

The Fall of Maoist Revolution

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Having murdered the leading Congress party functionaries in Chattisgarh and celebrating that macabre act like the savages do, the Maoists have now elaborated their 'hit list' of politicians and police officials whom they plan to murder at the first opportunity. Earlier, they have shown their 'character' by booby trapping the dead and injured policemen. Thus in one despicable sweep, a rebellion which had found wide endorsement of its cause if not its methods, has turned itself into a terrorist outfit. For a true revolutionary, there could not have been a morally degenerating 'fall' more

dismaying. Thus had departed a disillusioned Kanu Sanyal after all, the founder of CPI (ML).

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Fall from Revolutionary Grace

Revolutionaries do not depend on hit lists to further their cause. And if they have to assassinate someone, they do not indulge in 'blood dance' as the Maoist cadres are reported to have performed after torturing their victims to death. A rebellion, to be seen as distinct from terrorism or downright madness, has to remain within certain bounds of probity even when engaged in acts contrary to social and legal norms.

To succeed to any degree, a rebellion does not allow its moral plank to rot. Conversely, as the history records, intimidation and savagery can not be a harbinger of change. Mao Zedong must be cursing these outlaws for invoking him only to sully his name, for he did not propagate any hit list of personalities; neither did Lenin, Castro or Che Guevara. Such lists are advertised by nihilist groups and mindless fanatics, and such people do not make revolutionaries; their revolutionary pretensions fail in the long run. Therefore by propagating a 'hit list' after indulging in celebratory murders, and booby trapping the injured and the dead, the outfit remains neither Maoist nor an ideology based revolution. The hit list is sought to be justified by the assertion that there are persons somewhat vocal – even if in trepidation – in their opposition to Maoist methods, and therefore are liable to be treated as 'enemies' of what is claimed to be a peoples' revolution. That assertion is of course ludicrous because: firstly, none of the named, indeed none whosoever, has really had shown the heart, in the real sense and in all seriousness, to confront the Maoist rebellion; and secondly, such fellows are no more of enemies of the cause as the Maoists themselves are. Yes, when it comes to anti-social acts, corruption, highhandedness and injustice, the present lot of so called Maoists are no better than the unscrupulous lot of exploiters of the have-not's whom they wish to 'correct' or eliminate.

People living in Maoist influenced areas do not see the Maoist control as an aberration, neither do they long to be released from their rebellious clutch.

By falling prey to diabolic means in contravention to Mao's teachings, the Maoist rebellion in India has taken its first step towards ignominy and defeat. For those who wish to be rid of this menace, this must come as music to ears. Conversely, for those well meaning part-radicals who wish to see the cleansing of a system so callous, this development must be heart-breaking, for they will have wait indefinitely for the coming of redeeming revolution.

Saviours versus Tormentors

Maoist activities go on unhindered because of two reasons:-

One is that ever since the known past, the affected areas had been administered more in exception than as a rule, be it the days of local rajas, zamindars, head-men or the agents of the government. Even in post-independence period, political opportunists have shown little interest in local affairs due to its short voter lists. Further, what little administrative focus there had been, that was directed, not at elevating the people and their lives, but on exploitation of natural resources. It would therefore not be wrong to view that kind of mechanism as nothing more than a 'system of brokerage'. Maoists have taken advantage of that void and have assumed the much needed role of dedicated arbitrators of their routine problems. These problems relate to recovery of wages unpaid by 'outsider' employers, fixing reasonable wage rates, receipt of due compensation against displacement or share cropping, prevention of extortion from revenue and police officials, working of usually non-functional health centres where existing, enforcement of entitlement schemes like MNERGA against total loot, etc. Resultantly, people living in Maoist influenced areas do not see the Maoist control as an aberration, neither do they long to be released from their rebellious clutch.

Two, to the locals, Maoists are their boys and girls, who live permanently among them, observing the same culture, not adding to but solving some of their difficulties, particularly in securing better economic returns from their trade and safety from official harassment. Conversely, the state is represented just by occasional visitations of the police, patwari and prospectors. The state's other citizen-dedicated departments have never appeared in any case – earlier because of their 'right' not to work, and presently on the excuse of Maoist threat. Further, whenever the state-functionaries did appear, they brought with them trouble – labour unpaid, hospitality forced upon, bribes demanded, chicken eaten, women harassed – before vanishing after having made a nuisance of themselves. Obviously, people are least bothered by the Maoist's unconstitutional acts – extortion and murder of persons they do not relate to.

