



CATCH THEM YOUNG PATTERNS OF NAXAL RECRUITMENT

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The fundamental core from which the ultra left-wingers derive their strength and energy are the dedicated cadres of the vanguard party. Even if the ideologues work in absentia, the party will move on if the cadre supply is in steady state. It is precisely this particular inflow of the recruits that deserves a telescopic view.

I

PATTERNS OF RECRUITMENT: 2012-13

In an online report, Anirban Roy informs about 'missing youths' in Assam – a scary prospect for the administrators and law and order

authorities, though it is nothing unusual and beyond expectation (*India Tea*, 26 September 2013): "The census [in Assam's Barak Valley] has become imperative as there are reports that the Communist Party of India (Maoist), which is waging a 'peoples' war' in mainland India, are in a massive recruitment drive in the tea gardens of South Assam to sustain its proletarian movement."

Roy goes on to stipulate the numbers in exactitude: "There are reports that the Maoists recruited around 200 cadres in the state, mostly from the poor tea gardens of Barak valley in South Assam. The cadres have reportedly been sent to Palamu district in western Jharkhand for training." Earlier in the same month, mainstream media reports had put across another glaring expose: "Maoists across Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Bihar and Jharkhand have reportedly 'recruited' nearly 10,000 children including girls. These children will serve as intelligence gatherers or perform chores as cooks and couriers for Maoists. Most of the minor recruits are in the age group of 10 to 15 and are given basic training to handle weapons." (*Niticentral*, 7 September 2013)

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Views expressed are author's own



To what extent that data could be classified as sensational is debatable as such wealth of information, in a much benign and routine format, has been corroborated by authors, commentators and activists. Arundhati Roy romanticises such child-recruits as part of the Maoist militia in “*Walking with the Comrades*” and Gautam Navlakha reports ‘considerable number of women’ in People’s Liberation Guerrilla Army [PLGA] and the militia in his “*Days and Nights in the Heartland of Rebellion*”. In a manner loosely termed mechanical and technically statistical, the enumeration of Maoist recruitment in 2012-13 is warranted for an evolving discourse on the subject.

In February 2013, intelligence agencies of the state reported that the Maoists were forcibly taking away children from villages in Latehar and Lohardaga districts of Jharkhand. Asked about the lack of complaints, the Superintendent of Police cited the element of fear of the Naxalites (*Hindustan Times*, 12 February 2013). Whereas, going back in time, in the month of March 2012, the Maoists opposed a recruitment drive by the Indian Army at Bastar – their core bastion (*DNA*, 10 March 2012)

In March 2013, the Maoists were reportedly eyeing Assam University, Silchar and the adjoining tea gardens for cadre recruitment – a data to be appreciated if one recollects the journalistic venture of Anirban Roy (*Times of India*, 25 April 2012). Further, there were talks about minority youths being tapped in Assam, with disgruntlement being the primary cause of recruitment (*Times of India*, 15 June 2012). The

UN Secretary General’s annual report of 2011 also pointed out that Indian Maoists recruit and indoctrinate children for squad level formations (*Times of India*, 20 June 2012).

During the last three months of 2012, the media hinted at children between the ages of 13-15 years being recruited in the Abujhmad area of Chhattisgarh. Moreover, Jharkhand’s Latehar and Garhwa districts and Odisha’s Koraput had also started to listen to Maoist war-trumpets. In fact, there were media reports detailing Maoist recruitment drives in the Saranda forests (*IBN Live*, 30 April 2011). And the police alleged that the Maoists lured the gullible rural masses with robust financial packages!

II MOTIVATIONS AND RECRUITMENT: THEORY AND PRACTICE

“Maoists attempt to ex-ante pick candidates from aboveground sympathisers who are deemed trustworthy and whose interests are aligned with the group”, is what Pavan K Mamidi summarises through his painstaking research. He further asserts that the recruiters are likely to run into “bad apples/lemons” and there is no easy way of distinguishing those candidates from sustainably trustworthy ones among the sympathisers. Hence, not accidentally at all, Mamidi opines that “there can remain an informational problem.”

Maoists, according to Mamidi, solve this problem by depending on demonstrations of self-abnegation by prospective candidates which either serve as signals which could be really costly to mimic or which reduce their outside options of survival. Such demonstrative acts are termed “burning bridges” in the author’s lengthy December 2009 paper “*Signaling and Screening for Recruitment among the Maoists in India.*”

Reading Mamidi’s manuscript, it appears that norm compliance by Maoist cadres or aspirants under the threat of punishment in itself may not signal or demonstrate trust. In fact, defection by existing members causes much more damage to the Naxalites than non-compliance of aboveground candidates. Mallojula Koteshwara

Rao's elimination due to the alleged, yet quite possible, information leak from the inner core-turned-defectors is a prime case in consonance with such hypothesis.

