

‘A Professional Revolutionary’ Ideological Underpinnings of the Maoist Movement in Urban Areas

Akshay Ranade*

The armed Maoist movement in India today appears to be waning, with a consistent decline in the level of violence in Left Wing Extremism (LWE) affected areas.¹ The reduction of ‘extremely affected’ LWE districts, increase in the number of those who surrendered and the reduced number of LWE incidents overall, are all encouraging signs in the country’s efforts to root out the insurgency, which was once dubbed ‘the biggest threat to internal security.’² Yet, the course the armed

* The author is Assistant Professor (Politics and International Relations) at Symbiosis International University. The author would like to acknowledge Kaushal Balaji and Souraja Ain, students of Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts, who worked as research interns, during the course of the paper and assisted the author in literature review and compiling important data necessary for the observations of this paper.

- 1 “Violence related to Left Wing Extremism down by 76% in 2022 as compared to 2010, says Amit Shah”, *The Hindu*, February 8, 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/violence-related-to-left-wing-extremism-down-by-76-in-2022-as-compared-to-2010-says-amit-shah/article66482957.ece>.
- 2 Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had in 2009 dubbed the Left-Wing Extremism as the gravest threat to internal security. See, “Left-wing extremism gravest threat to national security: PM”, *Hindustan Times*, September 15, 2009, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi/left-wing-extremism-gravest-threat-to-national-security-pm/story-oT5o6abH4zde1iSyG742hI.html>.

Maoist movement has taken in India hints at a possible trend where the movement witnesses a temporal decline only to revive again, with increased strength and intensity.

The apparent endurance of the movement can be attributed to the well thought out and crafted strategy for a protracted people's war (PPW) which factors in the possibility of phases of tactical retreat, to weather the response of a more powerful state. The strategy is intrinsically linked to the peculiar assessment of the Indian state as 'backward, semi-colonial and semi-feudal', and devises a curiously tailored program for ushering in the 'New Democratic Revolution' (NDR) – a state based on the premises of the 'Dictatorship of Proletariat'.³ At the centre of the strategy is the consciously designed role for the 'urban spaces', which provides ideological justification to the evolution of the movement and charts the course to suit the political realities of the time.

The urban dimension of Maoism has always been a political hot potato in India, with an extremely polarized public discourse resulting into an equally polarized politics around it. But a careful study of the Maoist movement in India and its 'sources of inspiration' reveals a sense inevitability accorded to the 'urban movement'. The ideological underpinning of this 'urban necessity' can be traced to the Lenin's peculiar conceptualization of 'Professional Revolutionary'(PR) which implied the trained individuals dedicated full time to the revolution in Russia. In order to rationalize and actualize this revolution, Lenin carefully crafts a strategy for these PRs who

3 The term dictatorship of proletariat implies an intermediate state between the revolution and the onset of the communist order. In practical terms, it implies the rule of 'the party' who led the revolution. The party is supposed to sustain the gains of the revolution, fight 'counter-revolutionary forces' i.e., those who oppose the revolutionary party and prepare the society to move towards communist order. In all practical terms, it results into creation of one-party totalitarian state.

would lead the revolution in Russia. Indian Maoists seems to have deftly adopted this concept, which has a great deal of significance in the urban context.

This paper enquires into the theoretical underpinning of the Maoist movement, with a specific focus on the contours of the urban dimension of PPW. By a careful study of the Maoist literature and program for its praxis, the paper attempts to locate the contemporary realities of the Maoist movement in the theoretical constructs of Leninism-Maoism. The paper further argues that understanding this theoretical construct and devising a way to respond to it is integral to comprehensively responding to the Maoist insurgency in India.

LENIN'S PROFESSIONAL REVOLUTIONARY

R.P.N Singh, former Minister of State for Home Affairs in the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in his statement to Lok Sabha in 2014, observed:

On occasions, during operations by security forces, the CPI(Maoist) underground cadres shift to softer areas including urban areas looking for safe hideouts. On such occasions, the overground front organizations provide safe hideouts to armed cadres. The front organizations also facilitate procurement of supplies etc. to the Maoist war machinery. They also initiate legal action on various issues to slow down the enforcement regime. They are also adept at dissemination of propaganda and disinformation to demonize the state and the security forces. Of late, it has also come to notice that members of such front organizations are mentoring 'Professional Revolutionaries' to be inducted into the underground movement.⁴

4 The detailed reply of the minister can be accessed here, <https://www.mha.gov.in/MHA1/Par2017/pdfs/par2014-pdfs/ls-180214/3838.pdf>.

This mention of the Professional Revolutionary by the Minister is significant, as it brings into central focus the core concern regarding Maoism in the urban context. This idea of the Professional Revolutionary was formulated by Lenin at a time when he dedicated himself to prepare Russian society for an armed fight against the imperial Tsars. In doing this, Lenin redefined some of the basic tenets of classical Marxism in a way that fundamentally altered the future course of the communist movements across the globe.

This paper is not an attempt to analyse the theoretical merits or demerits of Lenin's conceptual development within the Marxist tradition, nor does it seek to evaluate the necessity of his political action in Tsarist Russia. The concern of the paper is to understand the practical utility of Lenin's interpretation of Russian realities, within the Marxist prism, and its implications for the Indian context. More importantly, the focus is on the understanding Lenin's ideational and institutional intervention into the Marxist tradition that sought to bring into being a socialist political order, and the way Maoists in India put it to strategic use. Understanding Lenin's 'program of praxis', will thus help in understanding the design adopted by Maoists in India, and will put in perspective the various methods through which they have attempted to instigate the revolution.

Lenin, arguably the most important thinker and political actor after Marx and Engels within the tradition of Marxism, interestingly occasioned the first major departure from what can be considered classical Marxism. While Marx famously predicted the demise of capitalism through a revolution resulting out of the deteriorating socio-economic and political realities within capitalism, he almost hinted at a revolution that would be a 'natural' consequence of capitalism. Yet, when the advanced capitalist countries apparently 'survived' this prophesied demise and injected curious innovations into

their polity to mitigate the problems of capitalism, the debate within socialist circles got polarized around the nature as well as the necessity of the 'revolution'. An interesting trend within the socialist discourse was represented by the likes of Eduard Bernstein, who questioned the inevitability as well as the necessity of revolution as predicted by Marx.⁵ This school of thought argued that institutions like trade unions played an important role in representing the interests of the workers in the capitalist set up. They also saw that evolving democratic institutions in the West could be effectively utilised to slowly but eventually evolve into a socialist political order. This trend of 'evolutionary socialists'⁶ moved beyond the rhetoric of revolution and saw alternative ways of ordering economic and political systems within the socialist paradigm.

