement is about communist revolution to establish socialism and thereafter, to reach the stage of communism. For this they need to, as they claim, overthrow the Indian State through armed struggle to capture the political power and introduce Democratic Revolution in India. They say that through the Democratic Revolution only, it is possible to resolve the contradiction between the great masses of the Indian people and the feudal system. They *prima facie* seem to be following the Marxist *praxis* that philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it. In the introduction to one of their founding documents, entitled *Strategy and Tactics of the Indian Revolution*, they say that theory should guide the tactics.

There has been a continuous movement for at least last two decades. This movement i.e. Maoist movement has been violent and comparatively strong enough to challenge, at least, the security forces and pose threats to the local government officials. The movement is primarily spearheaded by a Maoist party, i.e. the CPI (Maoist) which derives its ideological and militaristic inspirations from the China's Mao Tse Tung's thoughts which propagates agrarian armed revolution to capture political power. Indian Maoists or/and Naxalites aim at overthrowing the Indian State through the agrarian armed revolution and capturing the political power. The CPI (Maoist) has spread to one-third of the country's geographical area (primarily in forest areas) and established an efficient networking in urban areas through its mass organizations. It has also in place a proper research and development programme which is responsible for the development of sophisticated arms and ammunitions. In addition to it, the CPI (Maoist) has set up an intelligence network to collate and analyse the information as to the planning, movement and operation of the security forces. They are challenging the Indian state on many fronts—from propaganda to military actions. Although they say that they are in a strategic defensive mode in which they, on occasions, conduct counter-offensive attacks on security forces and civilians, the data on the killings of security forces and civilians reveal enormity of the Maoists' threat to the internal security of the country.

### Strategy

Maoist document regarding Strategy and Tactics says that their strategy is guided by the Programme. They aim to introduce their so-called revolution in India through armed struggle. For that, Maoists would need, they assess, to be relied on armed agrarian revolution and their three magic weapons—party of the proletariat, people's army and revolutionary united front. To form a revolutionary united front, they distinguish real friends from real enemies. Their three main enemies are imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism. On the other hand, motive forces of the Indian Revolution are proletariat, peasants and some section of petty bourgeoisie. National bourgeoisie as a class, as per their class analysis, is vacillating and cannot be fully relied upon. The central task of the Indian Revolution is to capture political power through people's protracted war as envisaged by Mao Tse Tung of China. People's protracted war is a method of war which is meant to expand a war in time and space to harass the enemy forces. Maoists think that the Indian armed forces are superior to their forces only from the tactical point of view. They believe that they can destroy the Indian armed forces bit by bit as a full meal is eaten up mouthful by mouthful. In fact, they plan to attack on the Indian State when the government is weak, for example, at the time of full-fledged war with neighbouring countries or a war on a world scale. Maoists say that the people's protracted war will pass through three strategic stages— Stage of Strategic Defensive, Stage of Strategic Stalemate and Stage of Strategic Offensive. They say that tactics must be guided by the strategy. Their tactics are: to formulate clear and concise propaganda slogans, to transform the slogans into agitation, to follow the class line and the mass line, to build mass organisation and to carry out mass movement, to build the Party amongst the dalit masses, to mobilize women/dalits/tribal/minorities into the revolutionary movement, to mobilise urban population on mass issues, to acquire relatively better and larger number of arms and ammunition, to develop appropriate forms of military organizations, to pursue tactical counter offensive, etc.

While it is seldom mentioned in the Western media, the Naxalite rebellion in India represents a significant threat to the establishment in its effectiveness and its level of popular support. According to some reports, the Naxals control up to one-third of India's territory at any given time, and in some places they have established alternate governments. The Naxals, an alliance of various parties across India representing the country's poorest and most exploited people, have taken up arms



against India's government in what they say is a struggle against widespread poverty and oppression perpetuated by the policies of the ruling class and the theft of land and resources by Indian and multinational corporations. Both in India and in the West, the establishment views the Naxals as violent extremists who must be eliminated. The fact that the Naxals are retaliating against severe poverty, oppression, and exploitation is agreed upon by all sides – however, the legitimacy of the Naxalite struggle remains a topic of debate. While the conflict is undoubtedly bloody, establishment voices continue to advocate violent suppression of the insurgency even as its popularity grows. The response of the Indian ruling class so far has been to ignore the obvious economic solutions and instead focus on a counterinsurgency campaign using police and paramilitary units to suppress the rebellion, despite the criticisms of numerous human rights activists. This kind of response is certain to prolong the violence. Until extreme poverty and social inequality are eliminated, social tensions will exist and violence will occur, both in India and elsewhere.