Maoists do not ask for secession, nor are their demands, at least formally, any different from what the constitution guarantees to the Indian citizens. Yes, they wish to change the system of governance, not by democratic means, but by unconstitutional use of violence.

Thus far, the Maoist 'fish' has thrived in conducive 'waters'. Barbarism, however, is heating up that water. That offers an opportunity to the state to defeat the rebellion – as it happened in Punjab, Tripura, Mizoram and to some extent, in Nagaland.

Coalition of the State and the People

Barbaric acts tend to cascade and spill over. Therefore, at one juncture, when the common man feels tormented, it could spell the Maoist doom. If managed effectively, such a situation would allow the state to find its feet – which presently it is not being allowed to – in winning the people's endorsement. Indeed, in most instances the world

over, successful suppression of rebellion has been occasioned by highhandedness of rebels that drove common people to join the state in countering it. One such opportunity came when more than a dozen contending groups – including the Salwan Judum, 'Tritiya Sammelan Prastuti Committee', 'Pratirodh Bahini', the 'Marxist-Leninist Committee', 'Lal Jhanda Party' etc. – emerged. Unfortunately, there was no effort to strengthen these; instead the most prominent one, Salwan Judum, was first poisoned, then misused and finally decimated by the state itself. That has emboldened the Maoists, made their threats more credible and imposed caution upon the other factions – psychology, after all, nurtures a rebellion.

Many of the Maoist methods are already beginning to be seen by the people as acts of highhandedness. One, the sham of 'governance' that the Maoists claim to have established in their 'liberated areas' stand demolished; two, their inability to garner the expected level of finances, weaponry etc. has exposed their limitations; and three, arrogant diktats of the 'area commanders' – rebellion's main pillar – have made most locals turn sceptic of Maoist intentions. Barbaric acts would further expose their diabolic characteristics. Indian state would be wise to seize that opportunity.

Basic Questions

That brings up certain basic questions, as discussed in the following paragraphs. To be rid of the Maoist menace, answers to these have to be pondered at.

The first question to be considered is that as to why should the Maoists be considered a threat to the nation? There are two considerations in this matter. One, Maoists do not ask for secession, nor are their demands, at least formally, any different from what the constitution guarantees to the Indian citizens. Yes, they wish to change the system of governance, not by democratic means, but by unconstitutional use of violence. That makes them anti-nationals, albeit politically oriented ones. Two, barring occasional forays to attack the state administration, Maoist activities are so far confined to those areas where the footprints of the state administration do not exist. Truly, the Maoists have taken control of the vacuums left by the state but are yet far away from displacing the state authority where it exists.

In the overall context therefore, effective counter-Maoist actions would be contingent upon extension of effective governance to fill up the vacuums left so far and following up with amelioration of an unjust system. It is in their violent opposition to that effort of the state that the Maoists come out to be a real threat to the nation. However, as discussed, the situation in the country, burdened as it is by corruption and political opportunism at the cost of the society, has to be improved further before the dream of defeating the Maoist rebellion can come true. It is a long haul indeed !

The Unemployed have found sources of income through a gigantic industry of illegal mining, sale of mining explosives, gun running and as informers and 'carriers' of logistic loads for the Maoists.

The next question is as to why would anyone want the Maoist activities to be stopped? No one in particular, after all, seems to be adversely affected by it. Villagers continue to live as they did before, a deal better actually because the Maoists have caused their earnings to increase, while the state has started spending some of its allocations – what is left after collective graft is satiated – to create facilities, even if these are rudimentary and soon to go defunct in absence of a maintenance mechanism. Traders, transporters, contractors and miners continue to thrive while paying 'levy' to the rebels which comes cheaper than the bribes they had to pass on to various government functionaries and local 'rangdars'. Thus traders and transporters may fix exorbitant rates, contractors may escape the stipulations of scope and specifications and miners may exploit areas many times more than the allotted blocks.