Lenin had little patience for these evolutionary ways and criticized the politics of trade unionism and similar conciliatory method as opportunistic.⁷ Lenin saw gaining 'political power' through revolution as the 'only' way to change the political order to move towards a state premised on the logic of 'dictatorship of proletariat'. He therefore saw the moderate stance of the 'Mensheviks'⁸ in Russia as inconsequential to the actual goal of a socialist state.

5 Eduard Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism: A Criticism and Affirmation*, Schocken Books, New York, 1963.

6 The term evolutionary socialist is generally used for those who believe that 'socialism' can be established through gradual process by reforming the existing political system, unlike the orthodox Marxists who believed the revolution is a pre-condition to change the capitalist political order into socialist one.

7 For Lenin's critique on the politics and methods of trade union see "What is to be Done: The Burning Question of our Movement", <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/download/what-itd.pdf>.

8 Mensheviks were faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP). Considered to be moderate faction of the party, Mensheviks were apprehensive of the Bolsheviks approach to the 'revolution' and had differences with Lenin as well.

Lenin's conviction in the Marxian orthodoxy on the necessity of revolution ironically also meant changing some of the basic premises of classical Marxism to suit Russian reality. Russia then, for instance, wasn't industrially an advanced economy for revolution to come through according to Marx's prescription. Moreover, Lenin had little faith in any 'spontaneous revolution' emerging from the working class since, according to him, the working class lacked the necessary 'revolutionary consciousness' to actualise the revolution. Lenin, preoccupied with the seizure of political power, thus sets out to reformulate the classical Marxist doctrine, which will guide Russian society to revolution in an influential pamphlet titled "What is to be done?" first published in 1902,⁹ which turned out to be one of the most influential documents in the Marxist tradition.

Lenin reformulates classical Marxism primarily in three key ways – one, he argues that the revolution can happen in imperial Russia, despite the lack of an industrially advanced economy, proposing a thesis that even imperialism is a sufficient condition for the revolution to take place. Second, he saw that the industrial proletariat in urban areas would play a major role in the revolution. But since the working class lacks revolutionary consciousness, a 'Vanguard' is needed to lead society into the revolution. In the case of Russia, the Vanguard will be the Party of Bolsheviks. Third, and arguably most important for the purpose of this paper, is the need of PR (as mentioned above) to prepare the ground for the revolution and eventually lead it to its logical conclusion.

Lenin's exposition of PR is to be contextualised in his critique of the ways and methods of the moderate faction of

9 "What is to be Done: The Burning Question of our Movement", <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/download/what-itd.pdf>.

Russian Social Democrats, which he termed as 'economism'. By economism, Lenin meant the economic struggle by the industrial workers for better working conditions, channelized through institutions like trade-unions. For Lenin, this economic struggle alone was not sufficient to truly liberate the working class. While maintaining that this economic struggle waged by the industrial worker was important, Lenin saw its impact as limited. For true liberation, political struggle to overhaul the entire political order is necessary. This political struggle, which moves beyond the industries and captures the imagination across the country is a prerequisite for political liberation. And political struggle of this kind requires centrally organized PRs within the Vanguard party, dedicated entirely to the task of revolution because "*the struggle against the political police requires special qualities; it requires revolutionaries by profession.*"¹⁰ By PR, Lenin meant dedicated workers who are trained revolutionaries equipped to wage a sustained struggle against a more powerful enemy, the imperial state in the Russian context. The PR – who could be anyone, from intellectuals, students to workers – would primarily be responsible for an ideational as well as a conspiratorial role against the state.

The ideational role implied preparing the ideological frontier for the decisive political struggle against the state by making the masses 'conscious of the necessity of the revolution'. Arguably this ideational role was of critical importance since, according to Lenin, the working class lacked this basic prerequisite of revolutionary consciousness, thereby impeding the spontaneous 'revolution from within'. Thus, 'pushing from outside' or 'ideological instigation' is a necessity to sufficiently

10 Lenin as quoted in 'Robert Mayer, "Lenin and the Concept of Professional Revolutionary", *History of Political Thought*, Volume 14, Number 2, 1993, pp. 249-263.

prepare the working class for a sustained and decisive struggle because, according to Lenin,

...there has never been too much of such ‘pushing on from outside’; on the contrary, there has so far been all too little of it in our movement, for we have been stewing too assiduously in our own juice; we have bowed far too slavishly to the elementary ‘economic struggle of the workers against the employers and the government’. We professional revolutionaries must and will make it our business to engage in this kind of ‘pushing on’ a hundred times more forcibly than we have done hitherto.¹¹

The economic struggle alone, for Lenin, was not equipped with the expertise – ideological and operational – to ensure the political overhaul necessary for liberation. Lenin therefore, asserted emphatically the centrality of an ‘external agency’ like the PR, to raise class consciousness on the ideational front as well as for waging a sustained armed struggle.¹² The role of the PR is to bring that ideological and operational preparedness, thereby raising the ‘amateur’ to the status of the ‘professional’ revolutionary.

Three implications from Lenin are extremely critical to deconstruct the idea of revolution and the necessity of the PR in it: First, the improbability of a spontaneous revolution through a supposedly organic class struggle. Second, the necessity of an ‘external’ political agency to ‘instigate’ the revolutionary struggle from ‘outside’. And third, the centrality of the

11 “What is to be done: The Burning Question of our Movement”, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/download/what-itd.pdf> ; for the specific quote, see <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/iv.htm>.

12 Robert Mayer, “Lenin and the Concept of Professional Revolutionary”, *History of Political Thought*, Volume 14, Number 2, 1993, pp. 249-263.