According to a study published in 2010 by researchers at Oxford University, India contains more impoverished people than all of sub-Saharan Africa, with over 421 million living in deep poverty in eight of India's 28 states – the highest concentration of severe poverty in the world. The study used a "multidimensional poverty index" (MPI) created by experts at Oxford to conduct a more in-depth examination of global poverty which does not focus solely on monetary conditions. The MPI concentrates on ten main factors in poverty, including access to nutrition, education, electricity, and sanitation. The Oxford study found that the severity of poverty in some parts of India exceeds that of Africa, and that the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh contains a level of poverty close to that of the war-torn Democratic People's Republic of the Congo, a country with a similar number of people. The study also found that about 1.7 billion people worldwide, or approximately one-third of the world's population, live in multidimensional poverty – 400 million more than World Bank has estimated to be in extreme poverty using its analysis based on household income. Considering India's severe poverty conditions, it is not surprising that an armed movement such as the Naxals has arisen in the country, as armed struggle is easily perceived as a means of survival by people who lack access to the basic necessities of life.

India's reality is that the 80 per cent of the poor live in rural areas, where they are typically bereft of assets, illiterate, malnourished and sick and only scarcely less than in colonial India, they are deeply oppressed by the landed. The lowest castes remain the most impoverished; brutal violence and ritual discrimination are ubiquitous; and democracy is a fiction at the village level in all the major states except Kerala and West Bengal, where leftist governments have undertaken substantive agrarian reform.

These myriad disabilities bar the poor from participating in economic growth. They also ensure that the poor barely share in the gains of growth: little or nothing trickles down to them, too often not even higher wages for their labour. Moreover, these disabilities prevent them from translating universal suffrage and their massive numbers into political power. The record of the past half-century has proved all this beyond doubt."

With corporate abuse and theft of tribal land a regular phenomenon in India, many of its dispossessed peoples look for alternative ways of exerting political influence as they neither consider the Indian government to be representative of their interests nor perceive a democratic process for obtaining such representation under the current establishment. The oppression suffered by India's poor plays a fundamental role in shaping their view of society and politics – the ongoing structural violence they endure is not without consequence, as it conditions them into a bleak worldview based on a never-ending struggle for survival in which violence dominates every aspect of their lives. As people find themselves in desperate circumstances created by oppressive state and corporate policies, they can be expected to do what is necessary to defend themselves and their families – the Naxals enjoy the support that they do because they offer what many of India's poor consider to be a feasible solution to the perceived lack of democratic representation and the loss of their land, resources, and livelihood to corporations.

Despite such acknowledgements of the social, economic, and political factors in the insurgency, the Indian government continues to engage in paramilitary and policing operations against the Naxals, often committing brutal or illegal acts in the process. Torture is commonly used in interrogations of suspected Naxals, who often do not survive police detainment. Police have illegally confiscated pro-Naxal literature from people and arrested sympathetic writers and activists in a campaign of force to disrupt the movement. As the Naxals have made an effort in urban centers to recruit personnel, the Indian government has begun cross-agency operations to counter the threat including intelligence-sharing and providing specialized training to police. Some police forces in India have received improved equipment and more advanced technology to fight the Naxals. As the Naxalite movement has spread, the Indian government has increasingly relied on the use of paramilitary force in its attempts to put down the rebellion, although the overall effectiveness of its actions in reducing Naxalite activity remains in doubt.



The repressive tactics of Indian security forces are likely to increase popular support for the Naxals. Besides confiscating Naxalite and other Marxist-Leninist literature which is not banned under Indian law, the police also routinely make lists of anyone attending pro-Naxal meetings or demonstrations, often arrest ideological supporters of Naxalism without legal basis. According to *The Statesman* in 2005: “Pro-Naxal organisations and leaders feel that the recent arrests of alleged Naxalites and seizure of alleged Naxal literature by police would hamper the planned peace process between the rebels and the state government” (“Naxal Arrests...”). Indeed, the deadliest attack yet occurred in early April 2010, in which Naxalite guerrillas killed at least 76 police and wounded another fifty. Despite the Indian government’s forceful response to the insurgency, Naxals continue to gain popular support from India’s poorest areas and have begun using heavy weapons such as rocket launchers, which they used for the first time in 2009 against a Border Security Force camp in Bihar, catching security forces by surprise (“India: Maoists...”). More state repression will only produce more popular dissatisfaction with the government, fueling the insurgency which relies heavily on a sense of perceived injustice among the poor.

