

Constitution of Women in Maoist Insurgency in India: Naxalite and Anti-Naxalite Approach

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Abstract

The up surging representation base of Women in the Maoist ranks in lower as well as higher level have failed to secure the attention, that it deserves in the Indian Security paradigm. The Maoists holding is in its abstaining phase, since many men & women in Naxalite force have either lost their lives in the war against the Indian Security Forces or have surrendered or have been arrested by the Police Forces. The Maoists who plea to rebuild the tribal rights, have gained substantial social acceptability due to rising participation of “Women”. Forty to fifty percent of the lower Maoist cadres promptly constitute women, who are serving as fresh fodder in the bloody war against the Indian State. While for many women, the movement evidenced a way to free themselves from the shackles of patriarchy, but the picture anyhow is not very pleasing. Since inception of this insurgency, gender equality has remained as backup job to be done and has been reversed by the larger ideals of class equality raised by this movement. The cases of sexual abuse experienced by women both; at the hands of Naxalites and State Security Forces are villainous. Since the “Female Body” is generally considered by the “Socio-Cultural Norms of Honor and Dignity”; some women find it difficult to blend into the society after having been abused. For many who surrendered to the Indian State Authorities, after quitting the Naxalite movement, found it extremely controversial, to restore their normal lives and so Indian State decided to employ Women Force Cadres to counter such Women Based Naxalite Groups. The paramount objective of this paper is young scholars having desire to explore the various aspects of lives of Women in Naxalite and Anti-Naxalite Spectrum; however authors with all level of proficiency may find useful intellection in the paper.

Key Words : Women, Maoist, Naxalite Movement, Indian Security, Indian State, Anti-Naxalite Force

Genesis : Inception of Women in Naxalite Movements

Bloodshed and truce have become synonymic with men and women reciprocally. Advantaged presentation of women as “pure victims” and men as “perpetrators” completely pose women’s experiences and participation in crime and violence in a war like situation of Naxalite Movements. Not only does this lead to suppressing women’s voices who commit acts of violence as trigger personnel but also jeopardizes their reintegration into society in post war phase. Limitless focus on women as agents at the humanitarian front of Naxalite Movement eludes the possibility of considering women’s role in crime and violence. Violent conflict leads to merging of public and private arenas, which in turn creates space for their activism; as giving women special skills to assess the role of weapons and war and to offer alternative models of self representation in dealing with war and social change.¹ It is this wide range of women’s involvement on two

sides of facet that is, to seek to cover in the context of Naxalite.ⁱⁱ Women's roles in warfare can be categorized into four ways:

- (a) The classic roles of victim and of instigator;
- (b) Combat support roles;
- (c) Virago roles that perform masculine functions without changing feminine appearance (such as warrior queens, women members of home militias, or all-female combat units); and (d) Warrior roles in which women become like men, often changing clothing and other gender markers.ⁱⁱⁱ

Combat and acts of violence are still mistakenly interpreted to be the store of men and the literature that fails to elaborate on involvement of women in acts of violence.^{iv} "Women are usually occupying base or menial positions such as cooks and drivers, secretaries or in some ornamental role. Although women's service in the armed forces is usually depicted by governments as a matter of equality, it is rare indeed that women climb out of the ranks."^v Therefore combat becomes this double edged sword where women suffer both as perpetrators and victims in both Naxalite and Anti-Naxalite movements.

Women sharing in significant manner in Guerrilla movements in many parts of the world, those of Nepal and Latin America remain the most recent and significant ones. A closer look at the apprehension that projects, women to join revolutionary guerrilla movements varies significantly. Some theorists suggest that, amalgamating oneself in public roles showed way for women, to get acquainted with political as well as revolutionary ideals. Men's out migration driven by economic downturn projected in structure of poor and impoverished woman headed household. This forced women to acquire new roles of bread earners and workers in the family. Certain theorists elaborate that the global wave of womanism in combination with changing societal needful roles were responsible for women's mobilization in the guerrilla armies of Naxalism.^{vi}

