

Seminar Report

Politics of Naxalism: Tribals, Dalits and Village Development in Post-Colonial India,

7th and 8th October, 2017

organized by Rural South Asian Studies Network

A National Seminar was organised on '*Politics of Naxalism: Tribals, Dalits And Village Development In Post-Colonial India*' by Department Of History And Ancient Indian Culture (AIC) of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad, which was further Supported by Bhumkal Sanghatan, Nagpur and co-hosted by Rural South Asian Studies Network and Aurangabad History Society. The two-day national seminar was on 7th and 8th October, 2017. Chairperson of the seminar was Prof. Pushpa M. Gaikwad, Head, Department of History and AIC, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad and convener of the seminar was Dr. Bina Sengar, Asst. Prof. Department of History and AIC in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, of Aurangabad. Co-Convener of the seminar was Mr. Shrikant Bhowate, he is Asst. Prof. Department of Political Science, M.B. Patel College- Salekasa, Dist.: Gondia, (convener-Bhumkal Sanghatan,) Nagpur.

The seminar was organised to address the aspects of unrest and development in the tribal areas of India. The theoretical background of the seminar was as follows: The Naxalite movements are a serious threat for the Indian State: They are now active in 223 districts in 20 states and the strength of their armed cadres is estimated between 10.000 and 20.000¹. The Naxal movement finds its origin from the Naxalbari incident that happened on 25 May 1967 at *Bengai-Jote* village in Naxalbari, located in the Siliguri subdivision of the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. Here, a tribal youth, who had a judicial order to plough his land, was attacked by the goons of local landlords. The tribals retaliated and refused to part with the land owner's share of their produce and lifted the entire stock from his granary. It ignited a violent movement. On April 21 2010 Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh repeated his message that estimated Left-wing Extremism as the gravest internal security threat for the country (Indian Express 2010). This was said two weeks after the worst Maoist attack, where 76 security men were killed in an ambush in the Dantewada District of Chhattisgarh. This recent event is the culminating point of a long persistent escalation process. In the light of China's emerging markets and its gradual turning away from communist ideology, it seems surprising that after the end of the Cold War a Maoist movement is challenging the Indian state. Indeed, it is actually deeply rooted in the Indian context and not a new phenomenon, as the Indian state faces the problem of left revolutionary violence since more than past four decades.

Due to the Naxalite's control over certain areas and their armed fight against the state security forces, they are challenging the inherent ideals of the state, namely sovereignty and monopoly on the use of force. In order to correspond with its ideal, the state focuses on the re-establishment of law and order by encountering the Naxalites violently. However, the conflict has obtained a new quality over the recent years. Even though India is challenged by several conflicts, the Maoist insurgency can be regarded as one of the most serious threats, in terms of the level of violence, the amount of embattled territory as well as its complexity. Thus, since the times when Naxalism began in the beginning of the second half of the 20th century there are several changes and ideological schism which emerged within its nature of actions, strategies of political interventions and public engagement activities.

To have academic discussions and understand the intricacies, rhetoric's and parallel theories and movements for Tribal and Dalit empowerment and for Rural Development in South Asia, Department of History and Ancient Indian Culture organized the two days National Seminar on '*Politics Of Naxalism: Tribals, Dalits And Village Development In Post-Colonial India*'. The seminar invited eminent scholars from different parts of western and central India who were actively engaged in tribals, dalits, and rural history and development issues. For the seminar supporting agencies were 'Bhumkal-Group' a tribal welfare organization working in the heart of Tribal areas of Nagpur, Gondia and Gadchiroli district. Rural South Asia Studies Network and Aurangabad History Society. The primarily conceptualized and organised with initiatives of:

¹ Lennart Bendfeldt, '*Naxalism: The Maoist Challenge to the Indian State*', Heinrich Boell Stiftung-India, Berlin, July, 2010

- **Rural South Asia Studies Network:** An online and scholarly network of scholars working on issues of rural societies of South Asia. To know more about the organization kindly visit its website: www.ruralsouthasia.org
- **'Bhumkal Sanghatan'**; an organization based in Vidarbha which challenges the Naxalite rhetoric and works for the betterment of tribals in Naxal hinterland.

