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### ***Revolution and the Maoists***

In October 2015, in one of the most talked about legislative polls in the eastern Indian province of Bihar, an estimated 55 per cent of the electorate cast their votes in 32 constituencies across the six Maoist-affected districts. The entire elections passed off peacefully.

Interestingly, the polling also saw more women voters turning out than just their male counterparts. In fact, Bihar has been witness to the growth of the Maoist Movement in the Eastern sector – right from its inception in the late 1960s and early 1970s, through the gory years of the upper-caste financed days of private militias like *Ranvir Sena* and the *Sunlight Sena* and later in the post-2004 Maoist avatar of the erstwhile Naxalite Movement. Be it the land struggles of Mushahari in mid-1968 or the audacious Jehanabad jail break incident towards the end of 2005, [undivided] Bihar has seen and knows it all. There were districts and rural areas, until recently, in which the writ of the Maoists was the ‘rule of law’.

On 11 April 2015, a group of stealthily positioned 200 -odd Maoist guerrillas ambushed a team of Special Task Force (STF) security personnel in the forests of Pidmal at Sukma, Chattisgarh. Seven STF jawans were martyred. Moving northwards of Sukma, the Maoists torched 18 heavy-duty vehicles on 12 April 2015 at Kanker. Same day, a Border Security Force (BSF) soldier was killed by the ultras. The very next day, at their core location – Dantewada, the communist guerrillas wiped out five jawans of Chattisgarh Armed Forces (CAF). The Maoists did not even permit 300-odd Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and STF personnel to retrieve the bodies of the seven STF jawans from the forest. Finally, local journalists were asked to help retrieve the bodies.

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Is the blood-game still on? And, what about the revolution? As per the Second Havana Declaration (1962), “The duty of the revolutionary is to make the revolution. To push history, to catalyse, is the function of the revolutionary.” And “If one had to do Janajudhha (People’s War) for a health centre, one might as well do it”, as told to a journalist by an old man in Jangalmahal, West Bengal.

The battle-lines were drawn – since 1967 in its erstwhile avatar of Naxalism, and from 2004 in its new-found leotard of Maoism. The war, call it ‘the Bad War’ or the standard terminology of Civil War, took a breather since last week of May 2013, when Mahendra Karma, the architect of Salwa Judum and octogenarian leader of the Congress, V.C. Shukla, lost their lives in an ambush at Darbhaghati, Chattisgarh. Security forces turned rather vigilant and targetted approach against the leadership of the Maoists with sharp precision. Nevertheless, the guerrillas continued their fluid dynamics – attempting to spread in Western Ghats, Kerala and if reports are to be relied upon, in the Barak Valley of Assam. The ultras have lamented, among other issues, the elimination and incarceration of their top leadership, lack of recruits, weaning away of cadres through the financially lucrative rehabilitation policy of the government.

Some fundamental lessons have been drawn from the Cuban Revolution by the scholars, which inter alia, are:

- Popular forces can win against the army;
- Insurrection can create the conditions of the revolution; rather than to wait for the objective conditions to develop; and
- In under-developed America [read Latin America], the countryside is the basic area of armed fighting.

While theorising the Cuban Revolution, Foran says that the combination of five factors led to the formation of revolutionary conditions in Cuba.<sup>1</sup> These, according to Foran, were:

- Social and economic grievances among diverse sectors of the population due to the country’s insertion into the capitalist world economy;
- Repressive, exclusionary and personalist state;
- Elaboration of effective and powerful political cultures of resistance;
- A revolutionary crisis produced due to an economic downturn;
- Loosening of external controls.