Although embracing the overarching target of bringing gender equality in the post revolutionary cycle, the Naxalite movement has separated themselves from translating that idea into practice. The gender roles are redefined, reasserted and re structured in a more militarized space which in essence is hyper masculinized behaviors.^{vii} The roles for women are then given, based on the socio-cultural phase, which prevails in a nation. The post war reconstruction efforts in several nations are often to bypass the needs and experiences of women, who have fought the war alongside men in specifically the Naxalite movements. Naxalite armies hire their outlook from the same patriarchal structures; therefore the culture of sexism does not drastically disappear. Women are more likely to activate in back support rather than absolute war positions, but these support roles can be strategic.^{viii}

Women : As The Reliable Face of Naxalite Movements

For apprehending the convoluted of the Naxalite movement, it is essential to figure out its genesis and how the dynamics have altered with time. The socio-political scenario, in which the Naxalbari struggle is based, merged with the peasant struggle that ignited protests in many neighboring villages. The social agitations, with class & caste ruptures, which were in a tumultuous cycle in the woods of Indian State, were further boosted by the then ongoing struggle.^{ix} This sparked retaliation of the local tribal groups joined together and

started recapturing lands that belonged to disadvantaged class and caste groups. This incident gained momentum and mushroomed into similar peasant struggles and acquired support from other revolutionaries who chose the path of an armed struggle to fight for the rights of India's dispossessed and disadvantaged.

Few striking revolutionaries, who orchestrated the movement, were Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal. The movement^x in its beginning was considered as simple lawlessness by the Indian State^{xi} which increased its power to crush it. The force of the Naxalite Movement has been slow down by many splinters and mergers due to surfacing differences in this Maoist ideology along different lines. Naxalite Movement has spread across various parts of the India and has claimed to fight against the structural inequality and poverty, which have damaged the mass of India's population, now even in urban areas too.

Even after accountable word of honor, Indian Government has not succeeded in countering the Naxalite Movements. Part of the problem lies in Utilizing to Military Response rather than Fixating on Social Synthesis and Improvement in the Naxalite Affected Region. All the regions, where Naxalism took a stronghold, are those of alarming poverty.^{xii} Ramchandra Guha in his essay argues that Adivasis have lost most and gained least in the post-independence development in India. The vacuum that exists in the development paradigm has helped the Naxalite revolutionaries to flow into it and secure support of the tribals.

The primal showcase of the Naxalites saw a great deal of literature and academic research published from that period; still role of women rarely manifest in the historiography of movement. What presented paramount affirmation to the movement and violence in the revolution, is the subordination of women and peasants by State and the landlords. In fact, in male memoirs of the Naxalite struggle, women are mentioned as nurturer, lover and glorious mother who laid bare the patriarchal structures so deeply encircled in going movement. Thus far, there existed a clear distinction in the perception of rural and urban women. The women peasant (disadvantaged group) who struck down the police officer was recurrently looked at with amazement, at times compared to a women panther by virtue of her speed and attack which fell in sharp contrast with the domestic attributes of urban middle class women.^{xiii}

Women confronted the patriarchal norms, left their homes and joined the guerrilla armies of Naxalite. Women often secured only politically subordinate jobs along with daily drudgery work of domesticity, they were employed to do 'courier work, provide logistical support to robberies, stealing arms, disrupt classes and examinations'. The influential thought provocation was that, women would be inefficient in organizational work. Many women left the safe confines of their household, to be a part of gram Biplab (Rural Revolution), driven by their desire to bring about socio-political modifications. Naxalite members however were not eager on women's participation, as it was asserting women, to find a shelter when the movement had to function in underground when cracked by State oppression. At various level incidents, women were simulated to be free domestic servants in shelters, which signify the all prevalent nature of traditional women roles.^{xiv}

With relation to Naxalites, former Naxalite women have claimed that the larger agenda of class struggle had subverted the ideals of gender equality. The Naxalite induced struggle in Bihar in the 70s questioned the

rampant positional hierarchy, which settled between the higher and lower caste. The women performed justly well in the struggle, however, when it came to reparation the land rights, were considered to be the reserve of men. The struggle also rarely ever addressed the idea of equal wages and land rights both for men and women. These incidents proved that, the revolution borrowed the same bases, which present in the society and did not seek to change or overhaul, the same structures which put women in a lower position.^{xv} What demands to be analyzed, is, what inspires women to join these Naxalite Movements, as well as, their ability as agents in these movement. Some theorists have claimed that, women as actors are aimed with a copious sense of political consciousness and collective identity^{xvi}, which supports their imagination of a better world. Vindhya in her essay has elaborated on the idea of “risky, unconventional activity when success is at best elusive and causes are often lost”^{xvii}, which tried to explore linkages between women’s participation in an organization, which directed to restrict power, through armed struggle and the inspiration to enhance dignity and wellbeing through a coup.

