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Ideological Precepts of Maoism: From China, to India's Naxal Belt



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A fundamental element of Marxist-Leninist ideology is that all historical development is a result of struggle, whether it is within a nation, between nations, or all-encompassing issues such as the fight against imperialism.¹ Following more than two decades of bitter struggle and resistance between China's Communists and Nationalists, the Chinese Civil War 国共内战 that commenced in August 1927, ended when Chairman Mao Zedong addressed 475 million Chinese people on October 01, 1949, at the symbolic Tiananmen 天安门, reiterating what he had proclaimed much earlier in his long-drawn battle for gaining control of China, i.e., *political power flows from the barrel of the gun*. Mao's campaign is remembered till date for his remarkable skill, by virtue of which, he managed to transform a ragtag peasant crowd into a disciplined and motivated army of millions – practising the guerrilla warfare strategy to resist and, ultimately, defeat a better-equipped adversary.

It is interesting to trace the ideological precept that influenced Mao's political thinking

Key Points

1. Mao's campaign is remembered till date for his remarkable skill, by virtue of which, he managed to transform a ragtag peasant crowd into a disciplined and motivated army of millions – practising the guerrilla warfare strategy to resist and, ultimately, defeat a better-equipped adversary.
2. From the newly published Chinese translation of Marx's classic 1848 pamphlet, *The Communist Manifesto*, Mao learned that for the 'Marxist socialists', class struggle was the driving force in history.
3. Mao's adaptation of Marxism-Leninism for a peasant mass base started winning support – with a specific 'Chinese element' of peasantry becoming in-charge of ousting capitalism and creating a socialist society (led by the CCP as its revolutionary armed force).
4. The Naxalite movement received ideological support from China and saw the emergence of the left-extremist leaning and formation of the CPI (Marxist-Leninist).
5. Democracies the world over have rejected the dictum of Chairman Mao that political power, flows from the barrel of the gun, it has firmly been recognised that the power of the ballot, which has proven to be far more formidable and resolute than the gun.

The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), New Delhi, is an autonomous think-tank dealing with national security and conceptual aspects of land warfare, including conventional and sub-conventional conflict and terrorism. CLAWS conducts research that is futuristic in outlook and policy-oriented in approach.

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to a great extent in his formative years. Mao's search "for the road" to base his programme and vision for China's political, economic and social reformation intensified since 1919 by forming a Communist group in Changsha 长沙市 (Hunan Province) in 1920. Mao focussed on building up the fledgling labour movement and kick-started his political career and leaning towards Communism in Changsha. From being a student at the Hunan Number 1 Teachers' Training School from 1913-18, Mao later returned to teach there from 1920-22. In the meanwhile, Mao attended the first Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Congress in July 1921 and joined the Central Committee in 1923. It started to appear that Mao had found "the road he was searching for".²

From the newly published Chinese translation of Marx's classic 1848 pamphlet, *The Communist Manifesto*, Mao learned that for 'Marxist socialists', class struggle was the driving force in history. According to Marxism, as nations become increasingly industrialised, the growing concentration of economic power in the capitalist class and increasing oppression of the workers (proletariat class) would ultimately lead to rebellion(s), resulting in a revolution by the proletariat, which ultimately would depose the capitalists. Conventional Marxist belief was that Communist revolutions would inevitably begin with the urban proletariat: the establishment of a 'classless Communist society' in which private property would fade away and all resources and means of production such as farmland would follow this proletariat revolution (with factories that create a society's wealth being held in common by the people). Mao was moving closer to embracing Communism as his personal creed and the answer to his homeland's troubles.

An important figure around this time was the revolutionary Chinese socialist, Chen Duxiu (陳獨秀) who co-founded the CCP with Li Dazhao in 1921

and served as its first General Secretary (1921-27). Mao was much influenced by Li Dazhao, his former guide and philosopher at Beijing University. On the other hand, advocating the Trotskyist theory of Marxism, put forth by Leon Trotsky (identified as an orthodox Marxist and Bolshevik-Leninist) in favour of establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat, Chen Duxiu was known to be critical of Stalinism and promoted Trotskyist ideals that criticised the bureaucracy developing in the then USSR under Stalin. Chen Duxiu launched the influential Chinese periodical *New Youth* (*Xin Qingnian*) and wrote a series of articles and opinion pieces.

With the mass upsurge within the working class becoming visibly profound in 1925 and 1926, the armed confrontations led by the CCP began to rise. Significantly, in March 1926, Chen came into conflict with Mao over the latter's essay "Analysis of Classes in Chinese Society", wherein he blatantly opposed and challenged Chen's analyses of Chinese society.³ Mao's essay outlined the deviations then to be found in the Party, i.e., right and left opportunism, and simultaneously identified supporters and allies in the Chinese revolution, as detailed below.