However, as Mamidi genuinely asks, "Can this norm-compliance by candidates prior to membership is also capable of working as an ex-ante demonstrative mechanism independently?" And the answer pours out naturally - norm-compliance of aspiring candidates before membership per se does not fully demonstrate to the recruiters the potential of the candidates' intentions not to defect after membership. Otherwise, why would Shivaji, a graduate of Regional Engineering College, Warangal, later join the intelligence branch of the police once he started off as a 'martyr to be' for the Maoists? (p.96, Choudhary, 2012).

More brain-wrenching is the story of Sumit, who rejects the laxity of Kolkata and marries a tribal girl in the Dandakaranya area – later turns a police informer and effects a string of arrests against the party. Severe beatings by the police is supposed to have caused the snap in his ideological cord (p.12, *ibid*). Such events/narrations/stories abound. Hence, oblique behavior like physical self-harm (without Marxist norms) or giving up property (within Marxist norms) need be cautiously analysed and distinguished, as those could also be construed as signals, as per Mamidi.

If Mamidi's conclusions are agreed with, though such concurrence may require substantial reasoning based on data, then the two most significant causes of swelling of ranks of the Maoists by the Upper Castes [UCs] could be enunciated as:

Motivation of public mindedness – to incur costs to inflict altruistic punishments to enhance public good.

Motivation of rational self-interest. They wanted to regain power and social prestige in villages.

Signalling Theory, used in Political Science and Sociology posits:

Ethnic dominance might result in a civil war.

Greed over grievance is a motivation for rebels to join civil wars.

Some researchers suggest that while the main indicator of insurgency is a weak state (including a weak police), poverty is likely to make the life of a guerilla relatively more attractive and therefore aid recruitment (Fearon and Laitin, 2003). The insurgency should be aided by the rural base, the guerilla's superior knowledge of the local population, and the rough and inaccessible terrain.

Membership involves, Mamidi says, becoming privy to information relating to location, safe-houses/shelters, agendas, mission and access to weapons, disclosure of which can put a substantial number of candidates in danger. An ex-Naxalite interviewed by Mamidi sternly asserts: "You are a real Naxalite not even because you carry a Kalshnikov in Nallamala. You are a real Naxalite only when you have the trust and recognition of other Naxalites and they can be killed because of your mistakes or you can be killed because of their mistakes."

Diego Gambetta found a similar tendency in the Sicilian mafia when they granted recognition to their members. The Indian Maoists observe the strictest regulations while inducting members. First, every applicant for membership must be recommended by at least two party members. Moreover, the primary unit recommending the admission of a new member will take necessary steps to investigate the applicant secretly, both within the party as well as among the sympathisers. This is as per the constitution of the CPI-Maoists. Such a membership is called "candidate membership." Nevertheless, as

Mamidi elaborates, that type of membership is probationary in nature. A probation period may evoke consternation as this is not a government job. However, probation here has to be interpreted as a temporary phase in which the candidate is yet to be fully baptised as a Naxalite and his calibre of continuing as a Naxalite is being tested out.

A sorting equilibrium is achieved because potential mimics and infiltrators cannot bear the costs of these acts of self-abnegation. Different treatment is meted out to different categories of candidates on account of their social backgrounds. For instance, the lower end of the Lower Castes [LCs] have only a six month period of probation. Whereas middle-class peasants, petty bourgeoisie and urban middle-classes [both LCs and UCs] have a one year probation; and, the upper section of the UCs undergoes a two year probation. Such differential treatment is meted out both before and after admission.

Fearon and Laitin (2003) also opine that a second type of UC joins to acquire power as a rural elite – given that the power of the state is minimal in remote rural areas. Another ex-Naxalite cautions (Mamidi, 2010): “the bigger danger for the movement is the opportunistic UC who wants to join, and not the possibility of police infiltration.”

There is a third type of UC: temporarily smitten by the romance of revolutionary politics and influenced by glorified depictions of Naxalites in popular culture. Early in 1970, Charu Mazumdar had uttered: “It will give me the greatest pleasure if you plunge yourselves into the revolutionary struggle here and now instead of

wasting your energy in passing examinations.” (Banerjee, 2008)

Interestingly, Mamidi exhibits a signature of despair when he supposedly laments: “It is hard to get a specific measure of the demand that the Naxalites have for new recruits in general.” However, as Mamidi investigates, one of the methods by which the Naxalites may enforce allegiance and compliance – but only in a limited way – is violence. At the same time, Naxalites want to “economise” the usage of violence. Using violence can greatly hurt their credibility. In fact, the present General Secretary of the Maoists, Ganapathy, has acknowledged in interviews the debacle their party had to undergo in Andhra Pradesh was due to their indulgence in excessive violence.

