

Intellectuals and the Maoists

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A revolution, insurgency or for that matter, even a rebellion rests on a pedestal of ideology. The 'ideology' could be a contested one – either from the so-called leftist or the rightist perspective. As ideology is of paramount importance, so are 'intellectuals'.

This paper delves into the concept of 'intellectuals'. Thereafter, the role of the intellectuals in India's Maoist insurgency is brought out. The issue turns out to be extremely topical considering the current discourse of 'urban Naxals/Maoists'. A few questions that need to be addressed in the discourse on who the Maoist intellectuals are:

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Are the intellectuals always anti-state? Can they bring about a revolution or social change? What did Gramsci, Lenin or Mao opine about intellectuals? Is the ongoing Left-wing Extremism *aka* Maoist insurgency in India guided by intellectuals? Do academics, students, writers, journalists, film-makers, actors and poets, within India and without, in any way provide a fillip to the movement? Is there any ecosystem that binds the intellectuals and the insurgents together? Are the counter-insurgent Police well within their mandate to nab ‘intellectuals’ in the urban landscape, allegedly as supporters of the Maoist movement? How is the future trajectory shaping up in this contest between the state, intellectuals and the insurgents?

Perhaps Kyle Burke is spot on in his analysis when he opines that the characteristics of the US Police have taken their contemporary shape as a result of hobnobbing with the US military.¹ The interaction between the Police and the military has made the former learn the nuances of counterinsurgency warfare, which in turn has altered its approach to handling criminals. It is not clear if such a thesis would hold ground for the Indian Police, but it is certainly the case that the latter has showcased significant counterinsurgency musculature in its confrontations with the Left-Wing Extremists [LWE] *aka* Maoists.

In November 2019, Police in India’s southern state of Kerala arrested two activists of the mainstream leftist political party – Communist Party of India – Marxist (CPI-M). They were booked under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act [UAPA] due to their alleged links with the banned Communist

1 Kylie Burke, “The Police Know Guerrilla Warfare”, *JACOBIN*, December 12, 2019, <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/12/badges-without-borders-stuart-schrader-policing-counterinsurgency>.

Party of India – Maoist (CPI-Maoist). Incidentally, one of the activists Alan Suhaib, was a law student.²

Discussions, both within the CPI-M as well as in the public domain have been intense with some pertinent questions doing the rounds. Does the Kerala wing of the CPI-M harbour or even encourage the ultra-leftist viewpoints within the party? Or was this a failure of the local party leadership to curb the growth of such radical views? Or is it a mere aberration, the adventurism of two young party activists who were still in their formative stages of ‘ideology’?

Notwithstanding the responses to these questions, one aspect is clear as crystal – educated youth can somehow get attracted toward extremist viewpoints.

Why?

Is it romanticism? Is it a youthful predilection? Is it pure ‘josh’?

In November 2019 itself, Police in the Bastar District of Chhattisgarh arrested a Professor of Delhi University and another academic of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, along with a few Maoists, in connection with the murder of a tribal villager in the LWE affected Sukma district of Chhattisgarh. One of the professors was Nandini Sundar, writer on tribal anthropology and the activist who spearheaded the Public Interest Litigation [PIL] in the Supreme Court leading to the quashing of the vigilante movement, *Salwa Judum*.

Interestingly, in the happening month of November 2019, the Pune Police searched the Noida home of an Associate Professor of Delhi University in connection with a 2017 case

2 P.S.G. Unnithan, “Kerala: 2 CPI(M) activists held for alleged links with Maoists”, *India Today*, November 2, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/kerala-2-cpi-m-activists-held-for-alleged-links-with-maoists-1615152-2019-11-02>.

where ten activists had been imprisoned for more than a year while on trial for alleged Maoist links.³

Barely a month before this string of incidents, in October 2019, an Assistant Professor of the Hyderabad-based Osmania University was arrested for suspected links with the banned Maoists.⁴ The academician K. Jagan, was also a member of Viplava Rachayitula Sangham, a revolutionary writers' association – and possible front organisation of the Maoists.

Going back in time, in 2017, the Maharashtra Police felt vindicated when the Maoists put up posters in support of the Delhi University Professor G.N. Saibaba, who was arrested and subsequently convicted for alleged links with the communist ultras.⁵

BEYOND INDIAN BORDERS

The New York Times came out with a stunning report in September, 2018⁶ that examined the gradual de-radicalisation of Chinese students who were initially immersed in the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party [CCP]. They had read the literature of Marx, Lenin and Mao and had investigated the nature of the campus proletariat. They could

3 Pheroze L. Vincent, "Six-hour Elgaar case search at DU professor's home", *The Telegraph*, November 9, 2019, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/six-hour-elgaar-case-search-at-du-professors-home/cid/1704012>.

4 "Varsity professor held for alleged links with Maoists", October 10, 2019, https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/varsity-professor-held-for-alleged-links-with-maoists-119101001433_1.html.

5 Pavan Dahat, "Maoists have confessed their link to Prof. Saibaba: Anti-Naxal unit", *The Hindu*, March 23, 2017, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/maoists-have-confessed-their-link-to-prof-saibaba-anti-naxal-unit/article17591084.ece>

6 Javier C. Hernandez, "China's Leaders Confront an Unlikely Foe: Ardent Young Communists", *The New York Times*, September 28, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/28/world/asia/china-maoists-xi-protests.html>.

also recite the slogans of President Xi Jinping. Thereafter, when these radicalised student-activists were converting their theoretical and empirical knowledge into social action, they started demanding greater protection for workers. The CCP then realised that their ideological ‘cyborgs’ were going out of control. Several activists were detained and the authorities dealt with the rational voice of the proletariat and the activists in a ham-handed manner, arresting and detaining the activists.

Popular uprisings are as old as history, writes Gizachew Tiruneh.⁷ Stathis N. Kalyvas firmly asserts that a revolutionary group is by definition ideological, although not all ideological groups are revolutionary.⁸

Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci asked a germane question:

Are intellectuals an autonomous and independent social group, or does every social group have its own particular specialized category of intellectuals?⁹

He continued to research the question ‘who is an intellectual’ among an array of administrators, scholars, scientists, theorists and philosophers. According to Gramsci, all men are intellectuals, but not all men serve the function of intellectuals in society. Gramsci writes that, although one can speak of intellectuals, yet one cannot speak of non-intellectuals because non-intellectuals do not exist.

Maoist doctrine was endorsed, in varying measure, by a stream of French intellectuals. Richard Wolin observes:

7 Gizachew Tiruneh, “Social Revolutions: Their Causes, Patterns, and Phases”, *SAGE Open*, Volume 4, Issue 3, 2014.

8 Stathis N. Kalyvas, “Is ISIS a Revolutionary Group and if Yes, What Are the Implications?”, *Perspective on Terrorism*, Volume 9, Number 4, 2015, pp. 42-47.

9 Antonio Gramsci, “Intellectuals and Education”, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, International Publishers, New York, 1971, pp. 3-23.

