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## ADIVASIS AND THE NAXAL MOVEMENT

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Suparna Kundu, Symbiosis Law School, Noida

### ABSTRACT

The Adivasis have been subjected to social atrocities, political marginalization since ages and have often not been considered a part of the mainstream India. India has witnessed a rapid economic development post-independence but these aboriginals have remained in poverty ever since. Democracy is considered to be the voice of the people and on the other hand Constitution is perceived as the law of the land which creates a sense of inclusiveness in the minds of the people. However, even after seven decades of independence, the Adivasis have remained unheard and exploited. The Naxalites came to the rescue of these tribal communities, who often resorted to armed conflicts in order to express the needs of these communities. These movements came into being as an outcome of the then prevailing socio-economic conditions, such as lack of education, unemployment etc. of these rural tribals. The Governments have also resorted to “military force” in order to curb these activities instead of attempting to understand the cause of such conflicts. Naxalism have always been a threat to the national security and these movements reflects the country’s internal weaknesses, which in turn makes India vulnerable internationally. Even today, the Governments have been unsuccessful in curbing and washing away these activities from India. Although there are a number of provisions which aims to safeguard the interests of these communities, these have benefited the “haves” and have barely reached to the people in need. This paper intends to carve out the primary and significant reasons behind these naxal movements and provide solutions for the overall development of the nation.

**Keywords:** Atrocities; Exploited; Unemployment, Naxalism

## INTRODUCTION

The term “Adivasi” derives from the Hindi word “adi” which means from the very beginning and “vasi” means the inhabitant or resident.<sup>1</sup> This was coined in the 1930s, in order to establish a sense of identity among the various indigenous people of the country. The Adivasis are officially termed as “Scheduled Tribes”, however this is only a legal and a constitutional term, which might often differ from one place to another.<sup>2</sup>

The socio-economic issues and deprivation of basic rights since independence has led to the creation of certain revolts from time and again and one such is the Naxal Movement which was broadly an armed peasant revolt in 1967.<sup>3</sup>

The word “Naxalism” originates from the small village of Naxalbari in West Bengal, wherein the under the leadership of Charu Majumdar the movements started whose sole purpose was to redistribute lands to the landless farmers, from whom the Zamindars had snatched the same.<sup>4</sup> These activities were done through armed means and it started from the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, which outspread to Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar and Maharashtra.

The term “Naxalism” is often interchanged with the word “Maoism” because the ideology behind the movement started by Charu Majumdar was inspired by Mao Zedong. The proponents of these Naxal Movements were mostly comprised of poor, deprived and the tribals of India, who were deprived and often denied the basic necessities of life.<sup>5</sup>

In 1967, the year when the Naxal movements began in India, the Government considered this uprising as a law and order problem instead of analyzing the reasons behind such activities. The Indian Government at that time thought that these movements can be put to an end within a short span of time. Former UPA Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh declared these movements as “the most serious threat to Indian democracy” and Union Home Minister

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<sup>1</sup> *Adivasi: A definition coined in the 1930s and related information*, WORLD DIRECTORY OF MINORITIES AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, <https://indiantribalheritage.org/?p=8415>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Pletcher, *Naxalite Indian Communist Groups*, BRITANNICA, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Naxalite>

<sup>4</sup> Sarita Sharma & Vipin Kumar Singhal, *Naxalism: A Challenge In Internal Security of India*, LXXII THE INDIAN JOURNAL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE 765, 765-772 (2011).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

Rajnath Singh once said “There is no question of any talks now... But the forces will give a befitting reply if the Naxals launch attacks”.<sup>6</sup>

The United Front Government in the Indian state of West Bengal was found to be in a dilemma as to its nature and scope of response. As a result of this, the Government launched massive police operations and within a span of four months most of the naxalite leaders were under police custody.<sup>7</sup>

The Governments from time and again have enacted laws to combat the problems of Naxals and control and prevent their uprisings in the country. However, no particular National Law has been enacted till date in this regard. Several anti-terror laws are often used to curb this Naxal violence and too often it is used to tag the sympathizers as “Naxalites”.

