

# Declining Naxalism from Central Bihar

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*The Naxal problem has become the biggest internal threat to the country. Especially after the comments of the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2007, it has become a matter of concern as well as a subject of academic debate. The new thought, innovative ideas and fresh planning have been developed to address this issue extensively and intensively. In this backdrop, a case study of Central Bihar becomes relevant to focus the light on this issue. It is an established fact that Naxalism in Bihar had made its route through Central Bihar. When the Counterinsurgency mechanism crushed the first bubbles of Naxalism in West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh, it found its breeding ground in Central Bihar. Repeated massacres and Naxal terror in Central Bihar became the concern for the country in 1980s and 1990s. It argues that the changing socio-economic conditions along with other factors massively restricted the Maoist popularity and strength in the Central Bihar.*

## Introduction

Jhulan Devi of Pandura village under Sandesh Block was the first women Naxalite leader. She had canvassed for the Naxalite candidate in 2000 Panchayat election. Her contribution was crucial in electing a Maoist Mukhiya for Pandura Panchayat. But very soon the same fire brand old lady turned against the Maoist forces. Jhulan Devi said, "All Maoist leaders are political thugs. They are worse than the upper caste feudal. They use violence and murder not for bringing social justice but for their own vested interests." Like Jhulan Devi, there are scores of others who used to be sympathizers and promoters of Naxalite but have turned against them. This has brought fundamental changes in the status of the Maoist forces in Central Bihar.

There has been dramatic decline of Naxalism from the Central Bihar. More than one factor has contributed this decline. Bhojpur Patna, Gaya, Aurangabad, Arwal, Bhabhua, Rohtas and Jehnabad have seen rapid decline in the last few years. On the one hand, there is expansion of Naxal outfits in many other districts of Bihar. 19 out of 38 districts are now Naxal infested. There has been a spurt in extremism in parts of North Bihar, bordering Nepal, including the West Champaran, East Champaran, Sheohar, Sitamarhi, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga and Madhubani districts.

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The Naxalites have also extended their areas of influence in Shaharsha, Begusarai and Vaishali, and areas along borders with Uttar Pradesh.

The beginning of Naxalism in Bihar started from Bhojpur. The Ekwari village has played leading role in initiating the spree of Naxalism. The spark spread to adjoining districts to Patna, Jehanabad, Gaya and Aurngabad. The Naxal movement started with its own accumulated anger and gross violations of social justice. There were not many big landlords in Bhojpur. But handful of few created a much skewed conditions for the land reforms. Besides Jadishpur and Dumraow, Keshath, Chaugai, Kasap landlords were present in other districts. The extreme social and economic dichotomy provided amicable fertile grounds for Maoist to groom in the Central Bihar.

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### **End of Naxalism from Central Bihar**

There are many reasons which could be identified that led to the gradual eliminations of Naxalism from the Central Bihar. These have been discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

### **Changing Socio-Economic Conditions:**

The population density is much larger in the Central Bihar. The proportion of Dalits and Lower castes are more in number in the different districts of the Central Bihar. It is important to note that 30 districts of Bihar have been denoted as the backward districts of the country. Almost all districts of Central Bihar fall in this category. These districts are Bhojpur, Jehnabad, Rohtash, Patna and Gaya. The percentage of Upper castes population in these districts is almost 12 per cent. The lower caste share is almost 50 per cent. But two dominant backward castes Yadav and Kurmi's population share in these districts are almost 16 per cent. The Naxal movement in Central Bihar started its march on the wheel of caste. Primarily yadav was identified to wedge a war against the Upper caste. The Founder of the MCC Kanai Chaterjee picked up yadav community as the flag bearer of the Maoist movement. There are two opposite events narrate the changing social fabrics in the Central Bihar. One is from Mathiya village of Jehanabad district where a couple of lower caste youngsters were butchered by the upper caste men in October 1989. In fact, the sin of the lower caste youngsters of the Dhobi caste (washer man) was disobeying the arbitrary social order. They remained seated on the chair and did not stand up while upper caste people were passing through. The same village and few more tells a different story now. In Sandesh Block of Bhojpur district there are 12 panchayat. In every panchayat there is one Chath Puja committee. Chath festival is the most popular cultural festival of Bihar. Couple of decades ago, it was unimaginable to have a backward caste representative in the committee of

Chath. Surprisingly all the panchayat has accommodated different castes in the committee. The new remake of social order has challenged the Naxalite. The 50 per cent of the population of lower castes and 18 per cent of the schedule castes

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are accommodated in the society. Every activity in the village is being led by a group of people which consists of different castes. The Naxalite movement in Central Bihar has fought against exploitative relations in social as well as in economic terms. Izzat (dignity or honour) is one of the crucial social freedoms it has attempted to restore. Most importantly, the Naxalite movement has been effective in changing the mind set of Upper castes and restoring the human dignity of the Dalits.