- *The landlord class and the comprador class* – the appendages of the international bourgeoisie, depending upon imperialism for their survival and growth. The right wing of the Kuomintang was considered their political representative.
- *The middle bourgeoisie* – representing the capitalist relations of production in China in the towns and the countryside. This class was considered inconsistent in its attitude towards the Chinese revolution, i.e., they favoured the revolutionary movement against imperialism and the warlords; however, they became suspicious of the revolution upon sensing the militant participation of the proletariat at home and the

active support of the international proletariat abroad.

- *The petty bourgeoisie* – comprising the owner-peasants, the master handicraftsmen, and lower levels of the intellectuals, students, primary and secondary school teachers, lower government functionaries, office clerks, small lawyers, and small-time traders.
- *The semi-proletariat* – the overwhelming majority of the semi-owner peasants coupled with the poor peasants and peddlars constituted a very large part of the rural masses.
- *The proletariat* – the modern industrial proletariat (workers) numbered about two million, employed in five industries – railways, mining, maritime transport, textiles and shipbuilding, “enslaved in enterprises owned by foreign capitalists”. The industrial proletariat represented China’s new productive force and the most progressive class in modern China. It became the leading force in the revolutionary movement.⁴

The warlords, bureaucrats, the comprador class, the big landlord class and the reactionary section of the intelligentsia were identified by Mao as the adversaries in the Chinese revolution. He pronounced the industrial proletariat as the ‘leading force in our revolution’ supported by the semi-proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie. While Chen believed that the focus of the revolutionary struggle in China should primarily concern the workers, Mao had started to theorise about the primacy of the peasants. Mao was arguing for a radical land policy and the vigorous organisation of the rural areas, thereby, questioning the old guard within the CCP.⁵ Although Chen recognised the value of Mao’s interpretation of Marxism in inciting the Chinese peasants and labourers to revolution, their

differences multiplied, ultimately, ending their political association.⁶

The CCP, subsequently, took as its first major task the promotion of workers’ associations in China’s cities. Furthering this initiative, Mao founded the Peasant Movement Training Institute in Guangzhou (Canton) in 1924, which provided critical assistance to the mass movement in the countryside. Two years later, in December 1926, Mao travelled to his home province of Hunan – known for its deteriorating economic situation and rampant social unrest among the Chinese peasantry. In the summary of his findings submitted to the Central Committee in early 1927, Mao stressed upon the resentment of the peasants toward their landlord oppressors, which, according to Mao, needed to be tapped and converted into revolutionary action, with “*several hundred million peasants in China’s central, southern, and northern provinces rising like a fierce wind or tempest, a force so swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to suppress it.*”⁷ This impassioned account of Hunan’s rebellious peasantry, did manage to strike a chord with the larger Chinese masses. However, it did not impress the CCP’s top leadership much, which continued clinging to the traditional Marxist view of peasants as backward and the urban proletariat as the fountainhead of the Communist revolution.

That notwithstanding, Mao’s consolidated political positioning rendered him far more determined to stamp out bourgeois thinking with mass struggle. The anti-imperialist aspect of Marxism started to appeal in China – that of dramatic transformation being achieved by the actions of ‘ordinary people’. Consequently, Mao’s adaptation of Marxism-Leninism for a peasant mass base started winning support – with a specific ‘Chinese element’ of peasantry becoming in-charge of ousting capitalism and creating a socialist society (led by the CCP as its revolutionary armed force).

India's Naxal Movement and China's Ideological Umbrella

Soon after the formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) at the Seventh Congress of the Communist Party of India in November 1964, a section of its leaders wanted the Party to add armed revolution to its agenda, following the example of China. Prominent among them were Charu Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal. The Party leadership did not entirely dismiss the possibility of an armed uprising. In 1965, Majumdar came out with his famous *Eight Documents*, which essentially exhorted the Party to fight against revisionism within itself, follow the example of Mao Zedong's China, and take up an armed struggle against the state, whilst underlining that action, rather than politics, was the need of the day.⁸ The two factions of the Party continued to coexist, albeit a little uneasily, under the same banner for a while. Their differences became irreconcilable when the first CPI (M)-led United Front government was formed in 1967.

The proponents of Naxalism splintered from the CPI (M) primarily over differences on the issue of future participation in parliamentary democracy and, more significantly, on the means of carrying forward the 'revolution'. In the monsoon of 1968, Kanu Sanyal led a team of five revolutionaries to a trip to China where they received a warm welcome. It is believed that in their two-and-a-half months' stay in China, they even took military training.