The prevailing social and economic issues led to the uprising of Naxal movements in India. In fact, while conducting an enquiry into this, the West Bengal State Secretariat of the CPI(M) stated, “Behind the peasant unrest in Naxalbari lies a deep social malady-malafide transfers, evictions and other anti-people actions of tea gardeners and jotedars.”<sup>8</sup>

This article intends to discuss the reasons behind the rise of Naxal Movements in India, the plights of the Adivasis and their position in the Indian democracy.

## **INDIAN CONSTITUTION: THE PROTECTION AND RIGHTS OF ADIVASIS**

The “Adivasis”, as already mentioned are officially termed as “Scheduled Tribes” under the Indian Constitution. The Constitution defines “Scheduled Tribes” as “such tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purposes of this Constitution”. Art. 342<sup>9</sup> mentions about the powers and the process through which the President or the Parliament may by law include or exclude any tribe or its community or part or group from the list of Scheduled Tribes.

The Indian Constitution provides a number of safeguards to the Scheduled Tribes (hereinafter referred to as “STs”). It prohibits discrimination, grants equal opportunities, freedom to raise their voices etc. On the other hand, under the State is directed to protect and promote the

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<sup>6</sup> Ajay K. Mehra, *The Democracy Question In The Maoist Movement In India*, 41 INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE QUARTERLY 78, 78-89 (2014).

<sup>7</sup> Raman Dixit, *Naxalite Movement in India: The State's Response*, 4 JOURNAL OF DEFENCE STUDIES, MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES, (April 2010).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> INDIA CONST.

educational interests of the weaker sections, particularly the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and STs. Under the same Article, the State is to protect the SCs and STs from “social injustice and all forms of exploitation.”<sup>10</sup>

Certain political safeguards are also granted to these people, and under the Constitution seats have been reserved in the House of the People<sup>11</sup>, Legislative Assemblies of the States<sup>12</sup>, Gram Panchayats<sup>13</sup> and Municipalities.<sup>14</sup> These reservations intend to address their needs and prevent exploitation. Further, an agency has also been established for monitoring the safeguards called the “National Commission for Scheduled Tribes”<sup>15</sup> which has a duty to investigate, monitor, advise and participate in the implementation on the safeguards for the STs and to inquire into specific complaints of atrocities against the STs.<sup>16</sup>

Now, a pertinent question which arises, are these provisions really enough for all the STs? Are these safeguards really implemented in the rural India? Are these rights practically available to all the weaker sections of the society? Or at least available to the one for whom these have been enacted?

The answers to these questions are to be examined and that might be endless. But what is noteworthy here are the facts that even after all the rights and safeguards provided in various legislations, the Adivasis have still been subjected to exploitation in a number of ways from time to time. Here, we I will be discussing a few instances which clearly elaborates the plight of these sections of the society.

### **INDEPENDENCE: IT’S IMPACT ON THE LIVES OF THE TRIBALS**

On December 13, 1946, Jawaharlal Nehru moved the Objectives Resolution in the Constituent Assembly of India, which proclaimed that the nation would be an “Independent Sovereign Republic” and the Constitution would guarantee “justice, social, economic and political;

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<sup>10</sup> INDIA CONST. art. 46.

<sup>11</sup> INDIA CONST. art. 330.

<sup>12</sup> INDIA CONST. art. 332.

<sup>13</sup> INDIA CONST. art. 243D.

<sup>14</sup> INDIA CONST. art. 243T.

<sup>15</sup> INDIA CONST. art. 338A.

<sup>16</sup> INDIA CONST. Art. 338A, (5), Cl. (b).

equality of status; opportunity, and before the law; freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship, vocation, association and action, subject to law and morality.”<sup>17</sup>

Leaders like Jaipal Singh spoke on behalf of the Adivasi communities back then, who desired an equal treatment, development and acceptance of these communities in the mainstream. From then almost seventy-five years have passed and what have been the fate of these backward communities? Have they been granted the same rights and privileges as the other? Are the provisions under the Constitution really helpful?

This article argues that in many ways these communities have been exploited and deprived of the basic rights. The tribals are the unacknowledged victims of seven decades of Indian democracy.<sup>18</sup>

The Adivasis of the Indian peninsula are distinct in their cultures and practices and they are different in various parts of the country. Each of these communities has their own traditions, cultures and practices. However, if we look from the perspective of the Indian democracy, these communities are not united by their distinctiveness; rather what unites them is their social and economic disadvantage.<sup>19</sup> The 2011 census report indicates that the literacy rates of the ST population in India are much lower than the rest of the India taken as a whole. The same report also indicates towards the fact that there is a shortfall of nursing and doctors in these Tribal Areas.