The workshop garnered active participation and more than hundred registrations took place. The active participation was shown by students, young scholars, active citizens of the society.



Program schedule of the seminar was spread out in two days, the first day on 7th October, 2017 began with inaugural session and welcome and introductory remarks by Prof. Pushpa M. Gaikwad head Department of History and Ancient Indian Culture, convener of seminar Dr. Bina Sengar gave introduction and welcome of Chief Guest Prof. Satish Dandge head Department of Political Science was done by Prof. Pushpa M. Gaikwad and Mr. Shrikant Bhowte gave his conceptual thoughts. Anchoring of the welcome ceremony was done Ms. Sunita Sawarkar.

The second session, post inaugural session had three presentations for the panel '**Naxalism: Issues and Challenges in Post-Colonial India**' first panelists was Prof. Vijay Diwan, who is Professor of environmental science in Saraswati Bhuvan college of Aurangabad. He gave his lecture on 'Land and Deprivation in Post-Colonial India'. Second speaker was Prof. Arvind Sovani, **Professor of English, CP & Berar College, Nagpur, he had his lecture on 'From Myths to Reality: Understanding Naxalism'** and last speaker of session session was Prof. P.N. Sahare, he is Professor of Sociology in Department of Sociology of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad. He presented his field-based research on '**Tribals Vs Non-Tribal: Who gains from their privileges**'. In the second session, introductory remarks were made by Shrikant Bhowte; where he discussed with his opening comments and questions on: Who is Naxal? What are the reasons for that? He discussed the positive and negative aspects of Naxalism further initiating what we could expect from the two days seminar. In his presentation Prof. Diwan discussed about '**Law and Deprivation of Tribals in Post-Colonial India**' in which he highlighted upon how did the Naxalite movement originated and why? Secondly, why do these movements take a violent turn and why are they anti-national? He elaborated, when land is needed for large scale industries, malls and factories are set up by buying the lands of the farmers at low prices and the lands of the tribal people are seized eventually natural resources are destroyed. He further explained that, the area under cultivation seems to have increased from 1965 to 2014. However, between 2005 and 2010, the government seized people's farmland for industrial estates at a very low cost by large traders. Then there are the shocking examples of exploitation of farmers and tribals. The neoliberal policies are eventually leading certain violent aggressive movements for reclamation among tribal and rural communities in India, which further brings questions as whether expressing dissatisfaction through violent means is justified or not? However, what then could be means of reclamations for humanitarian causes. **Dr. Arvind Sovani who discussed about 'From Myths to Reality: Understanding Naxalism', according to him, naxals allow residents to use the entire forest. So, the tribals do not oppose the naxalites because the government does not allow the tribals to infiltrate the forest but allows the naxalites to use the land and allow the locals to take advantage of the forest resources. In return, the naxalites live an open life without any worries. According to him tribals are often restricted and they are deprived of education and the benefits of government policy do not reach them, but the Naxals create a barrier in the middle. The locals live a life of terror under constant fear. As a result, the way was paved for the naxals to be arbitrary. Prof. P.N. Sahare, in his lecture 'Tribals Vs Non-Tribal: Who gains from their privileges', explained further that who are the beneficiaries of these naxals are somewhere not among the tribals. Even the privileges which were constitutionally given to the tribal communities in form of reservations are often misused and false certificates are rampant in different parts of tribal pockets of Western India. Based on his field**

based research he shared facts relating to defective certificates which were allotted to non-tribal community members. In his findings he even shared that certain Therefore, evidence has been found that since the times of colonial era the documents related to tribal ancestry were forged, for e.g. Malhar Koli community is native to Thane and Nashik but at present people availing certificates pertaining to this community are found all over Maharashtra. These kinds of discrepancies not only take away rightful privileges of tribal communities but also lead to their intrinsic exploitation.