‘Vanguard party’ and dedicated professional revolutionaries to the attainment of the final objective of the revolution. These implications were a major departure from the classical Marxist prescription of a spontaneous revolution emerging from within the working class against the capitalist system. Lenin, who saw revolution against the state peculiarly in the terms of ‘civil-war’,¹³ was consequently focused on preparing an army to eventually triumph in that war. Any compromise short of a war was unacceptable to Lenin and he justified the use of all available avenues to wage this ‘civil war’.

LENIN AND THE INDIAN MAOISTS

The Indian Maoist movement is generally traced back to the outbreak of violence in the village of Naxalbari in West Bengal in 1967. This sporadic violence was converted into an organised and concerted revolt with the formation of Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist) (CPI-ML) in 1969, under the leadership of Charu Majumdar. Within a few years of the formation of CPI-ML, the violent movement had spread across West Bengal, along with a sizeable footprint in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, among others.¹⁴ The formation of CPI-ML was premised on the idea that parliamentary, democratic ways were incapable of bringing a socialist order into being, and armed revolt against the state was, consequently, the only option. The party adopted the title ‘Marxist-Leninist’ – implying the rejection of methods other than the armed conflict, to capture political power.

13 Israel Getzler, “Lenin’s Conception of Revolution As Civil War”, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Volume 74, Number 3, 1996, pp. 464-472.

14 See Harsh V, Pant and Akshay Ranade, ‘India’s National Security Challenges and State Response’ in Michael Clarke, et. al. (eds.), ‘Palgrave Handbook of National Security’, 2022, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 187-218.

The initial momentum of the movement after the creation of CPI-ML soon fizzled out, with the arrests of prominent leaders as well as the emergence of various factions within the CPI-ML, leading to the creation of multiple splinter groups.¹⁵ Yet, the movement continued – on the ideological as well as the operational front. Ideologically, the movement embraced the Leninist distrust of non-revolutionary, democratic means, but operationally gravitated more towards the military strategy of Mao Tse-Tung, who led the Communist Revolution in China.

Mao Tse-Tung's post revolution People's Republic of China (PRC) was a major experiment after Lenin, at creating a socialist state premised on the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Mao had heavily borrowed from Lenin and his concept of the Vanguard, and adopted it, with adjustments to Chinese realities. Unlike Russia, China was primarily an agrarian society, and therefore, agricultural peasants and not the industrial workers, were the primary focus of the revolution. Militarily too, Mao adopted a distinct strategy from that of Lenin. He envisioned an enduring doctrine of Protracted People's War (PPW) which projected a sustained, long-term, violent campaign against the state, beginning from countryside and led by agrarian peasants.¹⁶ The PPW sought to develop a strong base in the rural areas through peasants, and progressively planned to capture the cities in the final assault. Like Lenin, Mao also departed from orthodox Marxism regarding the necessity of the capitalist system for revolution. Mao peculiarly described China as a semi-feudal, semi-colonial state and argued that a revolution was possible and necessary in China as well. He scripted a three staged PPW – strategic defensive, preparation for strategic offensive and the strategic

15 Ibid.

16 Bernard D. Mello, "What is Maoism?", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume 44, 2009, pp. 39-48.

counter-offensive – to ensure a movement towards a socialist state in China.¹⁷

The evolving armed communist movement in India saw the material as well as political realities in the country resonating more with Chinese socio-economic realities. Consequently, in the operational areas, the import of Maoist ideas got entrenched in the discourse, with a call for replicating the Chinese-style revolution in India. Charu Mazumdar, who led the initial violent insurrection in West Bengal, was unapologetic in submitting the attempted 'Indian revolution' under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party when he declared,

...a People's Democratic India is no longer a distant objective. The first rays of the red sun have already lit up the coasts of Andhra and will tinge the other states also before long. A radiant India bathed in the rays of this red sun will continue to shine brightly forever. Every communist must exert his entire effort and energy to bring about this glorious future. Victory certainly belongs to us because China's Chairman is our Chairman and China's path is our path.¹⁸

The movement got its most decisive fillip when different parties and groups subscribing to this frame of thought announced their merger in 2004 into the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist).¹⁹ The CPI-Maoist (hereafter

17 Mao Tse Tung, *On Protracted War*, Foreign Language Press, Peking, 1967.

18 The full text of Charu Mazumdar's article titled "China's Chairman Is Our Chairman: China's Path Is Our Path" is available here, <https://cpiml.org/library/charu-mazumdar-collected-writings/formation-of-communist-party-of-india-marxist-leninist-22-april-1969/chinas-chairman-is-our-chairman-chinas-path-is-our-path/>.

19 Anil Kumar, "PWG and MCC merge to form new party", *The Times of India*, October 14, 2004, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/patna/pwg-and-mcc-merge-to-form-new-party/articleshow/885422.cms>.

Maoist Party) then ushered in one of the most violent phases in Indian history and continues to be the face of the Left Wing insurgency in India.

The formation of the Maoist Party was practically a renewal of the Maoist insurgency, which had been in troubled waters in the previous decades. The Maoist Party led the efforts to recoup the strategy to sustain its war against the Indian state, both in ideological and military terms. And this is where we see the merger of Leninist and Maoists ideas, which the Maoist Party clearly spelt out in its document, *Strategy and Tactics of Indian Revolution*, where it declared “the Strategy and Tactics of the Indian Revolution should be formulated by creatively applying the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism to the concrete conditions prevailing in our country”.²⁰ To justify the necessity of revolution in India, like Mao, the Maoist Party conveniently dubbed India as a “*semi-colonial, semi-feudal system under neo-colonial form of indirect rule*”²¹ and that the targets of the Indian revolution were identified as “*imperialism, feudalism and comprador bureaucratic big bourgeoisie*”.²² This politically convenient depiction of the contemporary Indian state was intended to ensure the theoretical and ideological applicability of Leninism as well as Maoism to the Indian context, and thereby to delegitimize the Indian state. The final objective was, thus, to capture political power and bring about the ‘New Democratic Revolution’ (NDR) through an “armed agrarian revolutionary war”, i.e., the Protracted

20 The document titled “The Strategy and Tactics of Indian Revolution” (Hereafter the Strategy and Tactics Document) can be accessed from here <https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/documents/papers/strategy.htm#:~:text=Thus%20the%20political%20strategy%20of,the%20backs%20of%20the%20Indian.>

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

People's War (PPW) on the lines of the Chinese revolution where "war will be carried out by encircling the cities from the countryside and thereby finally capturing them."²³ In the entire course of the PPW, the Maoist Party assumed the role of the 'consolidated political vanguard of the Indian proletariat' with Marxism-Leninism Maoism and its guiding ideology. The Party, the Peoples Liberation Guerilla Army (PLGA), the military wing of the Maoist Party tasked with the military role, and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which consists of the proletariat, peasantry, the urban petty-bourgeoisie²⁴ and the national bourgeoisie (middle and small bourgeoisie), collectively form the 'three magic weapons' in the quest of the NDR.