The Unemployed have found sources of income through a gigantic industry of illegal mining, sale of mining explosives, gun running and as informers and 'carriers' of logistic loads for the Maoists. Some entrepreneurs have started bonafide business: tailoring, printing, supply of bottled water, batteries, medicines etc.; their life depends on these ventures. Politicians depend on them for garnering votes and state employees are having a bonanza, receiving higher 'cuts' from projects half done and no accountability in the name of Maoist threat. Employees of most public department and undertakings – Public Works, Health, Education, Civil Supplies, the Food Corporation, Petroleum Companies, etc. – are benefitted by the lack of accountability that the instability offers to them. Even the top industrialists, 'class enemies' of communists, continue to do pretty well in the affected areas. At the worst, even if someone does land up on the wrong side of the Maoists, relief can always be bought in exchange of a 'reasonable' consideration – after a good deal of friendly haggling. There is bliss all around ! Yes, among those who should be concerned, there is no pressing need to battle the Maoists.

The third question is that as to who would fight the rebellion? Obviously, it must be the state. But the state is constituted of those very people who, as discussed, have no interest in doing so. No doubt, the armed actions would be progressed by the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and some of the state armed police battalions under the overall management of state police. Similarly, the civic part of the counter-action would be undertaken by the state institutions. However, even if funds are made available, the state does not have the institutional mechanism to plan and execute the large range of development works over vast and remote areas. Further, the culture being what it is in these departments, it may be fair to discard any thought of the state succeeding in bringing about any socio-economic transformation any time soon. That leaves the police, a disciplined force, as the sole recourse to stave Maoism off, with little, if any, conjoined effort from the rest of the state. That is not a condition that may defeat a

rebellion so vast and so entrenched. Therefore the police forces are in for a long journey over undulating ground, till the rest of the state is able to gear up.

The question that arises is that as to who would replace the Maoists after it is defeated?

The fourth question has three sub-sets. One is, does the state have adequate police forces to clear and control one fifth of the Indian landmass, particularly when the people excuse themselves from offering support? The answer is: 'no'. There are just 81 battalions of police forces deployed in an area so vast. The strength is expected to be raised to 102 in next three years, whereas even by conservative estimates, 150 are needed. Next, can the strength be build up soon? The answer is: 'may be', in three to four years. Lastly, can the state afford that kind of expansion? The answer is: 'at great cost'; that cost could be better disposed in development. In any case, as discussed, there is a plethora of 'rebels' of different shades; whom and how many will the state decimate?

The fifth question that arises is that as to who would replace the Maoists after it is defeated? Would the state expand its institutions to govern well the vast remote-land, or would there be another void for the muscle-politicians and 'dons' to walk in and carry on their trade – till another uprising gains momentum?

The last question to be taken note of is that will development, if and when brought about, succeed in turning people's alienation? The fact is that appeasement by development whets the appetite for more freebees and starts another kind of manipulative race. Therefore, strong arm of law enforcement is still needed to reap the benefits of development.

State – Centre Relations

By far the most effective solution to the Maoist rebellion depends on the manner the State-Centre Relations are articulated. In this respect, the following factors have to be considered :-

Villagers continue to live as they did before, a deal better actually because the Maoists have caused their earnings to increase, while the state has started spending some of its allocations.

One, the State-Centre Relationship is dictated by a struggle for the 'chair'; Maoist rebellion is not on the main agenda.

Two, resolute leadership of any hue – among social activists, politicians or police – for efficient conduct of counter-insurgency operations are not being allowed to emerge due to petty rivalries, turf wars and the lure of graft. Most counter-insurgency 'action plans' stand hijacked in favour of personal or group agenda of the local power-brokers.

Three, even a semblance of law enforcement remains absent in Maoist infested areas. There is no fear of law.

A Quest

Having developed vested interest in continuation of their terror-based dictatorship, functionaries among the Maoists, the ideologues as well as the all powerful area commanders, have no pressing urge to seek accommodation within the democratic system. The Maoist rebellion would therefore have to be controlled by finding best answers to the questions discussed above. By adoption of terror tactics the Maoists have opened a window through which the state may be able to find a way.

However, the fight has not even gone past the first ladder yet.