The presence of tribal women elicited a sense of romanticism even though there existed a long history tribal and peasant women’s participation, for example in Tebagha Movement.^{xviii} This springs from the fact that historical proofs were largely run by the middle class male who assembled similar ideas in the movement. The ideal image of the Naxalite remained confined to that of male Naxalite idols and some of the very integral accounts on Naxalites have alluded to the same image, thus compromising on the very intricate details of the socio-political base, which Naxalites came from. Although this can be assumed, that the country side (non metropolitan) women Naxalites were absent from the historical accounts due to double marginalization, primary for the fact that they emerged from rural or small town areas and secondary by virtue of them being women.

Middle class women due to narrow experiences in daily survival come out as less tougher political figures than women however they have better access to politics than lower class women. The impact of job loss and imprisonment is less on middle class women who have better access to coping strategies than lower class women. The onus of income generation falls less on middle class women which leaves room for activism and politics.^{xix} Women often reintegrate their women ideals after quitting the Naxalite Movements; as Ajitha who was one of the Naxalites, who fearlessly fought for the rights of dispossessed and disadvantaged now runs an organization called “Anweshi”, which is a women’s groups that fights against gender oppression, environmental and indigenous issues. This organization has unearthed several cases of sexual exploitation by politicians as well as various sex rackets.^{xx}

Maoist Insurgency in India : Role of Contemporary Women

The Naxalites have for great survived and engendered their agenda through the remarkable backing of women. Indian Government figures shows that, women form fifty to sixty percent of lower cadres comprise of women. The Maoist publication titled women martyrs if the Indian Revolution highlights, that women from the most oppressed sections join them in unrivaled numbers. More than ninety percent of these martyrs belong to the most oppressed classes of and oppressed castes from rural areas and hence women from the oppressed classes and castes form the revolutionary social force.^{xxi} The same document reveals that the

reasons that, drive women to join the revolutionary struggle might be different but one common feature can be identified amongst most of them and that is to be liberated from patriarchy and to liberate all the women from patriarchy.^{xxii} This document evokes heroic and sacrificial image^{xxiii} of the women Naxalite, which performed as fresh fodder for the Maoist propaganda.^{xxiv}

The women's question adds further validity to the struggle, presenting an image of dedicated, disciplined, devoted and militant women fighter that attracts more women into the movement, who want to escape the oppressive structures prevalent in society.^{xxv} In the case of Naxalites, there has been a multiform escalation in the number of women in combat roles which has earned further social acceptability for the Naxalites. It also becomes easier for women fighters, to support of poor and especially women, since they can penetrate into remote and neglected tribal areas without arousing suspicion in the eyes of police.^{xxvi} The Maoist document on women Martyrs also claims that women revolution in remote and interiors of the forests where women in turn have mobilized lakh of other women from the forest.^{xxvii}

For example, referring to the Colombian FARC^{xxviii} movement one of the main reasons for women to join the Guerrilla Army was to validate their identity. In a country where women are usually ignored, guerrillas are surrounded by symbols that give them an identity.^{xxix} Incentives that have driven Colombian women to join guerrilla armies are that of lack of socio economic and political rights and grinding poverty.^{xxx} This same angle can also be connected in the prior developments of Naxalite Movements in India and has been also developed by the time. The reasons in the case of women Naxalites would not separate in the case of Maoists. Some women have picked up guns rather than to escape the gender based violence shown by the Naxalites or the State or to vindicate that has been already burdened upon them. Amongst them one of the reasons for women to join the Naxalite is also to escape economic risks. The Naxalites also utilize women and young girls in their attacks, but to mention the naxal leadership is yet to include any prominent women.^{xxxi}