With the applicability of Maoism in the military domain accepted by the Maoists in India, the focus on peasants in the rural area was inevitable. Yet, a peculiar trend visible, particularly after the formation of the Maoist party, was the expansion of the geographic space on the strategic radar of the Maoists to particularly include urban spaces.

The Maoist movement, since its inception, had decisively focused on the rural areas along Chinese lines, but there was a renewed interest in and focus on urban areas, which became prominent in the more recent assessments of the Maoists themselves. The urban centers which, according to the Maoists, were the strongholds of the 'enemy', had previously lacked deserved attention, resulting in party major strategic setbacks for the Maoist Party. As a corrective measure, the Maoist Party sought to reorient its energies and strategies to include

23 Ibid.

24 Petty Bourgeoisie includes all those who generally fall in the middle-class incomes groups that are derived mainly from their own manual or mental labour. Eg they include small traders, to professionals like doctors, lawyers, university professors, students etc.

urban areas, with specific objectives such as building a mass movement, ensuring ideological support to the party in urban centers, infiltrating the enemy ranks and getting more recruits to the party, among others. In other words, the urban movement would focus on securing the legitimacy for the NDR through the people in urban areas and would prepare them for the final assault against the Indian state.

This is where the application of the Leninist notion of the PR becomes critical. In fact, in the strategy and tactics document, the Maoist Party categorically identify their role in urban areas when they declare that, the

...working class leadership is the indispensable condition for New Democratic revolution in India. The working class exercises its leadership in the revolution by organizing all sections of the people in anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggles and by sending its advanced detachment to the rural areas.

To achieve this, the document further stresses,

...we have to free the working class from the influence of revisionist and reactionary politics. Only by organizing and arousing the working class and continuously drawing its advanced section into the party that the party can be strengthened, its class basis made firm and working-class leadership on the New Democratic Revolution be guaranteed.

And therefore, it is necessary to “concentrate on building Party cells among workers in key industries in cities and towns and develop full-time professional revolutionaries from the working class...”²⁵

25 Strategy and Tactics Document, op. cit.

In other words, the success of the NDR depends on the success of the urban objective and thus accords an inevitability to the urban movement, which in turn hinges on the effectiveness of the PRs.

MAOIST MOVEMENT IN INDIA- THE URBAN INEVITABLE

“The Central Committee (CC) assessed in 2021 January that the several people’s movements going on in the country for the past five years shall develop into a countrywide ‘spate of people’s movement’”, the CPI-Maoist observed in its document, “A Message from the Central Committee of the CPI (Maoist) to the ranks of the Party, Revolutionary People’s organs and Revolutionary People on the Occasion of 18th Anniversary of the Party.”²⁶ The document goes on to claim that the party had successfully infiltrated the farmers’ agitation against the three Farm Laws and that this ‘militant struggle of the farmers’ with the “help of workers, students, democratic forces, the entire oppressed classes, sections and nationalities forced the Modi government to withdraw the three Agrarian laws.”²⁷ The document also boasted not just of the active participation but also of the ‘leading efforts’ in the agitation against the *Agnipath* scheme for recruitment to the Armed Forces, where several ‘Mass Organisations’ actively worked to consolidate ‘similar struggles’. Calling for the zealous celebration of 18 years of the formation of the Party, the

26 The Document titled “A Message from the Central Committee of the CPI (Maoist) to the ranks of the Party, Revolutionary People’s organs and Revolutionary People on the Occasion of 18th Anniversary of the Party” was accessed from <http://www.bannedthought.net/India/CPI-Maoist-Docs/Statements-2022/2022-08-13-CC-MessageToPeopleOnSept21-18thAnniversaryOfParty-Eng-View.pdf>; Soumitra Bose, “Maoist document confirms urban focus, infiltration”, *The Times of India*, September, 19, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/maoist-document-confirms-urban-focus-infiltration/articleshow/94288686.cms>.

27 Ibid.

document goes on to urge “members, sympathizers, associates, supporters and mass based open and secret committees and organizations to implement the guidelines of their apex body to guide, provoke and infiltrate ‘spate of people’s movements’ across the country.”²⁸ In other words, the document appreciated and also anticipating the increased urban role for the Party in furthering the so-called ‘New Democratic Revolution’. This increased role in urban areas was a consequence of the well-crafted strategy for the urban movement which took into account the evolving socio-economic and political trends in urban areas, and integrated these with the broader paradigm of Leninism, to usher in the NDR. This strategic focus on the urban areas was one of the most distinctive developments since the formation of the CPI Maoist in 2004.

Ever since the infamous merger of various splinter groups subscribing to the ideology of armed revolution against the Indian state with CPI Maoist in 2004, the efforts to renew, sustain and expand the PPW has been institutionalized through a detailed strategy, with different kinds of organizations being delegated with different responsibilities. This is where a well thought out strategy for the urban centers was laid down and, consequently, institutional work charted out within the organization. Though the central focus of the armed movement has always been the rural areas where the peasants – who are supposed to be the main force of the revolution – dominated the demography, the strategic significance of the urban spaces was never lost on the leaders of the armed movement since the outset.

For instance, when the Naxalbari revolt first broke out from the countryside in the state of West Bengal in the late 1960s, the urban spaces were not untouched by the movement.