“Suddenly and unexpectedly, Maoism had acquired immense cachet as political chic. It began attracting prominent intellectuals—Michel Foucault as well as Tel Quel luminaries Philippe Sollers and Julia Kristeva—who perceived in Maoism a creative solution to France’s excruciating political immobilism.”¹⁰

In *All Said and Done*, Simone de Beauvoir, notes:

“Despite several reservations – especially, my lack of blind faith in Mao’s China – I sympathize with the Maoists. They present themselves as revolutionary socialists.”¹¹

Jean-Paul Sartre, popular as a philosopher and writer, was also known as an advocate of social engagement. In this respect, he is renowned as an active supporter of varied causes such as the Algerian, Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions. Sartre even wrote the introduction to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, where he endorsed revolutionary violence as a liberating force in the face of the violence of the ruling regime. Sartre however, avoided any direct commitment to parties that espouse these revolutionary ideas. It is a rather obscure anecdote that Sartre had joined the French Maoist militants in their protest actions, assumed the titular editorship of several of their newspapers, and publicly gave away copies of banned Maoist papers on busy Paris boulevards.¹²

10 Richard Wolin, *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2010, p. 4.

11 Ibid, p. 140.

12 Henry Giniger, “Sartre Is Arrested at Last, but Briefly, for Role on a Maoist Weekly”, *The New York Times*, June 27, 1970, <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/06/27/archives/sartre-is-arrested-at-last-but-briefly-for-role-on-a-maoist-weekly.html>.

The father of post-modernism, Michel Foucault, joined the prisoner advocacy network GIP or the Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons. GIP functioned as a support group for detained Maoists in France. Foucault became deeply involved with Maoists and adopted the Maoist method of social investigation to gather information on French prison conditions. Within Foucault's framework, it is not enough to carry out academic studies and remain confined merely within "textuality". More important is the act of actually immersing oneself among the masses and learning directly from them through 'social practice' (praxis).

Foucault argued that it is clear that we live under a dictatorial class regime, under a class power that imposes itself with violence, even when the instruments of this violence are institutional and constitutional. When the proletariat triumphs, it will also exert a power that is violent, dictatorial, and even bloody, over the class it has supplanted. While agreeing with the fact that the existing court system manifests the interests of the ruling classes, Foucault rather amusingly opposed the creation of people's courts on the basis of proletarian class interests.

Many of the French intellectuals who became infatuated with Maoism in the 1960s would eventually end the dalliance due to several factors. The death of Mao in 1976, the capitalist upsurge in post-Mao China as well as the fall of Soviet Communism, led many 'bourgeois intellectuals' to veer away from the path of revolutionary change. Moreover, Postmodernism became the new craze as many of these very same intellectuals, who were poster boys of Maoism, started sternly criticising the concepts of class analysis, the party, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and Marxist theory on the whole.

WITHIN INDIA

The government of Karnataka had prepared a list of college teachers, newspaper editors and some NGOs purportedly ideologically close to the Naxals [Maoists]. A group of these intellectuals, arrested in 2003,¹³ included the likes of actor-director-playwright Girish Karnad, winner of a slew of national awards, including the Padma Bhushan. Karnad had also served as Chairman of the national Sangeet Natak Academy and President of the Karnataka Nataka Academy, both Government backed institutions. Apart from Karnad, the list included Professor Govind Rao, Dr Sridhar and others, who were incarcerated in 2003 when they had participated in a rally in support of the Supreme Court decision with regard to a Sufi shrine.¹⁴

Binayak Sen is another case in point. He was arrested by the Indian Police for alleged links with the Maoists. At the other end, he was nominated for the Gandhi Peace Award in 2011 by the Gandhi Foundation – an organisation based in London that could safely be construed to be driven by intellectuals. The organisation, with mentors of the stature of Bhiku Parekh and Richard Attenborough, painstakingly scripts a peace award in the name of Mahatma Gandhi each year. The initial wordings of the Award contained a *faux pas*¹⁵:

“...the Gandhi Peace Award 2011 is being conferred to the tribal people of India, on behalf of whom, Dr

13 Ambrose Pinto, “Lalgarh: Intellectuals, Maoists and the State”, *Mainstream*, Volume XLVII, Number 30, July 11, 2009, <http://www.mainstreamweekly.net/article1497.html>.

14 Ibid.

15 Uddipan Mukherjee, “Gandhi Peace Award And Adivasi Consciousness”, *Uday India*, December 24, 2019, <https://udayindia.in/2011/12/24/gandhi-peace-award-and-ativasi-consciousness/>.

Binayak Sen and Mr. Bulu Imam would receive the honour...”

After several tribal groups reacted strongly, the foundation made its first retreat, rewording the award script, with the home page of the organisation’s website reading, “Gandhi Foundation International Peace Award 2011 will be presented to Dr. Binayak Sen and Bulu Imam.”¹⁶ Conspicuously, the phrase ‘tribal people of India’ was missing.

Interestingly, most Indians know Dr. Sen through the media, and their opinion about him, his family and other activists spread around the Maoist heartland, was shaped by news articles, both in the national as well as in international circuits. At the time of the Gandhi Peace Award, Dr. Sen was yet to be totally absolved of the charges of sedition. An award for him in the international arena at that juncture could have created a mess for the Indian judiciary. Sen, however, voluntarily relinquished the award.

The award for Dr. Sen was surely a decision taken by a coterie of sociologists, anthropologists and activists. It did not reflect the ‘will’ of the autochthonous *Adivasis*, and the conferment of the award did not elevate Dr. Sen to the position of a ‘messiah’ of the *Adivasis*. Yet, such a move by the Gandhi Foundation surely elevated the ‘intellectual’ Sen to a pedestal of infallibility even while he was facing serious criminal charges. That, in turn, may have encouraged other ‘intellectuals’ to collude with the Maoists, as a pathway to attain cult status as ‘celebrity (read seditious) rebels’ against the state.

Film-maker Aparna Sen, dramatist Shaonli Mitra, poet Joy Goswami and others were arrested by the Police while entering Lalgarh, the epicentre of the 2009 crisis in West Bengal. Police

16 Ibid.

reports submitted to the government suggested that some of the Maoists had accompanied the intellectuals during their Lalgarh trip. When the intellectuals were questioned about this nexus, they expressed total ignorance.¹⁷

On the global platform, the phenomenal French Revolution did not occur in an intellectual vacuum. Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu and Rosseau drove the intellectual revolution, years before the actual physical revolution took place. Rousseau's concepts of 'sovereignty' and 'general will' played a substantial role in radicalising the movement. That was the 18th century.

In the present era, there is a group of intellectuals who have received prominence through the media, a motley group of professionals: litterateurs, actors, singers, players, painters, sculptors, *et.al.*, who have successfully tamed the supply-demand curve in their respective domains. Barring a handful, most do not qualify to be termed 'intellectuals.' To render opinion is one thing, but to claim scholastic aptitude of the genre of Voltaire or Rousseau is completely different.

The submission of the doyen of subaltern historiography Ranajit Guha, is startling. In an interview, Guha emphatically says¹⁸:

“Later, I became something of a Naxal intellectual. I still consider myself to have been inspired by Charu Mazumdar's ideas which, I think, contain a lot of validity. But Charu Mazumdar and his followers were weak in organizational capability, which resulted in the

17 Saugata Roy, “Intellectuals pay price for championing Naxal cause”, *TNN*, June 25, 2009, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Intellectuals-pay-price-for-championing-Naxal-cause/articleshow/4699277.cms>.