The statements of few female guerrillas resonate of evidences that young girls have been recruited in the struggle, thought that has not always taken place under the influence of force. Girls have joined by low poverty conditions, to break from the shackles of patriarchy. Some men and women comrades, who have surrendered in Chhattisgarh have revealed they are not allowed to have children even after marriage in order to not sabotage their fighting capability. Women are made to forcefully undergo abortion and men are forced to undergo vasectomy to restrict child birth. These concerted measures portray deprivation of women's rights for the sake of revolution.^{xxxii xxxiii xxxiv} It remains to throw some light on women's experiences in the difficult terrain where the Naxalite acts are mainly operational. Some women have also openly spoken about the tough life they face in their Naxalite lifestyle. During their monthly periods they have to undergo tough and rigorous training. There are days when they have to go without water since water in the forests could be poisonous. Usage of toilets is also scarce. Many surrendered women have also spoken about rampant sexual exploitation of women that is meted out to women by the Naxal leadership.^{xxxv xxxvi} With this we can say that, Women are more than often used for tactical purpose which provokes a sense of dissatisfaction and betrayal for not achieving their desired status in the society.^{xxxvii}

Anti-Naxalite Women Force : Need of the Hour

Women have largely served as supports at the onset of Naxalbari movement rather than being independent agents. Women, who have surrendered, have often found it difficult to merge again into the society. The societal structures women come from, also determine the challenges they face, when they have quit their life as combatants.^{xxxviii} Women as a whole are being increasingly Ignored by the Government, Media and the Society. Manchanda also points out that national movement in South Asian context have failed to incorporate women's issues in ethnic conflict situations into their agenda. "When democratic agenda meets with failure, it paves way for radicalized politics". Driven by extreme poverty, neglected young boys and girls are being increasingly drawn into the Naxalite war. Due to the narrow range of options, the road to empowerment has become that which is scarred by violence. The new government has been pushing for further concentration of military in the Maoist affected areas to eradicate the problem, however as Manchanda has pointed out that a military oriented response will only lead to a manifold increase in violence unless the prevailing structures of injustice have been addressed.^{xxxix xl}

One of the strongest weapons that the Naxalite Movements in India have with them is women. In very often situation where it is the women, who entered into the villages and interact with other women for diverse reasons, most prominently for intelligence collection and hence, it is often said that, women in Naxalite camps play a crucial role in battles too. In this view point, it is considered to be a brilliant move by Indian State to deploy 560 women commandos in Anti-Naxalite operations. This decision was taken by keeping in mind, the increased number of Naxalite fighter women, despite their harsh and brutal individual life spectrum, so as Indian State women commando force can counter their strengths; both mentally and physically in proportionate manner, with higher power projections.

Also there are mandatory specifications of sensitivity, while dealing with women in villages, which provides information to Naxalite Movements and even Women Naxalites too, as, women villager will feel free to communicate with woman soldier rather than male commandos. The problem arose while dealing with women Naxalites is that, they fight from the back channels rather than forefronts. This has been proving disadvantageous for male commandos to deal with them. Hence with the induction of women commando force in Anti-Naxalite operations, the flaws will be filled over the time.

Earlier, women were either recruited to assist men or for ordinary tasks. But, now the scenario has changed. With most of the men rebels quitting the movement, it has prompted the Naxalite leaders to alter their recruitment strategy. They are giving more preference to women. In the past few months, about 60 percent women cadres were recruited at lower ranks in Naxalite camps as compared to men, while they hold 50 percent presence in area and divisional committees and 25% in zonal committees. By recruiting women, the Naxalite leaders want to convince people that they enjoy social acceptability. Besides, doing routine work, women also serve better in collecting intelligence inputs. Most of them are between 16 and 20 years of age. Their fighting capabilities are as good as men. They are trained alongside men and with the number of men declining their commanders are dependent on women fighters. Women easily do not quit the movement,

which is why their numbers are increasing. For various cultural activities aimed at publicizing the Naxalite propaganda, mostly tribal girls were recruited and later they joined the movement.

The woman Naxalites are generally more brutal and ferocious. We cannot rule out their increasing numbers in the movement, as we have to psychologically deal with the issue, the employment of women commandos can eradicate it very effectively. In fact women's representation amongst the Maoist Insurgency and its fighting force is much more than the number of women in police forces, which is only five per cent in various parts of the country. It was felt that to tackle Women Naxal, there should be Women Commandos, who must be equally capable of neutralizing Naxal. The women commandos are well prepared and well groomed to face any situation and hardships. There is no difference between a man and a woman commando. "If Naxalites can fight with women cadres, we can fight better". This particular Indian State decision is an exception which is aimed to obtain specific results in Naxalite hit areas to counter Maoist Insurgency in India with stringent strategy.

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