28 Soumitra Bose, *op. cit.*

In fact, urban youth from elite and prestigious colleges were radicalized by the armed ideology and actively participated in the 'revolutionary struggle'.²⁹ This participation of urban youth was consciously sought by the then leadership, including the likes of Charu Mazumdar, who explicitly invited the youth to join and lead the movement.³⁰ Curiously, even the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA's) assessment of the first Naxalbari outburst hinted at this trend when a dispatch from the CIA, now declassified, observed:

Naxalites have thus far concentrated their efforts in two primary areas: (1) party work in the countryside to bridge the gap between urban leaders and peasant followers; and (2) organization and education of student groups. Recently, particularly in the Communist-oriented state of West Bengal, they have begun to proselytize among urban workers.³¹

The document, further, pointed to the deliberations of the All-India Congress of the CPI – ML in May 1970, where the leaders had specifically emphasized concentrating on urban areas.³²

While it is true that the utility and necessity of the urban movement was never really ignored entirely by past Maoist-inspired groups and that the direct 'urban' angle in the Maoism is not a new phenomenon, it is equally true that the initial years

29 For the account of the Naxalbari revolt, see for instance, Deepak K. Gupta, "The Naxalites and the Maoist Movement in India", *Democracy and Security*, Volume 3, Number 2, 2007, pp. 157-188.

30 Rajeshwari Dasgupta, "Towards the 'New Man': Revolutionary Youth and Rural Agency in the Naxalite Movement", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume 41, Number 19, 2006, pp. 1920-1927.

31 The observations are from the CIA report titled, "The Naxalites: India's Extreme Left-Wing Communist", The Document can be accessed here <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp85t00875r001100090048-5>.

32 Ibid.

of the movement decidedly focused on the rural areas, drawing heavily on Mao's experience in China, and the urban areas were accorded a secondary position in the strategic scheme of things. But with the formation of CPI Maoist in 2004 the urban dimension got an institutional fillip with a conscious role being conceived for the urban areas along with a network of different kinds of organisations drawn for this work. In the document *Our Work in Urban Areas*³³ published somewhere around 2007, the Maoists evaluated the trend of movement to that time with regards to the urban areas and also charted the way forward.

The document clearly laments the fact that urban areas had hitherto not been accorded the priority they deserved and observes

...throughout the past thirty years, and in most of the main areas of the Party's work there has been a disregard towards the tasks of the urban movement and Party... We have failed to grasp the dialectical relationship between the rural and urban movements. Having understood the formulation that rural work is primary and urban work is secondary in a mechanical way, we concentrated most of our leadership forces only in rural work.³⁴

Noting the peculiarity of urbanisation in the Indian context, the document asserts:

33 The said document was drafted by the Urban Sub-Committee of the CPI Maoist and allegedly, Kobad Ghandy *alias* Rajan played a key role in coming up with the plan. For details about the document, refer to P. V. Ramana, *Understanding India's Maoists: Select Documents*, Pentagon Press, IDSA, New Delhi, 2014, pp. 161 -225.

34 See the full document titled "Urban Perspective: Our Work in Urban Areas" at <https://www.satp.org/document/paper-acts-and-oridinances/urban-perspective---our-work-in-urban-areas> (hereafter referred as the Urban Perspective Document).

...the percentage of the working class and the urban population in India is much higher than it was at the time of the Chinese revolution, and that therefore the urban areas and the working class in India will have a relatively more important role to play in the revolution.³⁵

The implication for the urban work then is clearly spelt out as the document declares,

...without a strong urban revolutionary movement, the ongoing people's war faces difficulties; further, without the participation of the urban masses it is impossible to achieve countrywide victory.

Quoting Mao, it adds further, "the final objective of the revolution is the capture of the cities, the enemy's main bases, and this objective cannot be achieved without adequate work in the cities."³⁶ So, while there was recognition of the necessity of the urban movement even in the earlier *avatars* of the Maoists, the Maoist Party took up the task of coherently drawing the strategy for its urban activities and appeared to consciously work in that direction. If we study the nature of the work expected in the urban areas, the direct link with the ideas of Lenin and the role ascribed by him to the 'intellectuals' in the urban areas is unmissable.

The Urban Perspective Documents identifies the following three objectives for their urban activities:³⁷

Mobilise and organise the basic masses and build the Party on that basis: The task here is to focus on building a mass base for the Party. Here specific emphasis is placed on students, middle class employees and intellectuals. Specific

35 Urban Perspective Document.

36 Ibid.

37 These main objectives are compiled from and explained in brief from the Urban Perspective Document.

target groups who are to be radicalised for the revolutionary movement are women, *Dalits*, and religious minorities.

Building the United Front: This implies building an alliance of the different working-class groups and radicalising them with the revolutionary ideology against the state.

Military task: The military task in urban areas is to complement the main military work in the rural areas by sending cadres to the countryside, infiltrating enemy ranks, organizing in key industries, sabotage actions in coordination with the rural armed struggle, logistical support, etc.

The urban areas are thus expected to contribute to both the political and military aspects of the revolution, but apparently, the Party attributes the task of organising the basic masses as primary because, “without widely mobilizing the masses it is not possible to perform any of the other tasks such as building of United Front and performing the military tasks.” The long-term objective for the urban areas therefore “is to win over the masses, including the vast majority of the workers, and to build up the enormous strength of the working class in preparation for the decisive struggle in the future.”³⁸

Two reflections become pertinent with regard to the broader ‘urban approach’ of the Maoists. One, the urban dimension is inevitable in the comprehensive strategy to usher in the NDR. The lack of focus on the urban sector in the initial decades of the movement was sought to be corrected by the Maoist Party by emphasising the ‘dialectical urban-rural’ relationship in protracted people’s war and conceiving a definite urban role for the Party. Second, which flows from the first, is that urban activities must first focus on building a strong ‘urban vanguard’ by proliferating the Maoist ideology in different sections of the

38 Urban perspective Document, op. cit.

urban working class. This strategy in the initial phase would complement the rural military effort and, in the long run, would help in actualising the final assault on the Indian state. Ganapathy, the former general secretary of CPI Maoist pointed this out in no uncertain terms when he remarked, “unless the urban India is drawn to the struggle for the seizure of power, our revolution will remain incomplete.”³⁹

MASS ORGANISATIONS AND THE WORK IN THE URBAN AREAS

The success of building a strong urban movement essentially depends upon the efficacy of the Party in building a strong institutional architecture in the urban spaces that will support the objectives of the Party and compliment the struggle in the rural areas. Still, a practical impediment as identified by the Maoist Party itself, is the lack of a strong and wide-spread ideological support base for the Maoists in the urban areas. Also, the urban spaces, which according to the Party are “bastions of enemy bases”, are characterised by a strong state that impedes the core functions of the Party. In circumstances like this, the fulfilment of the urban plan requires a long-term strategic outlook where the task of the Party “is to win over the masses, including the vast majority of the workers, and to build up the enormous strength of the working class in preparation for the decisive struggle in the future.”⁴⁰ Proliferation of Maoist ideals among the urban population and developing a positive attitude towards the Party was key to achieve this objective.