These data indicates that the Adivasis or the ST communities have been exploited and denied basic education and health facilities by the Governments from decades. Our Government has dishonored its obligations and failed to fulfill the Constitutional guarantee to provide equal opportunities for social and economic development.<sup>20</sup> The tribals are known for their closeness to nature, where they mainly survived. But the Governmental policies have snatched their lives and livelihoods from time immemorial in the name of development. These communities have been displaced to new places which rendered them homeless. During the era of Zamindari

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<sup>17</sup> Ramachandra Guha, Adivasis, *Naxalities and Indian Democracy*, 42 ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL WEEKLY (August 11, 2007), <https://www.epw.in/journal/2007/32/special-articles/adivasis-naxalites-and-indian-democracy.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Ramachandra Guha, Adivasis, *Naxalities and Indian Democracy*, 42 ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL WEEKLY (August 11, 2007), <https://www.epw.in/journal/2007/32/special-articles/adivasis-naxalites-and-indian-democracy.html>.

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

systems, these lands were often given to the Zamindars who then cultivated these lands on behalf of the government which provided them the requisite revenue.

## RISE OF NAXAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA: THE REASON BEHIND IT

As a result of these exploitations from decades, the Naxal movements began in India. The reasons for the rise of Naxal movements in India are manifold. One of the reasons could be the lack of human development and resentment among the people. These communities often felt excluded and alienated because of the policies implemented by the Governments which restricted and deprived them of basic education, livelihood, healthcare, power.<sup>21</sup> They have always been subjected to cultural humiliation, political marginalization and were often not accepted into the mainstream.<sup>22</sup> Their access to natural resources has always been restricted through Governmental policies and decisions. They have been subjected to social atrocities, displacement and been provided inadequate rehabilitation programs.<sup>23</sup> A data indicates towards the fact that in the period between the years 1947-2000, 80% of tribal people have been displaced.<sup>24</sup> The Naxal affected areas are mostly found to be rich in natural resources and many consider the primary reason behind this conflict is natural resources. However, the main reason behind this kind of movement is the slow implementation of land reforms.

The Naxal movements have gained pace in the poverty-stricken areas mostly where the people had little or no resources to meet their basic requirements. Due to lack of availability of education and limited exposure to the ideas of the younger generation, the movements have always gained pace, which made them dangerous. The youth of these communities wanted equal opportunities and means like that of the urban areas, which was almost impossible given the lack of infrastructural developments from decades. The Governments over the periods have failed to improve the conditions of these communities and address their difficulties, leaving them more vulnerable and aspiring for urban facilities.

In the recent years, Governments have brought in schemes to improve the conditions of these communities; however these have remained far-fetched dreams. These schemes have always proved to be beneficial for the 'naves' and not those who are in 'need'. The failure of the

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<sup>21</sup> Planning Commission; 2008: *Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas*; 7/24/2010; [http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/publications/rep\\_dce.pdf](http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/publications/rep_dce.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> Shivani Nair, *Laws for Naxalism In India And Its Reforms*, IPLEADERS (July 11, 2020), <https://blog.ipleaders.in/laws-for-naxalism-in-india-and-its-reforms/>.

<sup>23</sup> Dr. Abid Ali & Dr. Sant Lal, *Naxalite Movement In India: Causes and Solutions*, 2 International Journal of Informative & Futuristic Research, 2973, 2971-2979 (2015).

<sup>24</sup> *Id.*

Government in performing its duties is the major reason behind these activities. Even when these rose up in the 1960s, instead of tackling it efficiently, attempting and providing means to improve their economic and social conditions, the Governments used “force” as a means to stop these activities which ultimately rendered these communities enraged than ever before.

Unemployment amongst the youth of these communities is also one of the reasons behind such movements. The Naxal groups operate in the interior villages and they collect funds from individuals, groups and even government officials as commissions for letting them function in those areas.<sup>25</sup> These groups then use these funds to purchase arms and ammunitions, and they also provide a salary to their members, which have made them popular in the rural areas.