However, debate continued whether the revolution in Cuba was pushed by the people from below or initiated by the vanguard *foco* through a lateral shove? Che Guevara was rather strict in believing as well as proclaiming that the vanguard *foco* was the primary cause for the revolution in Cuba. In fact, Guevara's increasing theoretical rigidity was visible in the prologue he wrote to Van Nguyen Giap's 'People's War, People's Army'. There, he stated that in Vietnam, the liberation struggle began with a mobile guerrilla *foco*. Similar in rhetoric was the French philosopher Regis Debray. He seems to have refuted the Leninist position of a vanguard party when he opined: "...the presence of a vanguard party is not an indispensable pre-condition for the launching of an armed struggle."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Debray was prudent enough to say that in order to improvise crisis situations, every country and every locality has its own special historical time, its own pace and its own speed of development.<sup>3</sup>

### Theorising Revolutions

Some 68 million human beings, according to the most careful estimates, perished in the 150 years between 1820 to 1970, due to human violence – murder, riot, war, and revolutions.<sup>4</sup> One prominent sociologist has argued that our understanding of revolutions needs to be positively liberated from the 'Panglossian metanarratives' – like the grand theories of social change, viz. Marxist, Weberian and Durkheimian.<sup>5</sup> The fact of the matter is theoretical over-generalisations to describe revolutions have remained a contentious issue. Moreover, in the post-modern era of theoretical analysis, there is an increasing incredulosity of meta-narratives.

Further, according to Goldstone, revolutions are the result of conjunction of three processes: State-fiscal crisis; Elite alienation; and Mass mobilisation. And the specific forces that generate these processes may be quite different from one society to the rest. Gurr and Goldstone emphasise that revolutionaries derive popular support not from some pristinely "social" or "economic" condition(s), but from experiences. The authors wrote that regimes that have been toppled by revolutionary forces "followed policies that intensified grievances and formed popular anger against the state." Goldstone's theory suggests that a period of tremor and the emergence of coercive regimes are likely outcomes of a revolution. Now, this expectation of Goldstone is quite contrary to what is expected of a revolution – prolonged period of peace along with stable, comparatively democratic regimes. More so, Jeff Goodwin writes that if states are less repressive and disruptive, popular grievances are more likely to remain disarticulated as well as diffusely targeted – even where great inequality and exploitation reign. Collective protest, including political

violence, may be chronic in such contexts, but revolution is unlikely (read the success of the revolution and not just mere initiation).

“Insurgents attempt to restore liberties and privileges which are lost as the result of the government’s temporary lapse into despotism”, opines Hannah Arendt (1965). Interestingly in 1964, Rosenau defined ‘Structural Wars’ as goal of insurgents to introduce social and economic changes – a definition primarily associated with Communist revolutions. A plethora of scholarship is available on revolutions. For instance, Samuel Huntington (1962) has suggested a classification of revolutions into four categories:

- Internal Wars / Mass Revolutions / Structural Wars;
- Revolutionary Coup (as by Kemal Ataturk in Turkey post World War I);
- Reform Coup; and
- Palace Revolutions.

In this connection, it is pertinent to mention the conceptual construct of Revolutionary Gap. The gap between *Expectations* and *Aspirations* is termed the Revolutionary Gap and the wider it is the longer and the more violent the revolution may be. However, considerable credit goes to Jack A Goldstone in building a fourth generation Theory of Revolutions. While Barrington Moore Jr (1966), Jeffery Paige (1975), S.N. Eisantadt (1978), and Theda Skocpol (1994), among others, expounded upon the old Marxist class-conflict approach to construct the third generation Theory of Revolutions, Goldstone offers a comparatively more contemporary definition of Revolution:

“...a transformation of political institutions and for the justification for political authority, accompanied by formal or informal mass mobilisation and non-institutionalised actions that undermine existing authorities.”<sup>6</sup>

To add, Foran (1997) has rightly argued that revolution is impossible without drawing on a “culture of rebellion” from widely remembered prior conflicts; viz. the Sandinistas in Nicaragua (in 1970s) drew their inspiration from the peasant leader named Sandino who fought against American domination at the beginning of the century, and the Zapatistas in Mexico derived their name from peasant leader Zapata of the Mexican revolution in 1910.<sup>7</sup> And why to ignore the Maoist upsurge in the Adivasi heartland of India which connects itself with the innumerable micro and macro tribal insurrections during the colonial regime – be it Munda-Ulgulan, Sido/Kanho Santhal, the Bhils or so forth.