To meet this objective, an intricate network of Mass Organisations was conceived “to build the broadest mass base” and “help the Party to have wide contact with masses, so that it can work under cover for a long time and accumulate

39 As quoted in Bidyut Chakrabarty, *Communism in India: Events, Process and Ideology*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2014, p.155.

40 Urban Perspective Document, op. cit.

strength.”⁴¹ This intricate network comprises of different variations of organisations – those that maintain direct links with the Maoist Party to those who apparently work under various thematic covers to meet the objectives designed by the Maoist Party. These thematic covers could be of caste issues, human rights concerns, worker unions, etc.

Ostensibly, the mass organisations formed out of these thematic covers use these issues as an entry point to infiltrate into the people within organisation and explore opportunities to involve them in the activities of the Maoist Party. The intellectuals like the lawyers, university professors, activists play an important role in these types of Mass Organisations to ensure the support for the Maoist objectives in the urban areas. Interestingly, Maoists employ a tactical flexibility to reach out to those organizations which may not be directly sympathetic to Maoists cause but have grievances against the state or society. This tactical unity with different organisation is then a precursor to their integration into broader revolutionary activities. The tactical outreach is primarily two pronged – one, infiltrating existing organisation or movements which may be ideologically different but are apparently against the existing ruling dispensation and two is to create organisations which are overtly for certain thematic issues but implicitly share the Maoist goal of an overhaul of the existing state. The Maoist Party therefore puts a lot of efforts in conceiving these different kinds of Mass Organisations and to support the objective of NDR.

A classification of different kinds of Mass Organisations as compiled from the Urban Perspective Document is given below. It seeks to define the roles of different Mass Organisations and contextualize these in urban areas.

41 Urban Perspective Document, op. cit.

'A Professional Revolutionary'

Secret Revolutionary Mass Organisations	Open & Semi Open Revolutionary Mass Organisations	Legal Mass Organisations
More significance in the rural areas	Significance in rural as well as urban areas	Extremely significant for urban areas
Remain underground – maintain direct link with the Maoist Party	Openly propagate the politics of NDR	Formed on an explicit political basis- Maintain legal existence – Ensure No link to the party at all
Focused primarily on instigating armed revolt	Use of the available legal opportunities to carry on revolutionary propaganda	Provide various other support to the Party cadre and activities
Develop secret organisational structure to carry the message of the party elsewhere	Cannot be a permanent form of mass organisation in the urban areas.	Take form of trade unions, student bodies, women's fronts, caste organizations, writers' associations, teachers' associations, cultural bodies, etc.

The immediate role of Mass Organisations in the urban areas is, therefore, to provide the ideological fodder for radicalisation of urban spaces to the compliment the efforts of the revolutionary war. The urban areas are supposed to ideologically lead the movement and bring about the

consciousness needed to prepare for the final assault on the state and therefore are extremely critical to the final objective of NDR and thus reflects the centrality of the PRs in achieving those objectives.

Considering the specific strategic roadmap outlined for the urban areas and conception of a complex institutional architecture to initiate, sustain, and expand the Maoist urban network with the long-term objective, the effort to increase Maoist presence and influence in the urban spaces is not really surprising. Though the movement was never untouched from the urban angle, concerns became alarming with an emerging pattern where Maoists infiltrated segments in urban areas where, hitherto, they had limited presence. The issue came to a national limelight in 2006, when heavy arms were recovered in the urban areas in Andhra Pradesh.⁴² Subsequently, police also detected an elaborate network the Maoists had built to manufacture rocket parts in Chennai and transport them to different parts of the country.⁴³ Similar arms manufacturing units of the Maoist party, which manufactured improvised hand grenades and rocket propelled grenades, were also found to be active in the stronghold areas of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Bihar.⁴⁴

While this was primarily on the military front, a more pronounced and arguably more concerning trend was the

42 “600 Rocket Launchers seized in Andhra”, *Hindustan Times*, September 8, 2006, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/600-rocket-launchers-seized-in-andhra/story-EHQisBO00pZRKSKNSyQj2I.html>.

43 Sanjay Behera, “Maoists turn to net for making rocket launchers”, *The Times of India*, November 9, 2009, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/maoists-turn-to-net-for-making-rocket-launchers/articleshow/2552997.cms>.

44 In 2013, the R.P.N Singh, then the Minister of State for Home Affairs informed this to the Lok Sabha. See the response of the Minister dated May 7, 2013, here <https://www.mha.gov.in/MHA1/Par2017/pdfs/par2013-pdfs/ls-070513/6533.pdf>.

infiltration of Maoist influence in sectors like industry, social and cultural organisations, organisations explicitly based on caste, gender, religion, etc., which were formed to address individual grievances within the state and society. The main objective of this infiltration was to exploit these existing fault lines and influence a peculiar political action premised on the logic of class struggle with the 'ruling class', and to prepare grounds for the PPW against the state. Maoist 'Front Organisations'⁴⁵ – which maintained a separate legal existence from the Maoist Party, but worked to garner support for it – became extremely handy in exploiting these fault lines. Intelligence agencies had earlier warned about "several frontal organisations of CPI-Maoist that have penetrated into unions, workers groups and organisations working in the social sector."⁴⁶ Maoists themselves boasted about their role in the anti-farm laws and anti-*Agnipath* scheme protests.⁴⁷ Similarly, there are front organisations masquerading as human rights groups, *Dalit* and other caste-based groups, womens' rights advocacy groups, cultural organisations, etc., whose primary task is to use these social-political issues in the urban areas, and to appropriate and radicalise their movement to prepare for a violent clash against the state. Increasing numbers of

45 A kind of Mass organisations, the Front Organizations are the off-shoots CPI Maoist. They maintain separate existence and profess distinct ideology to escape the legal scrutiny. Ministry of Home Affairs in one of its responses to Lok Sabha on February 18, 2014, submitted a list 74 identified Front Organizations in different states. The response and the list can be accessed here <https://www.mha.gov.in/MHA1/Par2017/pdfs/par2014-pdfs/1s-180214/3838.pdf>.