Further, post-independence India has witnessed a rapid economic development and in order to maintain this growth, more and more land is required for business expansion and industrial developments, which have led to the displacement of the aboriginals. This conflict between land acquisition for economic development of the country and land rights have led to the increase in Naxalite activities. Arundhati Roy, once said that the tribal forestlands should be called a “*MoUist Corridor*” instead of the “*Maoist Corridor*” as the people of these lands have been wrestling with “*Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) of the mining companies.*” Prashant Bhushan, a civil rights lawyer noted that “businesses are making Adivasis go through ‘sham formal consultation’ processes where interests of the Adivasis are not sincerely considered.”

The social and political alienation of these communities clearly establishes the reason why these poverty-stricken rural and indigenous people perceive the guerillas as their “saviors”. The tribals find these Naxalite groups attractive because they feel that apart from these groups they do not have any other power to express their atrocities and grievances.

## LEGISLATIONS ENACTED BY THE GOVERNMENT TO CURB NAXALISM

There are a few legislations/statutes which have been enacted in order to curb the naxalite activities. **National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy, 2007** was enacted in order to limit the displacement of tribals as much as possible. It was aimed to protect the rights of the tribals and grant them “land in exchange for land, job prospective to at least one member of the

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<sup>25</sup> Dr. Abid Ali & Dr. Sant Lal, *Naxalite Movement In India: Causes and Solutions*, 2 International Journal of Informative & Futuristic Research, 2974, 2971-2979 (2015).

family, housing benefits etc.”<sup>26</sup> Further, **Forest Rights Acts, 2006** aimed to protect the rights of the “Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers”. **Chattisgarh Special Public Securities Act, 2006** intended to control and prevent the Naxal activities which also defined “Unlawful Activity”, “Unlawful Organization” and permitted the establishment of an “Advisory Board” wherever required.<sup>27</sup>

### EFFECTIVENESS OF THESE LEGISLATIONS: QUESTIONABLE?

Even though the Government believes that these laws have been effectual in curbing the Naxal activities, the ground reality says quite the opposite. These laws have led to the creation of more hardships and have increased the problems of the tribals in the rural areas. These laws have negated the actual safeguards which were available to these people under the Constitution of India. The principle of ‘land for land’ has proved to be a nightmare for the Government and thereby have blocked the paths for industrial growth and economic development of the country. Issues of Naxalism have also been covered under the UAPA<sup>28</sup>, which was highly uncalled for.

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

It can be concluded from the discussion above that from time immemorial the Adivasis have often been subjected to social atrocities, cultural humiliation and political marginalization.<sup>29</sup> The governments have also failed to bring them to the mainstream and provide them with basic rights and instead of addressing their needs; the Governments have increased their hardships. On the other hand, the Naxalites have over time come to their rescue. However, they have often resorted to arms conflict instead of peaceful talks.

The need of the hour is to bring in socio-economic development which can be achieved by allocating a larger portion of the budget in improving the conditions of these communities. The Government should take steps for the development of these communities and ensure that these reach out to the people who are actually in need.<sup>30</sup>

Further, sincere dialogues are required between the leaders of these communities and the Government. Their needs must be addressed which will create a sense of inclusiveness in their

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<sup>26</sup> S. Dharmadhikary, *Resettlement policy: promising start, and a letdown*, <http://www.indiatogether.org/2007/nov/hrt-randpol.htm>.

<sup>27</sup> Chattisgarh Special Public Securities Act, 2006, § 2, No. 14, Acts of Chattisgarh State Legislature, 2006 (India).

<sup>28</sup> The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, No. 37, Acts of Parliament, 1967.

<sup>29</sup> Dr. Abid Ali & Dr. Sant Lal, *Naxalite Movement In India: Causes and Solutions*, 2 International Journal of Informative & Futuristic Research, 2973, 2971-2979 (2015).

<sup>30</sup> *Id.* at 2974.



minds and ultimately armed conflicts will reduce in these Naxal dominated areas. Thereby, the Governments must encourage dialogues and peaceful talks, instead of using “military force” as the only instrument.

Thus, in order to stop these Naxal Movements violence, atrocities, exploitation and deprivation of basic human rights must be put to an end with immediate effect.