18 “In Search of Transcendence: An Interview with Ranajit Guha”, February 2, 2010, https://www.sai.uni-heidelberg.de/history/download/ranajit_guha_interview_2.2.11.pdf.

movement being crushed. I have elsewhere condemned the role of some intellectuals in Indira Gandhi's period who supported her moves to crush the revolt..."

Guha points toward various kinds of intellectuals; one set of intellectuals who 'oppose' the state (to which Guha belongs in this case) and another set which aligns with the state in order to obliterate the former – in a war of ideology, ego and power.

Genuine intellectuals however, ought to remain neutral and posit an analytical perspective in a dispassionate manner. Moreover, an intellectual cannot be despised simply because her/his viewpoint is congruous with that of the ruling dispensation. It has however become quite a fashion for a bulk of the intellectuals in today's India to criticise government policies and programmes. In a sense, criticising the government seems to be a criterion for being qualified to be an intellectual. India today needs, what Gramsci termed as "organic intellectuals" — committed to the cause of the people.

Talking of Naxalism/Maoism, Mao Tse-tung, who had attacked intellectuals on a massive scale in his Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s, had called for recruiting large numbers of intellectuals during the course of the revolution. He wrote:

In the long and ruthless war of national liberation, in the great struggle to build a new China, the [CCP] must be good at winning intellectuals, for only in this way will it be able to organize great strength for the War of Resistance, organize the millions of peasants, develop the revolutionary cultural movement and expand the revolutionary united front. Without the participation of the intellectuals, victory in the revolution is impossible.¹⁹

19 Mao Tse-tung, "RECRUIT LARGE NUMBERS OF INTELLECTUALS", *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, December 1, 1939, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_22.htm.

Such a posture by Mao can best be described as opportunistic.

Earlier, in 1917, Lenin and Trotsky were guilty of the worst type of political adventurism; opines Ian Thatcher,²⁰ arguing that, in the name of the proletariat, Lenin and Trotsky had established a dictatorship of socialist intellectuals. They hoodwinked an ignorant lot of people, by alluring them with the carrot of a golden future. Interestingly, Lenin was a strong votary of a vanguard proletariat party in which intellectuals were supposed to take a back seat; though Lenin himself could best be described as an intellectual.

THE GENESIS: INDIA'S NAXALITES AKA MAOISTS

It all began in March 1967 with a young share-cropper, Bigul Kisan, in the Naxalbari area of the northern part of West Bengal, attacked by armed goons of the local *jotedar* when he had gone to till the land, in possession of a judicial order empowering him to do so. Oppression however was thwarted by arms; autocracy of the landlord-bourgeoisie nexus was bludgeoned by a unified band of tribal-peasants, invigorated by the fiery speeches of the ideologue of class-annihilation – Charu Mazumdar.

Since then, the movement has seen several ups and downs, bitter internecine showdowns, severe state repressions as well as splits, mergers and a mega-merger in 2004. But, the central theme of the Naxalites [derived from 'Naxalbari'] has remained almost the same. They have viewed independent India as a multi-national country and supported the right of nationalities to self-determination, including secession.

20 Thatcher, Ian D., "Lenin, Trotsky and the Role of the Socialist Intellectual in Politics", in David Bates (ed.), *Marxism, Intellectuals and Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2007, pp. 43-67.

Moreover, they have clearly stated that the ruling bourgeoisie is comprador, Indian independence was fake, and that India has a semi-colonial and semi-feudal status. Thus, in order to establish a people's government in India, Mao Zedong's guerilla warfare tactics have to be employed and a protracted armed agrarian revolution is the only feasible solution in this regard.

State and politics in India from 1947 to 1967 was a period of the formation of a developmental state. This implied significant intervention of the government in the economy through the progressive taxation of personal and corporate incomes and the consequent provision by the state of public services such as education, health and transport.

The late 1960s, and especially 1966 to 1968, were a period during which modern history boasts of a multiplicity of revolutionary movements, cutting across regions and continents. It was also a phase when student agitation gained unprecedented ground. Whether it was Berlin or Paris or Calcutta, the intellectual stimulus had engineered student movements – highly radicalised in thought and action. Blame it on the zealot-philosophers Frantz Fanon, Herbert Marcuse or Jean-Paul Sartre, to name a few!

Fanon passed away due to leukemia in 1961, but before that his firebrand writing achieved cult status. In his monograph *The Wretched of the Earth*, he wrote,²¹

...this same violence will be vindicated and appropriated when, taking history into their own hands, the colonized swarm into the forbidden cities.

Fanon believed that society had to be changed and could only be changed through violence, and violence was a personal

21 Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Press, New York, 2004, p.6.

cathartic – an individual could only find true expression and release in violence

The late 1960s were also a period of the rise of the ‘New Left’. Herbert Marcuse believed that man in Western capitalist society was every bit as enslaved as his counterpart in the totalitarian societies of the Soviet bloc. The New Left rejected both western capitalism and Soviet-bred communism. According to the New Left, the state maintained a dominant class interest through violence, psychological as well as physical. Hence, it was ‘just’ to use violence against the state as an instrument of emancipation.

Violence was also projected to be glamorous and, in the post-1967 world, Peter Reed opines, rugged good looks and violence came together in the ideal poster: Che Guevara. Heroic failure was more potent than success. 1967 was an eventful year – the death of a student in Berlin in a fracas with the Police, which later on assumed deadly proportions in the rise of the Baader-Meinhoff gang and its series of abductions and high-jackings, the death of Che Guevara in a Bolivian ravine, and finally the commencement of the historic Naxalbari uprising in India’s eastern province of West Bengal.

On March 18, 1967, a peasants’ conference was held under the auspices of the Communist Party of India – Marxist (CPI-M) Siliguri sub-division in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. The conference, *inter alia*, called for:²²

1. ending of monopoly ownership of land by the landlords,
2. redistribution of land through peasants’ committees and

22 Rajeshwari Ravikant, “People’s War and State Response: The Naxalite Movement in Telangana, India (1970-93)”, 1995, <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/831/items/1.0098990>.

3. organisation and arming of the peasants in order to destroy the resistance of landlords and rural reactionaries.

The conference further cautioned the landless to be prepared for a protracted armed struggle.

The eviction of Bigul Kisan by a *jotedar* in spite of a court order in his favour acted as a spark for the ensuing melee. Naxalbari quickly came to enjoy an iconic status among Indian revolutionaries. ‘Naxalite’ became shorthand for ‘revolutionary’, a term which evoked romance and enchantment at one end of the political spectrum and distaste and derision at the other.

Charu Mazumdar was a frail heart patient.²³ However, he emulated the likes of Mao, Guevara, Castro and perhaps Cambodian dictator Pol Pot, as he unleashed his ‘Eight Documents’. He attempted to justify the use of violence against the Indian state by positing his ‘Theory of Annihilation’ of class enemies. While building the theoretical framework of the movement, partly Marxist-Leninist, partly anarcho-communist, and verily fanning the sentiments of the youth and the dispossessed by glorifying violence, Mazumdar blew the trumpet to “Make the 1970s the decade of liberation.”²⁴

Calcutta’s Presidency College and Jadavpur University spilled over into the rural backyards of Bengal to ‘spread’ the revolution – with an apparent Cuban-styled ‘foco-ism’ without, however, explicitly and unequivocally accepting the

23 Sumanta Banerjee, “In the Wake of Naxalbari”, *Sahitya Samsad*, 2009, <https://www.amazon.in/Wake-Maxalbari-Sumanta-Banerjee/dp/8179551628>.