Furthermore, Tanter and Midlarsky hypothesise as under:<sup>8</sup>

- A revolution is operationally defined by domestic violence and duration;
- The higher the rate of increase of Gross National product per population, preceding the revolution and the sharper the reversal immediately prior to the revolution;
- The greater the duration and violence of the revolution; and
- The lower the level of educational attainment prior to the revolution, the greater the duration and violence of the revolution.

The above hypotheses were tested across 17 cases of successful revolutions from 1955 to 1960. The conclusions that emerged were that the hypotheses turned out to be validated in the case of Asian revolutions, whereas fell flat while analysing the Latin American types. Interestingly however, even after four generations of theorisations of Revolutions, the emotive definition posited by Lenin in the ‘Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution’ still holds much of its ground: “Revolutions are the festivals of the oppressed and the exploited. At no other time are the masses of the people in a position to come forward so actively as creators of a new social order.”

An interesting paper ‘Why Indian Men Rebel?’<sup>9</sup> authored by K.C. Vadlamannati published in *Journal of Peace Research* (2011) analysed the causes for armed rebellion in India’s North-East. Relative deprivation, persistent economic and political discrimination are often identified as the major causes for armed insurrection in that region. Quantitative analysis was carried out on data from 1970 to 2007. The paper zoomed in on certain hypotheses. In the first, it held out that *ceteris paribus*, the relative deprivation of a state/region compared to the rest of the country (India) is associated with the higher risk of armed conflict in North-East India. Further, in the third hypothesis, the author states that *ceteris paribus*, constant economic and political discrimination against ethnic groups increases the risk of armed conflicts by facilitating group cohesion and collective mobilisation.

The analysis for North-East becomes relevant for the Maoist heartland in Central and Eastern India due to presence of tribals/ adivasis in those regions.

### **Maoist Insurgency in Bihar-Jharkhand: Root Causes**

Now, what was the *raison d’etre* for the outburst by the dalits of Bihar in the late 1960s? Bela Bhatia focuses on a few of them.<sup>10</sup> First and foremost was lack of just wages to the village labourers – a perennial problem. Next contentious issue was the ownership of the village pond. It was unjustifiably

usurped by the landlord(s) and since it was a source of fish, thus protein, the issue added to the hues of the dalit-villagers. Other significant factors were the lack of proper housing and presence of criminal gangs and freebooters, at times in collusion with the landlord(s). Last but the most important was the restoration of *izzat* (dignity or honour) of the dalit men and women amongst the village folk through the gun supplied by the Maoists.

Has there been any abatement in the violence in the Bihar-Jharkhand region with the erection of parliamentary structures over the last four decades? Has there been any emancipation of the common-folks after seeing a new tribal-based province and two backward caste chief ministers on the trot? Have the basic problems which helped earn a Jagdish Mahato and Rameshwar Ahir of Bhojpur (killed respectively in 1972 and 1975) the epithets of Marx and Engels, been alleviated?

Bela Bhatia asserts that at the village level in Bihar, people had joined the Naxalite Movement because of their instinctive approach against injustice. They hardly, according to Bhatia's analysis, could be branded as 'informed revolutionaries'. Those ideologically motivated folks, quite expectedly, were the leaders at the block level and upwards. For the hoi-polloi of Bihar's grass-roots, an exposition to complex Marxist-Leninist-Maoist literature provided little amelioration. What, however, they demanded of the Naxalites were the basic rights. Once the Movement could satiate the masses with a part of their demand, and with the formation of Jharkhand, Naxalite leaders had to seek other avenues to save their existence and ideology.

After all, a protracted guerrilla warfare to usher in a New Democratic Revolution (NDR) so as to supplant the incumbent bourgeoisie governmental structure needs years and loads of patience. Hence, time and again, the Maoist leaders need to pump in 'political consciousness' in the cadres through wanton acts of terror: be it against the official constabulary or upper caste/class elements or lumpen elements within the Movement or even petty 'informers'.