Back in China, the CCP drifted towards a left sectarian position and began characterising India as a neo-colony and client of the imperialists. The Naxalite movement received ideological support from China and saw the emergence of the left-extremist leaning and formation of the CPI (Marxist-Leninist) [CPI (M-L)] in 1970. The official mouthpiece of the CCP, the *People's Daily* published an editorial on July 5, 1967, titled "Spring Thunder Breaks over

India", hailing the Naxalbari revolt, arguing that an "armed struggle is the only correct road for the Indian revolution ...". The editorial further went on to stating, "A peal of spring thunder has crashed over the land of India. Revolutionary peasants in the Darjeeling area have risen in rebellion. Under the leadership of a revolutionary group of the Indian Communist Party, a red area of rural revolutionary armed struggle has been established in India. This is a development of tremendous significance for the Indian people's revolutionary struggle."⁹ In the beginning of the Naxalite movement, there was mutual rhetorical support between the Maoist regime in China and the Naxalites in India. While there was little evidence of material support (in addition to no such indication of support today), the advent and growth of the Naxalite movement certainly did serve China's goal of politically weakening its largest neighbour to the south, when viewed through the prism of Sino-Indian relations during the decades of the 60s and 70s. With the expectant Chinese prescription, the Naxalites in India adopted the strategy of the Chinese revolution discussed above and portrayed themselves as the "flag bearers of the Chinese line".

Back in China, Mao Zedong came to feel that the Party leadership in China during the decade of the 1960s was drifting away from ideological purity. Given that his own position had considerably weakened following the failure of his "Great Leap Forward" (1958-60) and the ensuing economic crisis, Mao got together with Defence Minister Lin Biao, to help him attack the current Party leadership and reassert authority and control. Resultantly, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was launched in August 1966, at a meeting of the Plenum of the Central Committee. The movement gathered momentum, with students forming paramilitary groups called the Red Guards – claiming true understanding of Maoist thought. The flip side to this was the factionalism within the Red Guards

battling for supremacy, rendering many Chinese cities on the brink of anarchy by September 1967.

Owing to the political chaos, the Chinese economy plummeted, with industrial production for 1968 dropping 12 per cent below that of 1966.¹⁰ The adverse impact of the Cultural Revolution was felt far and wide by 1969, with nearly 1.5 million people being killed, millions suffering imprisonment, seizure of property, and torture. The CCP itself went through radical changes in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution and the subsequent deaths of both Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai in 1976. Deng Xiaoping regained power in 1977, and controlled China for the next two decades. These political upheavals in Beijing impacted the fragile ideological framework of the CPI (M-L) and it could not come to grips with the transition, eventually leading to innumerable splits during the decade of the 70s and 80s.

Despite the deviations from Maoist ideology in post-Mao China, Chairman Mao remains beyond any criticism for the Naxalites and their movement in India. The Naxals attach an almost divine infallibility to Mao, seeking to emulate his analysis, strategies and tactics adopted during the Chinese Revolution, including using weapons to achieve objectives in an Indian context.¹¹ The desired adaptation of Mao's model to the Indian context has remained elusive, on the part of the Naxalite groups in India. While Lenin and Mao suitably contextualised Marxism to the conditions existing in their respective country, the Naxalites have inherently failed to align the imported ideology to the cause of the deprived sections of India. This inability to generate mass mobilisation has been the primary cause of failure of the movement in India and led to consistent splintering of the Left Wing Extremist (LWE) groups.

The Communist Party of India (Maoist) [CPI (Maoist)] came into existence in 2004 through the merger of the Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCC), the

Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) and the People's War Group (PWG). It has shot into the limelight by means of numerous acts of violence and bloodshed, and certainly not owing to any achievements for the tribals or peasants whose cause it claims to uphold and be fighting for. Ever since the inception of the movement, India's Naxals/left-wing extremists have believed in a 'one size fits all' theory of revolution – and in imitating the Chinese module. By doing so, they have failed in reading and inferring the correlation of class forces amongst India's masses. The simplistic dogma adopted by the left-wing extremists has been: the situation is always ripe for a revolution, and if it could succeed in China, it just needs to be emulated in India at all costs. In this reference, the Naxalites led by Charu Majumdar have often been referred to as 'men in a hurry' – with 'romanticism' becoming the key driver, coupled with their inability to gauge the impact of mass mobilisation. In the process, the Naxalites committed grave blunders while pursuing their version of revolution, the first among them being rechristening of India as 'Dakshin Desh', China being 'Uttar Desh' with Mao Zedong as the Chairman. Secondly, they pursued relentless and unwarranted class annihilation, thereby segmenting their own home support base.¹² These developments did not go down too well with the masses and the opportunity to develop the crucial mass base was lost even before coming their way. Besides, in a revolutionary bid to encircle cities from the countryside (as advocated and practised by Mao), the ill-prepared optimists with urban backgrounds, holed themselves up in cities and were neutralised. Not surprisingly, with no emphasis on the people's movement, the initial phase of Naxalism triggered by the Naxalbari uprising was smothered in the early years of the 70s.¹³