24 Mazumdar, Charu, “Make the 1970s the Decade of Liberation”, in Suniti Kumar Ghosh (ed.), *The Historical Turning Point: A Liberation Anthology*, S.K. Ghosh, Calcutta, 1993.

Cuban *modus operandi*. Nonetheless, violence was the fuel – driving the engine of revolution.

The class enemy was not clearly defined, but the ‘annihilation’ campaign was on – which was sometimes grotesquely evidenced in the form of ‘police-wallahs’ being murdered in broad daylight, often while not on duty and unarmed. Rag-pickers in Calcutta, branded as informers, were also not spared the ‘*fasces*’ in the name of the revolution – or may be at the altar of Rousseau’s ever misconstrued ‘General Will’ or the new-found Maoism which over enthusiastically claimed ‘Chairman Mao as Our Chairman’ – a sentiment strongly objected to and refuted by the Chinese.

Alongside the tumultuous actions in Calcutta, the countryside remained the main arena of the movement. Annihilation of usurious landlords through small squad actions, operations which were bloated to be termed as guerrilla warfare, were carried out with impunity – with the fervent hope that such numerous and gory actions would definitely ignite the revolutionary consciousness of the masses.

On the contrary, such dissolute actions by the Naxalites only hastened their loss of connectivity with the people and paved the way for their eventual defeat in the first phase of the movement and triggered the dismemberment of the party – along the pro-mass line and the pro-annihilation line. The chief architect of the Annihilation Theory, Mazumdar was finally arrested by the Calcutta Police on July 16, 1972, and lived only 12 days after his arrest. Was indiscriminate use of violence the fundamental cause of the demise of the romantic revolutionary vision? Indubitably, it was one among others, if not the primary reason.

In the first phase of the insurgency, violence ruled the roost – inter-party murders, assassinations of Police personnel, and

torture of the Naxalites (both by the Police and the mainstream party cadres) in the physical realm, while an ambience of fear, the feeling of being in a war-zone, dominated the psychological sphere.

The debacle of the Naxalites, however, was critically rooted in their lack of armed preparedness and the imperfect development of the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army [PLGA]. Military affairs were given secondary weightage *vis-a-vis* political indoctrination by the *Bengalee bhadrak* revolutionary – again a gross misunderstanding of the Maoist tradition. Kanu Sanyal differed ideologically with Mazumdar's line in as far as developing the mass organisations (frontal or otherwise) was concerned.

Interestingly, this dichotomy would turn out to be the seeds for the next level synthesis of the Naxalite/Maoist programme in India, though after considerable bloodshed and energies sapped and time consumed. As Sumanta Banerjee observed,²⁵ the movement fizzled out with a “farrago of factions” and gradually the scene as well as the leadership rotated outwards from West Bengal to Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. The baton of the race, which was left unattended, was picked up by two disconnected groups – the Kanhai Chatterjee-Amulya Sen faction giving rise to the Maoist Communist Centre [MCC] in Bihar; whereas three groups emerged in Andhra Pradesh – led by Nagi Reddy, Chandra Pulla Reddy and Kondapalli Seetharamayyiah. Eventually, in the 1980s, the Kondapalli Seetharamayyiah-bred People's War [CPI (M-L) (PW)] emerged as the major faction.

25 Sumanta Banerjee, *op. cit.*, 2009.

THE STORY CONTINUES

We find Anil²⁶ leaving the intellectual and sometimes pseudo-intellectual horizons of Kolkata's Presidency College – more specifically the Baker laboratories, and acting as Kishenji's courier and plunging into the real-life laboratory at Bastar; that elusive urban connection is what Sonu and Rajanna of the same story²⁷ obtain, it is the umbilical cord which got detached, albeit unnaturally, in the early 1970s, which they painstakingly strive to revive through frontal organisations and hidden arms manufacturing units in Indian cities.

It is the city and the growing conurbations where the final war would be fought. Mao too envisaged encircling cities from the countryside. Rajanna concurs: "The main war should be fought outside the jungle, in cities."²⁸ The jungle after all, is basically a guerrilla zone a hideout against the agile counterinsurgent – a geographical ruse to aid hit-and-run tactics. The jungle is the beginning not the destination. The cities were hamstrung though, both in India as well as in Latin America and Western Europe in the early 1970s and late 1960s. In Western Europe, under the philosophical tutelage of Herbert Marcuse, Althusser and Franz Fanon, radical student outburst was directed at saving the 'depressed' and 'alienated' worker from the capitalist-industrial set-up.

Equally radical, if not more violent and bloodthirsty, were the youth in Kolkata and its environs during the Naxal movement in 1970. Journalist, author and activist Sumanta Banerjee eulogises them to an extent: "They were not common criminals, which the police tried to make them out, but dreamers with a

26 Shubhrangshu Chowdhury, *Let's Call Him Vasu*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2012, p 6.

27 Ibid, p. 134, and p.191.

28 Ibid, p. 202.

violent mission, characters whom Dostoyevsky would have been proud to have created.”²⁹ However, it is germane to note, as Banerjee quotes then Naxal leader Sushital Ray Chowdhury, “Sentimental students were used to perform democratic and socialist revolutions simultaneously. Such activities as burning educational institutions, libraries, laboratories and destroying the educational system were prescribed. It is enough to say that no discussions were held in the Party’s Central Committee before these tasks were adopted.”³⁰

This author interviewed ex-Naxals of late 1960s, belonging to both their ideological realm as well as squad action teams, who now are leading cosy lives in Kolkata either as government officials or entrepreneurs. A more or less unanimous verdict oozed out:

We committed errors. We should have taken the masses into confidence. Alienating them was a grave mistake.

Furthermore, interviews with people affected by the Naxal violence of the early 1970s in then North Calcutta brought out stories which indicate ruthlessness and immaturity on the part of the erstwhile and so-called revolutionaries.

Accepting the wrong tactics and to some extent the philosophy are the causes of failure that were identified by other ex-Naxal leaders like Kanu Sanyal (who reportedly committed suicide in 2010). Charu Mazumdar’s annihilation line led them nowhere. The failure of the first avatar of the movement probably provided the Maoists the lessons to couple Guevara’s *foco* theory with Mao’s protracted people’s war as a model, more or less successfully applied in the Bastar-Abujhmad region, in the post-Charu period.

29 Sumanta Banerjee, op. cit., 2009.

30 Ibid.

Noted Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm opines that the political impact of Marxism is the most significant achievement of Marx from the point of view of history; at least insofar as the guerrilla movements are concerned. At the other end, the concept of a nation-state which emerged from the treaty of Westphalia holds itself intact till date and at least in the immediately foreseeable future doesn't seem to be affected by the onslaught of the guerrilla battle-zones. Marx cheers for the Paris Commune; Mao doesn't believe that a revolution could be peaceful and effected at leisure; Rajanna innovates with the ammunition and targets the administration. The counterinsurgent firmly holds the gun and deservedly so. In the process, he fires at Rajni, Rajanna and Sonu. He keeps a strict vigil on the cities. He gathers intelligence and plants moles. He aims and shoots.