In West Bengal, as this author gathered from journalist Joydeep Dasgupta, that after Kishenji's death in November 2011, the Maoists almost disappeared. However, the CRPF were not withdrawn. Locals call the Maoists as "Bon Party" (*Bon* means Jungle in the Bengali language). Dasgupta further informed that development works are on in the Janglamahal region (comprising the districts of Purulia, Bankura and West Midnapore) and the locals have started relying on the local administration. Well, this author spoke with the local administration – and the information which was gleaned, was not surprising at all. The Maoists are trying to regroup in the Jangalmahal hills and they are infrequently seen in small reconnaissance squads.

## **Rationalising Guerrilla Warfare**

Naturally it was only Mao who could have said: “Guerrilla hostilities is the University of War.” Mao had given a detailed Dos and Don’ts for guerrillas. Guerrillas are lightly armed attack groups. They require simple equipments. The standard of arms and ammunition is based upon the nature of duties assigned. Since war equipments cannot be furnished immediately, they need to be acquired gradually. Telephone and radio equipments need to be obtained. At guerrilla bases, there must be high standard of medical equipment. Propaganda materials are very important too. Only volunteers are acceptable for service. It is a mistake to impress people into service. A soldier who habitually breaks regulations must be dismissed from the army. Vagabonds and vicious people must not be accepted for service. In the same vein, the Indian Maoists follow a similar and theoretically rather rigid formulation of initiating a novice into the guerrilla squad.<sup>11</sup> Habit of taking opium / intoxicating drinks must be forbidden. And last but not the least, hierarchical organisation is very much necessary for revolutionary success.

Guerrilla strategy must be based primarily on alertness, mobility and attack. It must be adjusted to the enemy situation, the terrain, the existing strength, the weather and the mindset of the local population. When guerrillas engage a relatively stronger army, they withdraw when it advances, harass it when it stops, strike it when it is weary, and pursue it when it withdraws: a very similar picture emerges in the Maoist heartlands of India when the CRPF are ambushed often during their Area Domination Exercises.

In a war of revolutionary character, guerrilla operations are a necessary part. These operations are, however, one aspect of the revolutionary struggle. Without a political goal, guerrilla warfare fails. Moreover, as Gusev in ‘Lessons of Civil War’ opines: “Orthodox armies are the fundamental and principal power; guerrilla units are secondary to them and assist in the accomplishment of the mission assigned to the regular forces.”

It is a well established empirical fact that guerrilla operations correlated with those of regular/conventional forces will provide victory. Vietnam is a potent case in point. The insurrection in South Vietnam culminated in success only when the conventional forces pumped in from the North Vietnamese side. Guevara confessed that the guerrilla phase of war on its own cannot lead to victory. Basing upon such empirical and theoretical backdrop, it could be safely surmised that the series of ambushes unleashed time and again by the Maoists against India’s security forces would necessarily produce ripples in the law and order circuit and could also send shock waves in the media circles, marking the



television debates with inflammatory speculations; but in no way would topple India's democracy – either in circa 2050 CE or soon thereafter.

### Things to be Worried About

Partha Sarathi Roy writing at Sanhati, narrates how the Maoists rose to prominence in Jangalmahal.<sup>12</sup> Systemic corruption by political parties cutting across all spectrum at the Panchayat level, was to blame, tells Roy. The Maoists appeared in the scene towards the end of 1990s and as they have been at other places like Chattisgarh, were successful in enhancing the price of the forest produce; i.e. the *tendu* leaves. In fact, leaders like Suchitra Mahato started evolving since then. Nilanjan Dutta reported in *Times of India* (8 November 2002) that basic requirements like health centre, water for irrigation and electricity were the demands by the people of Belpahari. Majority of the local populace are landless labourers and go to other districts to eke out a living. Rest cut *babui* grass and weave ropes and baskets. Further corroboration to this effect comes from Chandan Sinha through his memoirs.<sup>13</sup> An Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer, he was the District Magistrate of West Midnapore in 2004. He refers to a meeting with then Chief Secretary of West Bengal where the latter expressed the concerns of the provincial government about left wing extremism in the forested areas of West Midnapore. In fact, as narrated by Sinha, the Chief Secretary had visited the area himself and opined that the fundamental causes behind the rise of extremism in the area was lack of development and basic amenities. To these, one can safely add police atrocities, financial exploitation of the tribals and peasants through middlemen and moneylenders and muscle-flexing by the cadres of mainstream political parties as potent reasons for fuelling the insurrection.