Following the Congress of the CPI (M-L) in May 1969, one of its leaders, Souren Bose, went to China with the Party documents. China's CCP was strongly critical of the activities of the CPI (M-L) and

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rejected the latter's claim that "China's Chairman is our Chairman". Considering that India's Naxalite movement was going nowhere and had become a cause of embarrassment, it is reported that the Chinese Communist Party sent a note to Charu Majumdar expressing its reservations over the activities of the CPI (M-L) in 1970-71. Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai reportedly pulled up the Naxal leaders who visited China, for attempting a blind replication of the Chinese model of revolution and feigning a united front (peasants and proletariat) tactics.

The Naxalites' characterisation of the Indian bourgeoisie as 'compradors' remains the basic source of their errors. As per a thesis adopted at the Sixth Congress of the Communist International (1928), 'comprador' meant 'native merchants, engaged in trade with imperialist centres, whose interests are in continuation of imperialist exploitation, acting as agents for exploiting the masses in the colonial countries. To characterise the Indian bourgeoisie as compradors grossly misconstrues the character of the ruling classes¹⁴ that has evolved into a different shade after India's independence.

Without understanding the complexity of the evolutionary process of capitalist development in India and mechanically presuming an exact resemblance with pre-revolutionary China, the Naxalites grossly misread the Indian class character. Given that their theoretical understanding about India's capitalist development is totally out of line with reality, the practice of the Maoists has little to do with people's livelihood and attaining socio-economic justice. While the first and second generations of Naxalites in India (from the late 60s, through the 70s and 80s) were centred on issues pertaining to land reforms, the present generation led by the CPI (Maoist) planks itself on issues related to the political economy of neo-liberalism. In the fight for tribal rights, they do not believe in organising the tribals for exercising their sovereign

rights over land and forest resources or for socio-economic development.¹⁵ Political executions and violence are their practised methodologies and such nihilist anarchism is perpetrated in the name of 'People's War'. The belief that the "tribals can only be mobilised under the slogan for a 'protracted People's War' and that policy changes will take place only after a 'revolutionary government' is established", remains a pipe-dream.

Indulging in mindless militarism in the name of revolution, the Maoists have committed gross human rights violations. The present phase of Naxalism in India has no class war as its basis and is primarily directed against the government, with a conspicuously missing ideological edifice to stand upon. The CPI (Maoist) cadres continue to remain in the shadow of the old ideological structure that is not synchronous with the façade of the 'tribal cause' that they claim to champion. Sporadic spates of Naxal violence in the central-east tribal belt of India can be compared to the flicker of a flame before it gets extinguished. Their ideology of an 'armed uprising' makes it totally unacceptable not only to the Indian government, but also arouses scepticism among the people who constitute their supposedly 'claimed' support base. The aspirations of the tribals are clearly in a different silo vis-à-vis the ulterior motives of the Naxalites. The government needs to fulfill the former while firmly dealing with the latter.

Conclusion

Be it China, or the Naxal belt in India, both places have witnessed attempts to realise the tenets of the Marxist revolution representing a class struggle in which the landowners and bourgeoisie were overthrown in order to establish a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' (or masses). However, very significantly, the case studies of India and China remain diametrically opposite owing to their respective political systems and people's representation and participation. Establishing "a

dictatorship of the proletariat (masses)” in the case of India, would be a misnomer, primarily because modern India is already the world’s largest and distinctively established democracy, a sprawling multicultural polyglot nation comprising one-sixth of all humankind – the existence of which renders it nothing short of a political miracle globally.¹⁶ The impressive growth rates of the Indian economy, the entrepreneurial drive manifest in cutting-edge sectors such as information technology, and the creation of an ever larger and ever more confident middle class, make the Indian dream even more enchanting.