In an effort to undermine Naxalite recruitment, the Indian government has taken some steps to ease economic and social pressure on the poor in certain areas strongly influenced by the rebels. For the most part, however, these steps have not been adequate to seriously hinder the growth of the movement. The Indian government has made only minor, insignificant agrarian reforms in support of the poor, but at the same time it has opened the country to large multinational corporations which are taking over India’s agricultural sector with patented, genetically-engineered crops. In some places, the Indian government has enlisted the help of locals in fighting the Naxals, boasting job creation as a positive characteristic of its counterinsurgency program. Because of the terrible conditions faced by India’s poor, several human rights activists have stated their sympathies with the Naxals’ cause, condemning the establishment for its prolonged mistreatment of the lower classes. Among these activists is Arundhati Roy, the prize-winning author, who said of the Naxals: “If I was a person who is being dispossessed, whose wife has been raped, who is being pushed off their land and who is being faced with this police force, I would say that I am justified in taking up arms, if that is the only way I have to defend myself” (qtd. in Buncombe 3). Another activist, Gautam Navlakha, said of the Indian government’s ban on Naxalite political organizing: “You proscribe those [Naxals], you banned them from political activities, you don’t allow them to organise and mobilise people because of fears of them gaining popular support and then you ask why they don’t take a democratic course? What democratic means have you left for them?” (qtd. in “FTN: Activists...” 3). The Indian government has made examples of some activists who have spoken out against official policy. Dr. Binayak Sen, a widely known and respected pediatrician and civil rights activist, has long been an outspoken critic of the Indian government, especially regarding its policy of forced land seizures. In 2007, Dr. Sen was detained for two years and, to the shock of many, sentenced to life in prison in 2010 on charges of sedition and conspiracy, a move which sparked street protests across India. While the Indian government claims he was secretly providing material support to the Naxals, Dr. Sen and others consider the prison sentence to be a response to his vocal ideological opposition to state policy and economic injustice, arguing that phony evidence and contrived testimony were used in his trial (Wax, 1-2). Despite such harsh measures by the establishment, the Naxalite insurgency continues to grow, thus validating claims by human rights activists that more state repression only serves to inflame the rebellion and that land reform and other necessary changes must occur for hostilities to cease.

There is no shortage of voices condemning the Naxals for their use of violence. However, human rights activists tend to criticize the Naxals’ methods rather than the legitimacy of their struggle. Those siding with the establishment often overlook not only the violence carried out by Indian paramilitary forces in dealing with the insurgency, but also the structural economic violence suffered by India’s poor as a result of the collusion between the government and multinational corporations. The Naxals, as violent and barbaric as one might consider them to be, enjoy such a high level of support among India’s poor that they must be taken seriously. Besides constituting a physical threat, the Naxals represent a strong ideological threat to India’s establishment due to their willingness to address key political and economic issues which affect the poor – specifically, issues of self-determination. The horrible conditions suffered by India’s poor are the breeding ground of armed revolution, as it becomes the only perceived method of exercising self-determination. In India, it is acknowledged by government officials, human rights activists, and Naxals alike that the rebels are motivated out of resistance to severe oppression and exploitation. India’s government, however, continues to rely on forceful means of suppressing the insurgency, rather than undertaking the necessary land reforms and other vital steps to alleviate the suffering of the poor. Given the nature of social forces, it is unlikely that India’s ruling elites will ever willingly make such changes – a notion which the Naxals take to heart in waging armed struggle. India’s poor are undeniably the victims of a class war, and it is to be expected that they should fight back. Whether or not one supports the Naxals’ cause, an ever-increasing amount of scientific research suggests that the social tensions created by severe inequality lead to violence. As long as significant social, political, and economic inequalities exist within a society, a state of violence will exist irrespective of anyone’s moral or political sensibilities. As individuals, we can strive for the equalization of social relations, or we can ignore the ill effects of social



inequality and hope for the best. If there is one, universal message to be understood from the words of sociologists, human rights activists, Naxalite guerrilla fighters, and Indian government officials themselves, it is: “Share, or suffer.”

### Novels with Naxalist Tinge

A parallel body of literature has come from outsiders looking in. Among the great Indian novels of recent decades, at least a half-dozen, including Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance*, Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English, August*, Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger*, and, most recently, Neel Mukherjee’s *The Lives of Others*, have offered glimpses of the Naxal movement. But the movement’s defining fiction is Mahasweta Devi’s 1974 novella *Mother of 1084*. Like *The Lowland*, *Mother of 1084* is both a public fiction and an intensely private one. It is the violence perpetrated by the state that helps the upper-class, a political mother of Corpse No. 1084 understands what drove her beloved twenty-year-old son to become a Naxalite. In a harrowing scene at the police morgue, she reaches out to caress his bludgeoned face only to find no skin to lay her fingers on. Slowly she realizes why he had lost faith in the system into which he was born, a system epitomized by his corrupt father. *Mother of 1084* is a grisly index of the excesses to which India resorted to crush the rebellion. Yet it makes no mention of Naxal brutality, and “the movement” is referred to only abstractly.