Does he have any other alternative?

Does the counterinsurgent deserve a rebuke from the intellectual?

THE FORCE OF DIALECTICS

Opinions of contemporary scholars and writers have varied regarding the ongoing 'conflict' in the wide strip of land stretching from the Indo-Nepal border in the north to the Nallamala jungles in the south.

Aruna Roy, Mahasweta Devi, *et.al.*, firmly believe that the *adivasis* may genuinely 'protest' against maladministration.³¹ However, they have overtly not adhered to the view that the 'Maoist-type of insurgency' is the acceptable format of protest.

31 Aruna Roy, "Questions & Answers: Aruna Roy", *The Wall Street Journal*, November 3, 2009, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB125723504437924775>.

They basically stress on ‘separating’ the tribal-*adivasi* from the Maoist insurgent.³²

On the other hand, Arundhati Roy opines that the Maoists have in essence granted the tribal-*adivasi* a semblance of dignity.³³ At least, the importation of the gun; according to Roy, if not the ideology, has given the poverty-stricken *adivasi* a weapon to engineer ‘survival’; if not emancipation.³⁴

Bela Bhatia too, while analysing the Naxalite movement in Central Bihar, agrees that the Naxalites (pre-2004 era) empowered the labouring and oppressed classes of the region.³⁵ Nonetheless, she feels that the Naxalite leaders are *not interested* (emphasis added) in ‘development’ and hence the quality of life in the villages has not improved.

Gautam Navlakha even goes to the extent of conflating the tribal with the armed Maoist.³⁶

In this aspect, if one agrees with Arundhati Roy, then one is led to understand that Ranajit Guha’s element of ‘consciousness’³⁷ (if at all there is such) is provided by the Maoist leadership. Does Roy intend to say that the Maoist leadership (who are mostly urban-bred intellectuals) along with their dogmatic concepts associated with the ‘1930s China’

32 Mahasweta Devi, “Government should Talk to Maoists”, *Pro Kerala News*, April 7, 2010, <http://www.prokerala.com/news/articles/a126638.html>.

33 Arundhati Roy, “Mr Chidambaram’s War”, *Outlook India*, November 9, 2009, <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?262519>.

34 Ibid.

35 Bela Bhatia, “The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume 40, Issue 15, April 9, 2005, pp 1536-1549.

36 Gautam Navlakha, “Days and Nights in the heartland of Rebellion”, *Sanhati*, April 2, 2010, http://sanhati.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/navlakha_days_and_nights1.pdf.

37 Guha, Ranajit, “The Prose of Counter-insurgency”, in Ranajit Guha, ed., *Selected Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 45-84.

have essentially provided the necessary ‘consciousness’ to the *Adivasis*?

If that is agreed upon, then how does one explain the host of tribal uprisings in a non-Maoist political landscape during the Imperial Raj? Of course, if we completely disagree with Roy, then surely, we are led to accept the discourse that the urban intellectuals have acted as ‘usurpers’ in the tribal domain, which upholds the spirit of *primus inter pares*.

It cannot be denied that parts of the mainstream media, and a few think-tanks are, to an extent, alienated from the Maoist movement; morally and sometimes financially and physically abetted by the urban intelligentsia. ‘*Alienation*’ does not mean in terms of information, dossiers or papers, but in terms of understanding the ‘*root cause*’ of the armed insurrection. In that direction, Arundhati Roy hits the bull’s eye in her essay.³⁸ However, Roy flounders at the very beginning when she argues,³⁹

Perhaps the Kondh are supposed to be grateful that their Niyamgiri Hill, home to Niyam Raja, their ‘god of universal law’, has been sold to a company with a name like *Vedanta* (the branch of Hindu philosophy that teaches the Ultimate Nature of Knowledge).

‘*Has been sold*’ is a phrase which is completely ‘*out of phase*’ with reality. In fact, throughout her article she uses such phrases to bolster paranoia. Is she trying to mock at the age-old Hindu Philosophies pertaining to the Vedas or just castigating the then-Home Minister, P. Chidambaram? Not clear at all.

Roy vociferously proclaims:

Of course, the Maoists are by no means the only ones rebelling. There is a whole spectrum of struggles all

38 Arundhati Roy, op. cit, 2009.

39 Ibid.

over the country that people are engaged in — the landless, the Dalits, the homeless, workers, peasants, weavers.

Here, she is exaggerating the internal security threat to the country and undermining India's success as a democracy.

Moreover, is Roy eulogizing these movements? In the first place, she needs to appreciate the vastness of India, not only in the sense of territoriality but also in terms of ethnicity, religion and caste. By no means are struggle of the landless, Dalits, peasants and workers novel in India. They had been documented since the days of the Raj and continue to spark the headlines even today. It is the sheer efficacy of democracy that such incidents get reported more often today and hence, debated and, thus, sometimes acted upon.

That in independent India, we get the opportunity to discuss, debate and criticise, is in itself a pointer towards the existence of a free democracy. Every system has its bottlenecks and India is no exception. And this is the fact which Arundhati Roy probably fails to understand or, maybe, deliberately evades. To quote her:

“They're pitted against a juggernaut of injustices, including policies that allow a wholesale corporate takeover of people's land and resources.”⁴⁰

This is sheer hyperbole. There is no gainsaying the fact that at times the policy-makers and the executive have treated the tribal populace with disdain. There is also no denial that, post-1991, the Indian economy has proceeded towards the LPG (Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation) policy. Nevertheless, the scenario is surely not as bleak as Roy portrays it to be. Statements like “wholesale corporate takeover

40 Ibid.

of people's land and resources" and "the women raped as a matter of right by police and forest department personnel" are horrendous and mirror a Bollywood movie script rather than any description of fact.

The usurpation of farm and forest lands on which the livelihood of millions depend has, indeed, fomented movements, both of the non-violent and violent genres. Naxalbari in 1967 through Singur and Nandigram in West Bengal, can be cited as viable case studies. There has been corruption. But then people have spoken and acted against these 'State malfunctions.'

Further, Roy laments:

"Right now in central India, the Maoists' guerrilla army is made up almost entirely of desperately poor tribal people living in conditions of such chronic hunger that it verges on famine of the kind we only associate with sub-Saharan Africa."⁴¹

This is another extreme exaggeration. Roy should present proper data in order to corroborate her assertions. True, there is poverty, hunger and malnutrition in India, even after seven decades of independence. But that does not necessarily make India comparable to sub-Saharan Africa!

Roy continues undaunted:⁴²

"They are people who, even after 60 years of India's so-called independence, have not had access to education, healthcare or legal redress."⁴³

First, let us deliberate on the concept of the 'so-called independence' of India. This phrase has reverberated through decades, starting from the rantings by the Communist Party

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

of India [CPI] right after 1947. But the sheer ambivalence of the CPI regarding the definition of the term has manifested over time. To rebuke the government for its failures in order to usher in change and better governance is a welcome step, but not at the cost of jeopardising national sentiments. Roy should realise that casting aspersions in a blatantly indiscriminate manner on the Indian government in the international media generally boomerangs on oneself. Populism at national cost is unacceptable.