In naming themselves after Chairman Mao Zedong, the Naxalites hope to recreate in India what the Chinese revolutionary accomplished – building a single-party dictatorship that calls itself a ‘People’s Democracy’. Realising this objective would be akin to making castles in the air. Despite that, with the Maoists determined to play it out, a bloody war of attrition lies ahead. The Indian state will neither be able to easily recapture the hearts and minds of the *adivasis*, nor authoritatively reassert its control in the territories where the extremists are now active. These primarily include the hills and forests of central India, where the conflict is likely to persist, without any side claiming a decisive victory.¹⁷

As for China, the rising urban-rural divide has become a serious socio-political challenge for the Chinese government. In an attempt to confront this mounting problem, the Chinese leadership has focussed on an “urbanisation campaign” for boosting domestic demand whilst also creating jobs. With the challenge of having to cater for nearly 260 million migrant workers who await equal benefits in education, health care, social security, housing and pensions, the urbanisation campaign can be interpreted as the cumulative effect of three decades of urban expansion. Notably, people living in cities make up 52.6 percent of China’s total population – but just 35.3 percent, if calculated strictly on the basis of household registration status, locally

known as the *hukou* – which divides the residents into urban and rural categories with unequal benefits in education and other services.¹⁸ Ex-Shenzhen Mayor, Yu Youjun, speaking at the Sun Yat-sen University on December 09, 2015, warned that “... the soil for the Cultural Revolution is still fertile, especially when the people have no reasonable and profound knowledge of it... it may partially recur, under certain historical conditions...”, as reported by the mainland news outlet *Caijing*. Incidentally, 2016 marks the 50th anniversary of the outbreak of China’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The manner in which the Xi Jinping administration manages the mounting challenge posed by urbanisation will provide greater insight into China’s capacity to handle governance and social stability issues. Until the growing imbalance between urban residents and rural migrants is addressed, the dream of the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” will remain unfulfilled. The massive influx of people into bigger cities has triggered a population explosion and this concentration of an “unsatisfied lot” could well prove an overwhelming challenge for political and social cohesion.¹⁹

Where does China, or for that matter, the groups that swear allegiance to Maoist thought and ideology with the hope of replicating it in India, stand, when it comes to the principles of guaranteeing fundamental freedoms, including that of speech, expression, and the press, as well as of assembly and association to its citizens? Although an apparent advantage of Communism was that it laboured on the desire for justice and ensuing vengeance against feudal oppression and revolting working conditions, its collapse the world over as a dogmatic political thought and creed can be accredited to its abject failure at ensuring people’s participation. Democracies the world over have rejected the dictum of Chairman Mao that *political power flows from the barrel of the gun* – it has firmly been recognised that it is the power of the ballot which has proven to be far more formidable and resolute than the gun.

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Notes

1. "The Influence of Ideology" in Robert L. Warden, Andrea Matles Savada and Ronald E. Dolan, eds., *China: A Country Study* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1987).
2. As cited in Philip Short, *Mao: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), p. 84.
3. For more details, see "Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society", March 1926, in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol II.
4. For further discussion on the role of the national bourgeoisie, see "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party", Chapter 2, Section 4, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol II.
5. n. 3.
6. "New Youth: Chen Duxiu" in Orville Schell and John Delury, *Wealth and Power: China's Long March to the Twenty-first Century* (Random House, 2013).
7. n. 3.
8. Suhrid Sankar Chattopadhyay, "End of a Revolution," *Frontline*, Vol. 27, No. 8, April 2010.
9. Ibid.
10. For more details, see Xu Xiaoge, "The 50th National Day of the People's Republic of China" in Linda K. Fuller, ed., *National Days/National Ways: Historical, Political, and Religious Celebrations Around the World* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), p. 80.
11. Nilotpal Basu, "The Tragedy of Maoism", in Prasenjit Bose, ed., *Maoism: A Critique from the Left* (Leftword, May 2010).
12. Shashank Ranjan, "Ideological Faultlines of the Naxal Movement in India", Article 1332, Centre for Land Warfare Studies, June 24, 2015, available at <http://www.claws.in/1399/ideological-faultlines-of-the-naxal-movement-in-india-shashank-ranjan.html>
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. The Maoists have remained conspicuously absent in the struggles for forest rights of the tribals waged by various democratic organisations, which led to the enactment of the Forest Rights Act of 2006. Also, unlike the late 1960s, when the Naxalites attempted to organise tribal peasant movements, the contemporary Maoists have shown no such inclination.
16. For more, see Ramachandra Guha, ed., *Makers of Modern India* (Belknap Press, 2011).
17. Ramachandra Guha, "Will India Become a Superpower?" A report published by the London School of Economics and Political Science, UK.
18. Monika Chansoria, "China's Hukou Urbanisation," *China Policy Institute*, The University of Nottingham, October 15, 2015.
19. Ibid.

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