In the third session of day one of the seminar the three panelists discussed on theme, 'Naxalism Movement: History and Contemporary Challenges', the four panelists of the panel were Prof. Shuja Shakir, Professor of Political Science of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad he discussed about the 'Peasant Struggle's and Ambedkarite Approach' the second panelists was Dr. Shrikant Bhowate, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, M.B. Patel College- Salekasa, Dist.: Gondian, where he discussed about 'An Alternative History of Naxal Movement and its Mass Mobilization Politics', the third panelists was Dr. Bina Sengar, Assistant Professor, Department of History and Ancient Indian Culture, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad she discussed in her panel presentation about 'Sardar Sarovar Dam- Tribal Rehabilitation in Gujarat Protests and Prospects in Post-Colonial India' the fourth panelists was Dr. Ramesh Suryavanshi, who is an independent researcher working in Kannad region of Aurangabad and works with the tribal societies in Marathwada and Khandesh, Based in Kannad, Aurangabad he discussed about 'Causal Analysis of Naxalism in Aurangabad-Marathwada'. In the first presentation Prof. Shuja Shakir discussed about the '*Peasant Struggle's and Ambedkarite Approach*', where he explained the three ideological approaches emerged in the 20th century. Marxist, Ambedkarite, and Hindu nationalist approaches. The Marxist current had raised the voice of the exploited workers. The workers' movement was started in 1925 with the philosophy of marxism. The Naxalite movement is based on Marxism. Countering to the naxalism and marxism; Dr. Ambedkar's approach associated the tribal rights with empowering the tribal communities in the lines of the assimilative approach. Mr. Shrikant Bhowte in his panel presentation discussed about '*An Alternative History of Naxal Movement and its Mass Mobilization Politics*', Mr. Shrikant who did his doctoral research on Naxalite movement in the Gondwana region shared his fact findings and case studies. According to his findings, the naxalite movements harness on the isolation and distance of the tribal territories to the mainstream society. By depriving the tribal communities with the Ambedkarite approach of assimilation Naxalite movement creates further disempowerment of the tribal communities. In the third panel presentation Dr. Bina Sengar gave presentation on '*Sardar Sarovar Dam- Tribal Rehabilitation in Gujarat Protests and Prospects in Post-Colonial India*' where she discussed about the historical planning of Narmada Sardar Sarovar Dam, which initially was founded by First prime minister of India in 1961. Gujarat being part drought prone area was in desperate need to water channels. Thus, Sardar Sarovar Dam was planned in 1960's itself. Thus, in 1970's and 1980's many of the Gujarat Sarvodaya Mandal leaders and social reformers working in eastern tribal tract of Gujarat supported this Dam construction. Therefore, till 1990's many of the dam rehabilitation programs were governed by the Neo Gandhian social reformers of Gujarat. Somehow, with the anti-large dam movements of 1990s the movement against SSP began under leading figures like Arundhati Roy and Medha Patkar, which was backed by the displaced tribal communities. However, now the dilemma of situation remains, as some of the communities of tribes from Western India got displaced and resettled in other region whereas some continue in the process. In the panel fourth presentation by Mr. Ramesh Suryavanshi discussed about '*Cause Analysis of Naxalism in Aurangabad-Marathwada*', where he shared some of his personal experiences that the societal paranoia is so hard that even supporting the cause of tribal communities brings repression and legal acts. He shared some of the stories of hardships where tribal communities often don't get justice and struggle for their constitutional rights. The panel discussion was well received and several questions and discussion among panelists and audience ensued after it. Vote of thanks on behalf of the organizing team was given by Prof. Gitanjali Borade Professor of History in the Department of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University of Aurangabad.

The second day of the seminar began with the heritage walk of the old city area where the walk was sponsored by the Aurangabad History Society. During the walk, participants of the seminar were shown the oldest city market area of the Aurangabad city. Here the migrated communities of predominantly drought prone areas from the Gujarat, Bundelkhand and Malwa region migrated almost three hundred years ago and expanded trade and commerce in the Deccan area. After the heritage walk, the participants regathered in the Department of History and Ancient Indian Culture

premises of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University and the fifth session of the seminar began with the screening of movie; '*Chhakravyuh*' which discusses about the crisis of naxalite movement in India. The movie was followed by a public discussion on several aspects of the tribal societies in India. The film screening and discussions were further carried by the two invited guests; **Dr. Prashant Vighe, B.S. Patil College, of Partawada, Amravati** and **Prof. Milind Tulse, SJMSM College of Nandurbar**. Thus, the two days seminar came to a closure with active participation of delegates and participants.



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