On the failure of social ostracisation for a defector, this is what a Naxalite in the Ranga Reddy district says: “We cannot always depend on trying to make a defector feel ashamed.” Another Naxalite, based at Warangal, expressed his constraints: “We cannot hold the family members as hostage in lieu of the absconder. We must have a reasonable approach. Otherwise, we will be treated as hooligans.”

For young, unmarried members who may be enticed with money and resettlement in some other states or location, such methods of holding back the cadres are only partially effective. Suhas Bawche, the Sub-divisional Police Officer in the Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra, informs about the marriage of two former Maoists – duly conducted by the police (*Khabar South Asia*, 20 February 2013).

“The marriage was arranged as a part of the 'surrender saptah' (surrender week) announced by the district administration. We hope that this marriage will encourage many other Maoist rebels to leave the outlawed outfit and lead a settled life.”

As if endorsing the failure of keeping vigil and in line with pragmatism, an ex-Naxalite of Warangal comments (Mamidi, 2010):

“Trust is the key to delegating responsibility when you cannot afford a watchdog.” Perhaps, the observation is spot-on when one refers to

the defection of Suchitra Mahato – a close aide of Mallojula Koteswara Rao aka Kishenji.

A Nalgonda-based ex-Maoist opines: “One cannot start speaking the Marxist and Maoist lingo unless one is dedicated and spends a lot of energy behind it. It is hard for a fake to try and pull the wool over your eyes when it comes to talking about Marxian ideology. UC newcomers from Universities, in particular, try to dazzle members, with names. We preferred those who admitted their ignorance than those who tried to fake knowledge.”

The Maoists firmly affirm faith in Marx’s thesis that technology is the basis of revolutionary social change. In that light, recruits with qualification and expertise in technological faculties are always desired and hence preferred. Nevertheless, in this case too, even if the LC candidate does not possess the requisite skills pertaining to electrical, mechanical or electronic streams, his chances of being recruited does not go down.

In fact, demonstrated accomplishments in the technological fields after joining the Naxalite-fold are also plausible reasons for rapid promotions. Mamidi draws the example of Techie – who rose in the ranks fast since he was adept in technology. However, he surrendered. Recruiters could not fathom Techie’s lack of commitment as they were overwhelmed by his talent in one dimension.

Another differentiator is the physical attribute that manifests its abilities to withstand topographical challenges. Nevertheless, the foolhardiness of the cadres is frowned upon by the leadership.

Further, in this debate on recruitment, there seems to be a caste-division among the Maoists. For instance, UCs favour a recruitment approach that encourages the inclusion of intellectual and cognitive skills. On the other hand, LCs put more stress on physical capacities and commitment. Nonetheless, it may so happen that such a conclusion is no generalisation at all since this was a single dataset observed by Mamidi.

At the time of induction, aspiring UC candidates are expected to exhibit a basic minimum behavior that they have no prejudicial attitudes towards LCs. As a matter of fact, Naxalites expect de-castisation – and sometimes in a blunt manner. LC candidates are not expected to show any prejudicial attitude against other lower castes. But norms are quite tough for UCs as one UC candidate was disqualified because he showed a mild facial expression while being offered food in a Harijan’s hut. Further, commenting adversely on caste-based reservations may lead to disqualification of UC aspirants.

One of the biggest impediments to police infiltration into the Naxalite inner circle is their requirement that aspiring candidates must engage in at least a moderate amount of underground crimes. Hence, the police finds it difficult to plant moles within the Naxalites. Furthermore, the Party Constitution mandates relinquishing private property as a pre-requisite for joining the Naxalites. This creates an additional barrier against police incursion. With regard to abdication of private property too, successful LC candidates give up lesser proportions of their property holdings than the successful UC candidates. Mamidi introduces a nice terminology in this connection – he calls it “bridge-burning” behavior, that is: abnegating one’s caste/property and committing underground crimes.

Through the above acts, the potential recruits remove the trust-deficit, if any. The Maoists believe that one who has committed acts which would not entitle him/her to go back to his/her

societal fabric anymore is a stable and faithful recruit.

As far as the caste issues are concerned, LCs ridicule the UCs for not having physical strength. The UCs are prohibited from deriding the LCs for not possessing intellectual faculties since that sort of behavior is considered unethical inside the Maoist bastion. Actually, numerically speaking, LCs outnumber the UCs and hence unilateral pressure exists upon the UCs to prove their mettle. Furthermore, it is easier for LC candidates to get rehabilitated in the mainstream than the UCs.