Police interestingly had been unnecessarily brutal on the villagers in the process of nabbing the ultras. It was a clear case of wrong counterinsurgency policy – whereby instead of winning the 'hearts and minds' of the local population, they were further alienated. One villager, Kartik Raidas of Chakdoba village was frozen enough: "No, I was not tortured, they just gave me electric shocks."

Behula Kalindi, another villager, brought out the humane side of the police, as Nilanjan Dutta deftly reported. "I will never forget the Chhotbabu (junior officer). After beating me, he gave me his own tiffin – packet of Muri and Telebhaja [puffed rice and oil-fried snacks rolled in batter; a delicacy in this region of India] – to eat."

In the aftermath of the elimination of Kishenji in November 2011, there was a definite dip in the Maoist activities in West Bengal. So was it that the

Movement was awfully leader-centric and the political consciousness of the masses of Jangalmahal was just at the elementary level and hence the Movement petered out? Political activist, intellectual and former professor of Physics at Presidency College and an erstwhile Naxal himself, Dr Dipanjan Rai Chaudhuri, wrote a scathing review of the situation: “The military activity of the squads remained disjoint to the activity of the masses.”<sup>14</sup>

He continued in his patent fashion of narrating rather abstruse topics with elan while sipping black tea (the author witnessed several such sessions in Dr Rai Chaudhuri’s *Cosmology* as well as *Electrodynamics* classes at the Masters level in Presidency College), as he analysed: “The major factor leading to the decline of the movement was the weakness/absence of leadership among the struggling people of the Bengal-Jharkhand-Odisha border. Moreover, there was a conspicuous absence of the working class in the fray and no effective worker-peasant alliance.”

Rai Chaudhuri believes that without vibrant political leadership, the struggles of peasants will fizzle out. Rai Chaudhuri might be stressing more on ‘internal’ leadership than ‘external’ foco actors to foment a rebellion, but the fact of the matter remains that:

- Internal leaders from amongst the tribal/dalit/peasant groups would actually provide credible strength to the framework of rebellion in the hinterlands and sustain the larger ‘revolution’
- However, mere guerrilla tactics would not be a potent weapon to dislodge the firmly entrenched centralised bureaucracy.
- The Maoists do not seem to be in a position to win the favour of the Indian Armed Forces, nor are they formidable enough to erect their own conventional army. The strategic defence and stalemate stages of guerrilla warfare have extended too long in the sub-continent so as to create any substantial fears in the minds of the establishment.
- The Maoists, with their dogma of Socialist-Communist principles, hardly possess the wherewithal to penetrate into India’s burgeoning cities. They may still wean away certain disgruntled elements as well as romantic intellectuals, yet the level of participation of the urban folks is likely to remain dismal.
- Certain core territorial pockets may remain as guerrilla hideouts and bases and would continue to snatch away the succour of the administration, yet apart from intermittent and sporadic jitters, the Maoist Movement is unlikely to pose any challenge to the six decades old Parliamentary democracy.

- The bugle of Revolution was sounded in 1967 and thereafter many a times in several different locations within the Indian sub-continent, but the efficacy of the ‘strategy and tactics of the revolution’ were always under the scanner. The success of the revolution would require dictatorial-esque repression from the state and utterly lackadaisical attitude of the authorities in implementing development and security architecture in the geographical interior – a folly which the state hardly can afford and is a rather unthinkable scenario. There undoubtedly exists a ‘culture of rebellions’ in India’s interior, but the Revolutionary Gap is not wide enough to provide a material success to the revolutionaries in the foreseeable future.

### Notes

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