The Naxalbari uprising was the first major event to confront Mahasweta Devi after she became a writer, and she has said she felt morally compelled to record its dreams and betrayals. “In the seventies, in the Naxalite movement, I saw exemplary integrity, selflessness, and the guts to die for a cause,” she said. “I thought I saw history in the making, and decided that as a writer it would be my mission to document it.”

“This mission continued with “Draupadi” (1976), a short story about a young tribal Naxalite who is first widowed and then gang-raped by the police. Like *Mother of 1084*, “Draupadi” hinges on an unsparing image of state brutality.

Arundhati Roy, the author best known for her Booker prize-winning 1997 novel *The God of Small Things*, whose hero is an untouchable carpenter accused of being a Naxalite, is one of a handful of outsiders who have sought to see the conflict through the rebels’ eyes. “Here in the forests of Dantewada a battle rages for the soul of India,” she writes in *Walking with the Comrades* (2011), her powerful account of the two weeks she spent with the guerrilla army in what the media calls the “Red Corridor.”

Outside the world of fiction, however, a collection of activists and writers are beginning to offer an alternative to the political violence of the past four decades. Among those who advocate a peaceful resistance movement is writer, historian, and former Naxalite, Dilip Simeon. As a student at the elite Delhi college St. Stephen’s, Simeon was among those who joined the Naxal movement. But he soon grew disillusioned and came out of it. “Murder is not a birth pang,” he writes in his semi-autobiographical novel *Revolution Highway*, which dramatizes Naxalism against the global mood of radicalism that infected the sixties.

Simeon belongs to the school of activists calling for a movement to support nonviolent adivasi resistance against mining interests. In collaboration with these groups, adivasicommunities have already won important, if isolated, victories. In one notable recent case, the Dongria Kondh tribal villages in the eastern state of Odisha prevented the mining giant Vedanta from entering the bauxite-rich Niyamgiri hills, which the Dongrias have worshipped for centuries as the seat of their gods. The case attracted wide international attention—the Church of England protested by selling its shares in Vedanta, while media outlets compared the plight of the Dongria to that of the Na’vi tribe in James Cameron’s *Avatar*—and finally, in a landmark ruling, the Supreme Court of India ruled in favor of the Dongrias.

The support base of Naxalites is the tribal population and other depressed classes who have been discriminated against by the mainstream population and who have not been able to achieve their rightful part despite laws to counteract injustice. It has been found that the areas where Naxal movement is strong are places with a large number of tribal populations. Naxalism has become a major challenge not only before the Indian government, but also the Indian society. Naxalite movement has a long history and which over a period of time has expanded its influence and violent activities. It is now spread over 14 States covering about 160 districts. This really becomes a matter of concern and hence provokes one to identify the factors which are responsible for its widening base and the increase in its violent activities. In the literature, the factors that are normally identified with the emergence of this movement are political or economic in nature. The present study, however, without undermining the role of these factors, focuses on the psychological factors as vital in the emergence and increasing influence of this movement. But before that the present paper briefly discusses the history of the movement and then directs its efforts towards understanding the role of the psychological factors in the emergence of Naxalism.



The term “Naxalite” refers to “all forms of armed struggle that have taken up the cause of socio-economic development of the downtrodden rural masses.” The Naxalite revolt has grown in magnitude and strength for many reasons, political or economic in nature. Some of the political factors which can be identified are: the emergence of the movement coincided with the formation of the first United Front Government in West Bengal (1967) with the Communist Party of India-M as its main constituent, and received increasing official support, attention and press coverage. The study of various factors indicates that Naxalism is the outcome of not just one factor but a number of various factors. One can really have a proper grip of the problem by focusing on the psychology of the individuals who are a part of the movement. The psychological factors synthesise well the above mentioned factors - political and facilitate a clear understanding of the roots of the movement. Furthermore, if we are to delve into understanding and explaining the attitudes and behaviour of the Naxals, we can suggest, not demonstrate that they may have some hope in the future but it may so happen that in the future they do not receive any benefits from growth and further their situation can be worsened by a sudden change. All these make them feel that their present situation is worse than the past. All these provide the ground for the rise of psychological tension which erupts in the form of protest activities and thus enables people to establish a link between the real world and their expectations.

The literature of protest signifies how the intelligentsia and the literary circle react to these types of events and incidents. Broadly, it has been observed that intelligentsia and the media remains apathetic to these events. A limited circle that does not turn blind their eyes to these incidents comes out openly to support these people. Various forms of oppressive measures are used by different agencies to suppress the voices of these writers when they express their concern for these people. Recently, one can see how different writers, authors and playwrights are expressing their solidarity against growing intolerance in the country. Various social workers sacrifice their lucrative jobs to support the oppressed people. But, literature has a special role in furthering interests of these people in a very effective manner. One of the most interesting aspects that one can clearly observe is that the Naxals themselves circulate their own literature in a clandestine manner.

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