A vivid study was carried out on the rebel recruitment in Burundi. The authors researched the historical data pertaining to 1972 and 1988 and found that there was no effect of grievances on the likelihood of recruitment (Nillesen and Verwimp, 2009). They came out with tentative support for the idea that reduced opportunity costs may promote recruitment. Factually, negative income shocks in addition to adverse weather conditions; viz. lack of rainfall, are a strong push for recruitment. Commodity price shocks, according to Nillesen and Verwimp, show no robust linkage with civil war violence while weather shocks do.

To answer the more fundamental question about why people participate in violent rebellions, Gurr (1971) and Scott (1976) theorise on the idea that grievances such as frustrations about economic/political inequality induce

rebellion. Individuals also join warring factions by being motivated for private gains like higher wages, looting opportunities, promises of future rewards and to be protected from violence from the rebel groups.

Do and Iyer (2007) find that higher rates of poverty and lower levels of literacy prior to the outbreak of the Maoist insurgency are correlated with greater conflict intensity within the district. Furthermore, Dube and Vargas (2007) in an unpublished working paper find a linkage between the prices of export commodities to violence in Columbia. A drop in the price of coffee and increase in the price of oil increased the intensity of civil war.

Barron, Kaiser and Pradhan (2004) analyse local conflicts in Indonesia and find a positive correlation between violence and unemployment as well as violence to income inequality. Assuming that recruitment is voluntary, village-level data analysed by the authors tentatively support the theorisation that reduced opportunity costs may promote recruitment. In fact, villages with insufficient rainfall were more likely to promote recruitment. The fact of the matter is that several scholars have argued that joining a rebel group may be a rational choice to ensure protection from violence.

The Indian Maoists, headquartered at Abujhmaad, are laying low for multifarious reasons. Planned police action coupled with smart intelligence-gathering by the security forces, snatching away of political space by mainstream parties, and the systematic decapitation of ideologues and the top brass are some among many causative factors. Be it the principle of 'winning hearts and minds' (WHAM) or through the operational game-plan of 'clear-hold-build', the security forces and the district administration have done their jobs. After all, if the people – be it the autochthonous adivasis or the LCs or the romantically uplifted UCs – are not weaned away from the redder part of the

political spectrum, the voices of anarchy and nihilism will continue to reign supreme.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implementing the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution in letter and spirit is essential.

2. The intellectuals must act responsibly as 'peace brokers' rather than 'problem-creators' by spouting hyperbole.

3. At the operational level, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) could be broken down into small squad-like groups of anti-insurgency units to "fight a guerilla like a guerilla." Satellite imagery i.e. remote sensing techniques to locate the positions of the insurgents could be explored in this regard. Further, unmanned aerial vehicles may not be just a fashion fiesta in this context.

Security forces need to tackle the ambushes by meticulously adhering to Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) It is easier said than done as implementation on the ground, especially in Chattisgarh, crucially depends on local intelligence gathering.

4. Presently, the (CRPF) needs to be trained in counter-insurgency/counter-terrorism (CI/CT) warfare. More jungle warfare schools modelled on the one at Kanker need to be set up. Any erstwhile irregular militia need to be translated into regular constabulary as early as feasible. Local men with knowledge of the topography and dialect would provide a fillip in CI/CT operations.

5. Nevertheless, the onus of taking the Maoists head-on has to be taken by the local police as was done in Tripura and Punjab. CRPF must be viewed as an ancillary force and not as an agency to which the job could be outsourced.

6. Empowerment of the adivasis may continue in parallel, i.e. revenue-sharing with the adivasis by the corporate bodies. The administration needs to act as a facilitator in this regard. Interestingly, some corporate houses have taken a positive step in this direction. For

instance, Tata Steel has called for social infrastructure development in the Maoist areas. Already, ITC has served the peasant community by introducing agri-marketing with the aid of information technology.

7. The 'Andhra Model' of tackling the Maoists by unleashing 'terror versus terror' can be kept in the reserve. Surgical strikes (targeted killings, incarcerations: TK/TI) against top leaders will lead them to ideological bankruptcy. In all probability, personnel from the "Greyhound" force can 'coach' the provincial police forces and the CRPF.

8. India needs to focus on a WHAM-based counter-insurgency approach coalesced with TK-TI as a viable mode of tackling insurgencies. Dynamics peculiar to a region or ideology notwithstanding, Indian counter-insurgency can rely on this approach as an overall strategic measure.

9. Finally, the authorities may attempt to sow seeds of dissension amongst the Maoists; i.e. try for a de-merger of the CPI-M into the Maoist Communist Centre [MCC] and People's War Group [PWG] wings. In this regard, the coming to the fore of the Tiritiya Prastuti Committee [TPC] as a direct competitor of the Maoists is a welcome proposition.

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