One fails to gauge why Roy doesn't join the ranks of the Maoists, when we come across the line, "Their journey back to a semblance of dignity is due in large part to the Maoist cadre who have lived and worked and fought by their side for decades."⁴⁴

Arundhati Roy fails to mention, *inter alia*, about the Right to Information Act (2005) or the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) which have made independent India proud and have provided benefits to millions of the poor. On most occasions, she looks at just one side of the coin. She presses on with excessive demonisation of the government and puts forward wrong false picture – even invented data – as in the argument: "To get the bauxite out of the flat-topped hills, to get iron ore out from under the forest floor, to get 85 per cent of India's people off their land and into the cities."⁴⁵ The census of 2011 indicates that 68 per cent of Indians live in the countryside, and not 85 per cent as Roy claims; moreover, even if a quantum of dispossession is conceded, it is limited to relatively limited strips of mineral rich land, and certainly does not comprehend the entire rural population.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

One thing is crystal clear though. Roy is definitely against any armed operation against the Left-Wing Extremists [LWE]. She advocates talks with the Maoists. But, she does not bring out the negative fallouts of an armed rebellion. What are the solutions offered by Roy? Apart from talks with the Maoists, she offers no further clue.

A few words of caution are probably necessary, despite this autopsy. The administration ought to continuously be more and more pro-people. Nonetheless, the intelligentsia needs to restrain its verbosity. It would not only be mutually beneficial, but also a catalyst for democracy and for the development of the tribals on the whole.

The fact of the matter is that a Mumbai-born Kobad Ghandy or a Ganapathy have simply displaced a modern-day Birsa Munda or a Sido. Instead of being the torch-bearers for the ‘subaltern *adivasi*’, the Maoist leadership has undertaken a ‘struggle for power’, enmeshed in their own intellectual abstractions of dismantling the purportedly comprador-bourgeoisie Indian democracy.

To a large extent, this idea seems to be echoed by past Naxalite leaders like Kanu Sanyal⁴⁶ and Azizul Haq.⁴⁷ Amusingly, they hold the opinion that the present Maoist struggle is nothing but a ‘power struggle’ and is using the tribal peoples as pawns. One thing, however, is noteworthy and deserves attention. If the urban-bred intellectuals are merely perceived as ‘foreigners’ in the *adivasi* heartland, then how could they extend their influence? It is a bare fact that the palpable absence of any pro-people structure of authority in

46 “Terror can’t bring change, Kanu Sanyal says”, May 25, 2007, http://naxalwatch.blogspot.com/s2007_05_20_archive.html.

47 Jhimli Mukherjee Pandey, “Naxal veterans slam Lalgargh misadventure”, *The Times of India*, June 19, 2009, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2009-06-19/kolkata/28208994_1_naxalites-lalgargh-tribals.

these areas of the Indian landmass have created a power vacuum in these regions. Compounding this is the over-exploitation by an unholy nexus of money-lenders, bureaucrats, politicians and corporate honchos.

The ‘intellectual foreigner’ intervenes in the world of the *adivasi* as the neo-Birsa. Hence, Birsa’s 1899 chants of ‘*Katong Baba Katong*’ (O father, kill kill) echo in Liberation slogans:⁴⁸

Khet par adhikar ke liye ladho, desh me janawad ke lie badho

(Fight for land rights, march towards democracy in the country)

or

the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) slogan of

Apni satta, apna kanoon (Our power, our law).

This author had a conversation with Abhijit Mazumdar, Secretary, Darjeeling District Committee, CPI (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation and the son of Charu Mazumdar. An intellectual by his own right, Abhijit Mazumdar argues that the role of *avant garde* intellectuals globally is hailed in Marxist history. He lauded the erstwhile Naxalbari movement which, according to him:

“...could organically address the grass-root ferment toward a revolutionary transformation vis-à-vis the status quoist, compromising positions adopted by the revisionist leadership of formal communist parties... The Naxalbari movement could also inspire a large number of urban intellectuals to cast off their bourgeois moorings to engage themselves as professional

48 Bela Bhatia, op. cit., 2005.

revolutionaries... I believe, that we may refer back to the idea of producing organic intellectuals following Gramsci and which may only be possible through the interface between the rural and urban base..."

On being asked what late Charu Mazumdar's perception was on intellectuals, his son was candid enough to refer to his father's ideas about the role of intellectuals which shaped up "through the debate he (Charu Mazumdar) had with Sushital Roy Choudhury over the issue of demolishing the statues of national icons like Rammohun Roy, Vidyasagar, Tagore *et al.*"⁴⁹ Charu Mazumdar inspired the revolutionary youth to grow into liberated intellectuals and to have the courage to reinvent India's historiography. The rise of 'Subaltern studies' too remained complimentary to his basic position, according to his son Abhijit.

In an inner-party note, Charu *babu* had asserted that in reality the true of Indian culture is a product of cultivators (agriculture > culture) and the artisans; it further hinges on the mode of production and the relations of production. His son Abhijit *babu* lauds public intellectuals like Amartya Sen, Irfan Habib, Romila Thapar, Arundhati Roy and Ramchandra Guha, for carrying on with "this essential dialectical take" of Charu Majumdar.

'URBAN NAXALS'

In August 2018, activists Sudha Bharadwaj, Gautam Navlakha, Varavara Rao, Vernon Gonsalves and Arun Ferreira were arrested by the Police in simultaneous country-wide operations.⁵⁰ The houses of few other activists and lawyers were

49 Conversation with Abhijit Majumdar.

50 Mahira Dasgupta, Freedom of Expression and the "Urban Naxals", *Indian Folk*, September 5, 2018, <https://www.indianfolk.com/freedom-expression-urban-naxals-edited/>.

also searched. They were accused for their involvement in the Bhima Koregaon violence and of having ties with the Maoists. Marxist historian Romila Thapar petitioned in the Supreme Court against the house arrest of five activists arguing:

“We were all born Indians, lived as Indians all our lives. These activists are fighting for good causes and terming them urban Naxal is a political move.”⁵¹

Erstwhile researcher of the Manohar Parrikar- Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, P.V. Ramana, explains the term ‘Urban Naxalism’:

The presence of, and activities carried out by, Naxalites, or the CPI (Maoist), in urban areas — towns and cities — are together termed as Urban Naxalism. The activities of the Maoists in urban areas include maintaining safe houses for leaders and cadres while in transit, place for recuperation and for holding meetings; providing logistics support to under-ground squads; mobilising and recruiting youth, students, academics and workers from industry and other organisations.⁵²

In this regard, advocate Vrinda Grover’s caustic remark is significant⁵³ as she asserts that the term ‘Urban Naxals’ has been coined and deliberately placed in the public discourse to demonise dissent. While at the other end, Union Home Minister, Amit Shah visited the Central Reserve Police Force

51 “Who Is an Urban Naxal, Romila Thapar Asks the Government”, *The Wire*, September 30, 2018, <https://thewire.in/rights/who-is-an-urban-naxal-romila-thapar-asks-the-government>.

52 P V Ramana, “Prateek Goyal asked: What is ‘Urban Naxalism’?”, *IDSA*, October 22, 2018, <https://idsa.in/askanexpert/What-is-Urban-Naxalism>.