46 Abhishek Bhalla, "Exclusive: Maoists becoming part of labour unions in Delhi-NCR, say intelligence agencies", *India Today*, July 3, 2013, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/maoists-at-the-gate-red-ultras-infiltrating-labour-unions-and-workers-groups-in-delhi-168930-2013-07-03>.

47 Soumitra Bose, op. cit.

individuals have been arrested for direct or indirect links with the Party from the urban, areas point to this trend.

Amongst the targeted sectors, the more vulnerable section is educational institutions, such as colleges and universities, where the increasing Maoist influence is indicating troubling trends. Young college students have always been a target of radical Maoist propaganda since the onset of the first Naxalbari outburst. Ideologues like Charu Mazumdar had consciously focused on this demography to radicalise and initiate them into this violent movement. The trend continues even today, with new zeal and finesse. The *Urban Perspective Document* itself repeatedly urges a focus on the youth and students, to enlist them into the movement. Consequently, there have been instances where students have joined the movement directly from universities and colleges, at times under the influence of their teachers.⁴⁸ Various avenues, such as student politics, socio-cultural groups espousing peculiar socio-political causes, camps, etc., are apparently used to ensure this enlisting. For instance, the Democratic Students Union (DSU), which was once an active students' association in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) has been identified as a front organisation. DSU and its later splinter group, the Bhagat Singh Ambedkar Student Association (BASO) both maintained an ideological affinity with Maoism⁴⁹ and, interestingly, it was the same

48 There are several cases where college students were found to have been part of the underground Maoist activities. For more recent account of this activities, see Sidharth Rai, "Maharashtra Police reveals JNU, DU's dark Maoist secret", *India Today*, February 23, 2016, <https://www.indiatoday.in/mail-today/story/maharashtra-police-reveals-jnu-dus-dark-maoist-secret-310022-2016-02-22>.

49 For a more detailed understanding of the ideology and politics of DSU and BASO, see Jean Thomas Martelli, "The Politics of Our Selves: Left self-fashioning and the production of representative claims in everyday Indian campus politics", *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 55, Number 6, 2021, pp. 1972-2045.

DSU which had organised the 'cultural evening' that allegedly celebrated the convicted terrorist Afzal Guru.⁵⁰

The peculiar case of Kabir Kala Manch (KKM), which came under scrutiny during the ongoing Bhima-Koregaon controversy, is another case in point. KKM, which apparently maintains that it is a cultural organisation speaking on the issues of caste atrocities, has again been alleged to be a front organisation and has been under the intelligence radar for its Maoist links. In 2011, the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) had arrested members of KKM for their alleged links with the Maoist Party. Investigations revealed that some KKM members were present at a 15-day "study camp" held in the Khed area in Pune district, which was attended by the slain Maoist Milind Baburao Teltumbde, sometime around 2010. The camp was projected as a training programme for teachers, but was used to propagate the Maoist ideology and seek their participation in the movement.⁵¹ In 2012, R.R. Patil, the then Home Minister of Maharashtra had submitted to the Legislative Assembly that there was evidence of such camps being held around Pune.⁵² Two former students of the University of Hyderabad were arrested for plotting to kill Appa Rao, the Vice Chancellor of the University in 2018. The two students, Ankala Prudviraj and Chandan Kumar Mishra,

50 Aranya Shankar, "JNU students clash over event on Afzal Guru", *The Indian Express*, February 10, 2023, <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/jnu-students-clash-over-event-on-afzal-guru/>.

51 Chandan Haygunde, "Slain Maoist leader Milind Teltumbde's Pune links include 'organising Naxal camp', Elgaar Parishad case", *The Indian Express*, November 16, 2021, <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/pune/maoist-leader-milind-teltumbde-pune-elgaar-parishad-7623382/>.

52 Chandan Haygunde, "Evidence of Naxal training camp in Pune", NCP leader R R Patil in Assembly in 2012", *The Indian Express*, February 3, 2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/pune/evidence-of-naxal-training-camp-in-pune-ncp-leader-r-r-patil-in-assembly-in-2012-6248048/>.

were influenced by the Maoist-Leninist ideology and were in touch with the Maoists after the suicide of Rohith Vemula. The students had an earlier history of links with the banned outfit and the assassination was apparently planned by Maoists.⁵³

The ongoing complex Bhima-Koregaon case is another interesting instance where the complicated dynamics of Maoism and urban civil society groups is being explored as the case progresses. While the final verdict is yet to come in the case, the profile of the prominent individuals accused and arrested hints at a probable influence of the Maoist mechanism. The following is a compilation⁵⁴ of affiliations of the accused in the Bhima-Koregaon case, with identified Maoist Front Organisations.

Name	Nature of Activity	Association with any front organisation
Surendra Gadling	Lawyer and Dalit Rights Activities	Indian Association of People’s Lawyers
Rona Wilson	Human Rights Activist	Committee for Release of Political Prisoners
Arun Ferriera	Human Rights Activist	Committee for Protection of Democratic Rights and the Indian Association of People’s Lawyers.
Sagar Gorkhe	Anti-caste activist	Kabir Kala Manch

53 “Arrest of two ex-students foiled plot to kill Hyderabad Central University V-C, say police”, *The Indian Express*, April 2, 2018, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/plot-to-kill-hyderabad-central-university-v-c-podile-apparao-foiled-two-maoists-arrested-5119324/>.