53 Shriya Mohan, “‘Urban Naxals is a term to demonise dissent’”, *Business Line*, August 31, 2018, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/blink/know/urban-naxals-is-a-term-to-demonise-dissent/article24828924.ece#>.

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(CRPF) headquarters and made clear his no-nonsense approach against Urban Naxals and their facilitators.⁵⁴

MAOISTS' URBAN PERSPECTIVE

One of the major reasons for the 'demise' of the Naxalite movement of the late 1960s and early 70s was due to the wrong strategic evaluation of the then leaders of the insurrection. Their defective understanding of urban warfare and penchant of initiating a bloody confrontation with the administration in the cities led to their abysmal show. However, after the grand merger of the two major Naxal splinter groups in 2004, a series of bulky documents from the side of the Maoists have made their way into the public domain, which speaks volumes of their refined doctrinal position vis-à-vis strategy and tactics, especially for urban areas.

Out of those documents, two merit serious attention and analyses. The first is the "Strategy and Tactics of Indian Revolution" prepared in September, 2004 (henceforth STIR). The other one came out three years later; termed the "Urban Perspective: Our Work in Urban Areas" (henceforth UPUA). In the backdrop of the recent spate of arrests of 'Maoist activists' from urban areas and cities; it appears that a re-reading of the two documents to decipher the long-term strategy of the Indian Maoists has become a necessity.

In STIR, the Maoists stress on the large concentration of the petite bourgeoisie in urban areas of India. It is no wonder that the rebels are still basing their revolutionary tactics on the

54 Amit Shah asks CRPF to go after "urban Naxals and their facilitators", *The Hindu*, November 16, 2019, https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/amit-shah-asks-crpf-to-go-after-urban-naxals/article29990585.ece?homepage=true&utm_campaign=socialflow.

lower middle class of Indian society. Further, in STIR, they write with Marxian moorings:

We should not forget the dialectical relationship between the development of the urban movement and the development of the armed agrarian revolutionary war.⁵⁵

The Maoists admit, “In the absence of a strong revolutionary urban movement, the growth of the people’s war will face limitations and difficulties in its advancement.”⁵⁶ The pressing question in this context is, how will the urban work of the Maoists aid and abet their ongoing rural insurrection?

The answer, was clearly stated in STIR itself, and is far more conspicuous and resolute in UPUA of 2007. The document reads thus: “Working class leadership is the indispensable condition for the new Democratic Revolution (NDR) in India. Working class has to send its advanced detachments to rural areas.”⁵⁷

Thus, being the centers of concentration of the industrial proletariat (industrial workers), urban areas play an important part in the political strategy of the NDR. The task of the party in urban areas is to mobilise and organise the proletariat in performing its crucial leadership role.

According to the Indian Maoists:

...the specific characteristics of revolutionary war in India is to determine the military strategy as that of protracted people’s war – of first establishing revolutionary base areas in the countryside where the enemy (read the government) is militarily weak and

55 “STRATEGY & TACTICS OF THE INDIAN REVOLUTION”, *Central Committee (P) CPI (Maoist)*, September 21, 2009, <https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/documents/papers/strategy.htm>.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

then to gradually surround and capture the cities which are bastions of the enemy forces.⁵⁸

Thus, it is clear from the Maoists' document that the armed struggle and the movement in the rural areas will play the primary role; whereas the work in the cities will play a secondary role, complementary to the rural work.

Mao Tse-tung had, in fact, stated:

...the final objective of the revolution is the capture of the cities, the enemy's main bases, and this objective cannot be achieved without adequate work in the cities.⁵⁹

Che Guevara also opines: "The importance of the urban struggle is extraordinary."⁶⁰

The Maoists assess that presently, India has a larger proportion of the population in urban areas and a much larger working class than at the time of the Chinese revolution. This increases the relative importance of urban work in the particular conditions of the Indian revolution.

Nevertheless, in cities, the counter-insurgency state forces are very strong and hence, the Maoists are careful while establishing bases. Nevertheless, since a steady supply of urban cadre is necessary to fulfill the financial and logistical needs of the rural movement (protracted people's war), establishment of urban bases is imperative for the Maoists.

URBAN GUERRILLA WAR IS FAR-OFF

The main challenges that the Maoists face in the urban areas are:

58 Ibid.

59 Mao Tse-Tung, *Selected Work of Mao Tse-Tung Volume II*, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1965, p. 317.

60 Ernesto Che Guevara, "Guerrilla Warfare", Ocean Press, New York, 2006.

1. Democratic party-system is well entrenched in the cities and urban areas. So, it is extremely tedious to dent the political ethos in cities and towns.
2. Extremely strong administrative machinery exists in these regions and thus counterinsurgency will be effective.
3. The trade unions, which are a potentially fertile ground for fomenting dissatisfaction amongst the urban proletariat, already have established ties to mainstream political parties.
4. The presence of the Maoists in key industries like defence production, telecom and the like are poor.

Undoubtedly, an urban base can provide logistical support to the armed struggle, i.e. technical and medical help. It further helps to recruit and send cadre to rural areas. The Maoists also plan to infiltrate 'enemy organisations', such as the Police, para-military and military forces in these populous regions. They attempt to do so by conducting propaganda warfare; viz. upholding the problems of the ordinary constables and soldiers.

Favourable conditions exist in the urban areas of India for the building of broad mass fronts against the state structures, that is, at least, in the evaluation of the Indian Maoists as articulated through UPUA. It may be inferred that the Maoists are venturing into the Indian cities with obvious intentions of solidifying and extending their networks and in addition to that, they are in the process of colluding with other terrorist outfits based in the Northeast, Bangladesh and Nepal, which has grave security implications for the Indian state.

In STIR, the rebels stress the formation of secret party units in the *bastis* and slums of urban areas. Their main focus is that of mass political mobilisation by inculcating the leadership

qualities in the urban working class: the class, according to Karl Marx, which possesses the ‘revolutionary consciousness.’

The Maoists have realised their folly in the early part of their revolution, when they engineered a drastic showdown with the Police in urban areas. Hence, they warn their comrades, they cannot and should not, at the present stage of the revolution, organise for an armed offensive against the state in urban areas.

They accord special importance to small towns, small mining centres and areas in the vicinity of their base areas and guerrilla zones. They focus on the formation of both open and secret defence teams to resist state repression.

LWE PART STRUCTURE IN URBAN AREAS

The basic task of the Communist Party of India (Maoists) in the urban domain is to deal with the problem of coordination between open and secret work. Another chief component is to retain contacts between city organisations and the leadership in the rural areas – the heartland of the insurgency.

In urban areas, the Maoists seem to adhere to the principle of ‘political centralisation and organisational decentralisation’. That is, their Central Committee contemplates small squad-level groups which would be mature enough to take decisions independently, but along party lines. The squad leaders need not refer to the party high command for all minor issues and day-to-day work.

In UPUA, they acknowledge that their party’s work and organisation in the cities/towns is extremely weak and generally cannot achieve a dominant position till the final stages of the people’s war. This ‘objective reality’ forces the Maoists to carve out a ‘mellowed-down’ long-term policy for urban areas.

However, there have been arrests made (from 2007 onwards) by the Indian Police, of prominent Maoist leaders

from cities like New Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Thane, Nasik, Kolkata, Chandigarh and other urban areas. These are pointers to the fact that the ultras have spread their wings in cities, more so, after the publication of the UPUA.

So, what is the long-term strategy of the Maoists with regard to urban areas?

1. They would not adopt a short-term approach of direct confrontation with the state forces in order to achieve 'quick results.'
2. Thus, the threat perception to Indian cities in a form comparable to the cross-border terrorists is highly unlikely.
3. Urban terrorism accompanies a substantial amount of collateral damage. That acts as a dampener for the Maoists to go for a Lashkar-esque operation in the cities, because such sporadic and wanton acts of terror would create a disconnect between the left-wing ultras and the masses: a situation they totally detest.
4. The Maoists are concentrating on a long-term approach of solidifying their bases in the urban areas through their front organisations.
5. If at all they have a short-term goal; that has to be to use their urban bases in supplying money, spare parts, medicines, arms, recruits and ideologues to the rural guerrilla zones.
6. To further the military objective of the revolution, the Maoists surely would strengthen their cyber-warfare strategy.
7. Propaganda through student-worker organisations would be the mainstay of their strategy for the time being.

8. Their rural insurgency is in the stage of strategic defense. So, they would very likely continue the above discussed strategy in the urban areas till the rural insurgency reaches the stage of strategic offense.
9. Till then, the Maoists would try hard to penetrate the white-collar employees, intellectuals and youth so as to bolster their insurgency.

While evaluating the Iraqi insurgency (2003-06), Major Edward Brady in his thesis submitted at the Maxwell Air Force base, Alabama, in June 2008, rightly assesses that urban areas provide access to the insurgents to soft targets that could be attacked by small cells. Moreover, easy sanctuaries are provided to the insurgents to thrive in the cities. However, we may safely hypothesise that keeping in mind their historic failure in the 1970s, the Maoists would be reluctant to enact a Baghdad-type insurgency in Indian cities at this stage of their revolution.

Nevertheless, it always could happen that if the top leadership of the Maoists is annihilated by targeted killings/incarcerations, then a breakaway faction could unleash ghastly acts of terror emulating the cross-border militants. That will probably be a cost which we might have to incur in return of the decimation of the insurgency.

In the meantime, the Police needs to step up its human intelligence network and continue to nab the urban outfits of the Maoists, as they had been doing for some time. Panic buttons need not be pressed right now. But cognizance must be taken of the fact that the spread of the Maoists in the sprawling towns and cities of India could shape up as a major destabilising parameter in the future.

Establishment of any base in the cities however will not be feasible for the Maoists without help from the city-based intellectuals – students, academics or professionals.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

The intellectual support to the Maoists to a large extent provides the financial backbone to the ultras. Funds/grants are generated in the urban areas for the Maoists. In order to counter it, the following needs to be emphasised:

1. Police espionage on frontal organisations of the Maoists.
2. Arrests of suspected leadership of those organisations.
3. Police espionage in college/university campuses, especially those with a history of a rebellious past, like Presidency College, Jadavpur University or institutes with potential radical ambience like JNU, Jamia Milia Islamia.
4. Police espionage in social media interactions of suspected/potential rebels in urban areas – in *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Telegram*, *WhatsApp* and the like.

Overall, multi-agency coordination by the Security Forces is important to uncover the financial trails of the ultras. In fact, the government has well specified set of teams in this regard and ought to continue with this *modus operandi* in order to keep a strict vigil on urban Maoists and/or intellectuals in urban areas.⁶¹

61 “Government sets up teams to choke Naxal funding”, *The Economic Times*, July 11, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/govt-sets-up-teams-to-choke-naxal-funding/articleshow/64072449.cms?from=mdr>.

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The bottom-line is that, to disrupt the financial pipeline of the Maoists, multi-pronged action is required – from the security perspective, as well as from the purely financial angle.

The Security Forces must have a very strong public relations wing in the urban areas, who ought to cultivate anti-Maoist perceptions among the youth, through seminars in colleges, universities and academic institutions.

Vigorous pro-government ideological propaganda in television, radio, social media, internet, among other platforms, has to be carried out on a sustained basis.

Specific courses on ‘Internal Security’ at graduate and post-graduate levels need to be introduced.

The academic discourses in the Humanities and Arts faculties, especially in Sociology and Political Science disciplines, need to be monitored so that seditious literature/sentiment/thought is not encouraged in the classroom.

The Ministry of Home Affairs at the national level and state governments at the provincial level should introduce in colleges, universities, academic institutions, and think-tanks, academic disciplines related to Defence and Strategic Studies with specialisation in counterinsurgency, internal security and insurgency management, among others. Degrees from the bachelor level to PhD can be offered.

Local journalists need to be befriended by the state police so as to garner leverage in the war of information, propaganda and perceptions. The brand image of the security forces on the ground as well as in the national and international fora has to be promoted as a humane workforce meant for development of the country and the ugly face of the Maoists on the other hand, needs to be projected to all quarters.

A designated spokesperson for the Security Forces in each district ought to be appointed. It would be preferable if a civilian officer not directly related to operations is made the spokesperson, because that would help bridge the trust deficit between the security forces and the local population, media houses and others.

Incidentally, the Maoists are looking for urban intellectuals and intellectual youth to overcome their leadership crisis and to educate their ground-level cadres. They have failed to build the second-rung leadership due to the lack of educated youth in their ranks. Intellectuals from urban areas could come to their rescue. However, with the closest vigil on urban intellectuals by civil authorities, the tussle would undoubtedly be fascinating.

It would be pertinent to quote K.P.S. Gill commander of the counter-terrorism campaign in Punjab during the Khalistan movement:⁶²

To fail to exercise this legitimate coercive authority is, thus, not an act of non-violence or of abnegation; it is not a measure of our humanity or civilisation. It is, rather, an intellectual failure and an abdication of responsibility that randomises violence, alienating it from the institutional constraints of the State, and allowing it to pass into the hands of those who exercise it without the discrimination and the limitations of law that govern its employment by the State.

62 Manoj Joshi, “KPS Gill (1934-2017): The man who finished Khalistani terrorism in Punjab”, May 27, 2017, <https://scroll.in/article/838859/kps-gill-1934-2017-the-man-who-finished-khalistani-terrorism-in-punjab>.

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(See Rule 8)

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| 3. Printer's Name: | Kautilya Books |
| Whether citizen of India? | Yes, Indian |
| Address: | 309, Hari Sadan
20, Ansari Road, Daryaganj
New Delhi – 110 002 |
| 4. Publisher's Name: | Ajai Sahni |
| Whether citizen of India: | Yes, Indian |
| Address: | IIIrd Floor, Apsara Arcade,
B-1/8, Pusa Road,
New Delhi – 110 005 |
| 5. Editor's Name: | Ajai Sahni |
| Whether citizen of India? | Yes, Indian |
| Address: | IIIrd Floor, Apsara Arcade,
B-1/8, Pusa Road,
New Delhi – 110 005 |
| 6. Names and addresses of individuals who own the newspaper and partners or shareholders holding more than one per cent of total capital. | Ajai Sahni
IIIrd Floor, Apsara Arcade,
B-1/8, Pusa Road,
New Delhi – 110 005 |

I, Ajai Sahni, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

November, 2020

(Sd) Ajai Sahni
Signature of Publisher