54 This compilation is done by sourcing information various reports, judgements available of the accused.

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Ramesh Gaichor	Anti-caste activist	Kabir Kala Manch
Jyoti Jagtap	Anti-caste activist	Kabir Kala Manch
Varavara Rao	Writer, Poet, Human Rights Activist	Revolutionary Writer’s Association; was previously an active member of the People’s War Group

It is to be noted that a multiplicity of cases against these individuals are still under trial and it may well turn out that they are not guilty of the several crimes they have been accused of. However, their association with Maoist front organisations raises some concerns which cannot be ignored entirely, especially when seen in the context of the role of front organisations in urban areas.

This trend of exploiting the problems within the civil society for their ideological purposes will remain a major concern for state agencies. In fact, a recent document recovered from the CPI Maoists urges cadres to “infiltrate every strata of urban society, ranging from housing societies, puja pandals, sports clubs, slum committees, factories, educational institutions, political and government institutions, to even security and intelligence agencies.”⁵⁵ The document unapologetically elaborates on the strategy adopted by the Maoists for their struggle in urban spaces. Such influence in the civil society is a major risk, primarily because, unlike the possession, transfer and use of arms, which is an obvious act of violence,

55 For the report on the document, see Soumitra Bose, “Maharashtra: Maoists now plan to infiltrate forces, Durga mandals, slums”, *The Times of India*, September 21, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/maharashtra-maoists-now-plan-to-infiltrate-forces-durga-mandals-slums/article94338644.cms>.

such radicalisation is rather subtle and extremely difficult to legally substantiate, even as it creates a conducive ecosystem to instigate the politics of violence against the state.

An affidavit submitted by United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government to the Supreme Court in 2013 succinctly summarized the gravity of the threat the Maoists pose in urban areas

...ideologues and supporters of the CPI (Maoist) party in cities and towns have undertaken a concerted and systematic propaganda against the State to project the State in poor light and also malign it through disinformation. In fact, it is these ideologues who have kept the Maoist movement alive and are in many ways more dangerous than the cadres of the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army.⁵⁶

CONCLUSIONS

The fact that Maoism constitutes a major internal security threat is incontrovertible. It may appear to be waning now but the nature of the Maoist movement suggests that this is a tactical phase of retreat, to recoup and regroup, to revise their strategies, endure the temporary setback, and come back with increased strength. This classic 'one step forward, four steps back', strategy of the Maoists is integral to their strategy to face the might of the 'strong Indian state'. The movement may appear to be waning 'materially' but it continues to fight on the 'ideological' front, to keep the movement alive.

At the core of this ideological plan is to persistently work towards delegitimising the Indian state in the eyes of the

56 "Maoist ideologues more dangerous than Naxals, UPA regime had told SC", *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, August 31, 2018, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/maoist-ideologues-more-dangerous-than-naxals-upa-regime-had-told-sc/story-MtmKrWgn6E2oECTzlsUWPL.html>.

common masses. As Varavara Rao once unapologetically proclaimed, “the parliamentary system does not suit our country. The only solution to it is to follow the path of Naxalbari and free ourselves from these semi-Fascist, semi-colonial forces, paving the way to a real democracy. You can’t fight it without taking arms in your hands.”⁵⁷

The Maoists have consistently adopted this line and have sought an armed struggle to replace the Indian state with a totalitarian system. But as the armed struggle from the rural areas faced several challenges, Maoists have reconsidered their strategies and priorities to meet the contemporary realities of India. The focus on the urban spaces and directly targeting civil society has attained renewed focus in this reevaluation. The current nature of Maoism, as noted by National Security Advisor Ajit Doval is a classic case of fourth generation warfare “a warfare where the enemy is invisible and the battle is for the control of civil society – through coercion, controlling the hearts and minds of the people or delivering results by redressing grievances of the people.”⁵⁸ The urban areas are targeted to infiltrate various civil social structures and exploit their grievances to radicalise them against the state. The radicalisation is premised on the ideas of revolution, which reflects an unbroken ideological chain of thought, going back up to Lenin.

Lenin’s notion of Professional Revolutionaries, i.e., individuals fully dedicated to the task of revolution and guiding the struggle to create a new state, has been innovatively reconceived by the Indian Maoists with a military as well as

57 The quote is taken from an interview of Dr. Varavara Rao given to Rediff in 1997. The full text of the interview is available here. <https://m.rediff.com/news/jul/05naxal.htm>.

58 Ajit Doval, “Left Wing Extremism – The Threat and Response”, Vivekanand International Foundation, May 21, 2010, <https://www.vifindia.org/print/348>.

ideological role. Given the fact that the final military task in the long-drawn battle for the NDR is currently a distant goal, the immediate objective of the urban movement is to build a strong ideological base, sympathetic to the cause of the armed revolt. The PRs in the Indian context are therefore working through various mass organisations to use existing fault lines in the state and society to their ideological advantage. Consequently, we see these Maoists camouflaging themselves as various 'civil society' groups to exploit the democratic rights and liberties accorded by the Indian Constitution in their struggle for NDR.

The Maoists are also increasingly tapping into socio-political and economic movements, such as the protests against the farm laws, the anti-*Agnipath* scheme protests and anti-CAA protests, to use this mass momentum for their violent agenda.

This is not to discredit the genuine, constitutionally acceptable forms of protests. In fact, the robustness of democracy depends on the space available for people to constitutionally protest for their rights and demands. But it is important to make a reasoned distinction between the 'protest within Indian democracy' and 'protest against Indian democracy'. This distinction is, however, extremely blurred, making it difficult to identify miscreants from genuine protestors. As a consequence, the state is often accused of using its power to quell dissent in the name of fighting Maoism. While it is not inconceivable that the state uses force to quell inconvenient protests, it is equally important to be conscious of the fact that Maoists have been using this thin line to their strategic advantage as well.

The study of Maoist documents and their contextualization within the broader Leninist and Maoist theoretical and conceptual underpinnings reveals that the urban movement is part of larger plan to wage an armed war against the Indian

state, with the objective of overthrowing it. That there certainly are problems within the Indian state and society only works to the advantage of the Maoists. The Maoists have been exploiting these issues to keep the movement alive, despite several setback in recent times. The focus on urban areas is to keep the ideological momentum alive and expand it, to support the Maoist Party's work in rural areas. To effectively counter Maoism in India requires an acceptance of this reality and a long-term political plan to respond to the propaganda and violence of the Maoists.