### **End of Anti-Naxal Forces Weakened the Social Base of Naxalism:**

Puroshotam Singh of Jehanabad stopped paying chanda (yearly amount) 1000 rupees to Ranveer Sena for fighting against the Naxalite. He stopped paying because of two reasons. One was financial crisis another was disillusionment with the Ranveer Sena. There are many youngsters in upper castes in Bihar who do not want to bring a conflicting condition in their villages which develop unceasing violence and terror. This is a very significant development in Bihar at the backdrop of Naxal terror. The change of heart and mind set of new generations among the Upper Castes to turn the Ranveer Sena, largest upper castes militia irrelevant and outdated. The weakening of Ranveer Sena has created a social order which is inclusive to a large extent in accommodating the other castes especially Scheduled castes of Bihar. It is very interesting to analyze how the upper castes militia ceased to exist in the state. In the late 1960s upper castes landholders retaliated by forming private militias or senas with the reported aim of containing Naxalite groups and protecting land belonging to upper castes. Different sections of the upper castes organized their own militias the Rajputs formed the Kuer Sena in 1969, the Sunlight Sena in 1988. The Brahmans set up Ganga Sena; and the Bhumihars formed the Brahmarsi Sena in 1981 and Savarna liberation Front in 1990. By the 1980s as the animosities between the Naxalite groups and the elite grew, a deep polarization in caste and community consciousness occurred. This led the beginning of Ranveer Sena.

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The Ranveer Sena was born in 1994 with the support of all upper caste landowners in Bhojpur. It first made international headlines in July 1996 with its attack

on Bathani Tola. The Sena adopted an aggressive posture. Ranveer Sena chief Brahmeshwar Singh, the mastermind behind 36 massacres that left at least 400 persons dead over the past six years, including 63 Dalits in a single strike at Lakshmanpur-Bathe in 1997. The Ranvir Sena has been involved in several massacres of Dalits in central Bihar. These include cases relating to the incidents of Lakshmanpur-Bathe, Mianpur (36), Shankarbigha (18), Sarthua (8), Nagari (10), Haibaspur (15), Bathani Thola (21) and Santani (13). These villages are located in Bhojpur, Jehanabad and Gaya districts of central Bihar. The history of Bihar, for more than two decades, is replete with massacres; massacres of rural poor of dalit castes by various landlord armies and vice versa.

But the cracks among upper castes surfaced especially between the Rajputs and Bhumihars. Informed sources in Jehanabad said that the Ranvir Sena faced its stiffest battle within the organisation. These sources claim that infighting has weakened the central authority. Ironically, the Ranvir Sena was started by the Bhumihars and the Rajputs, two caste groups that traditionally never saw eye to eye, to fight the naxalites. The factor of Mandal Commission and fight against the Naxalites brought the two rival castes on the common platform. They had similar interest; because of their close proximity with the land. With the change of political tone in the state, fissures reappeared between the two castes. The present political set up posed them in opposite directions. Bhumihar community is very happy under the Nitish Government. It has been given due share of power in the government but Rajput feel disheartened in the present regime and looking for a political space beyond Nitish government. The different political goal of the two castes directly affected the functioning of Ranveer Sena. Rajput community distanced themselves and stopped paying yearly donation to run the Ranveer Sena against the naxalites.

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The acute poverty and unemployment among the upper castes increased rapidly. The number of landlords among the upper castes declined. Many of them migrated to cities to save the next generation from ensuing violent conditions in the villages. This has weakened the overall structures of the upper castes. The centralized power structures got demolished. The new power centers were created of lower castes.

The young generation from upper castes underwent in tremendous economic hardship. The joint families got divided. The division of household squeezed the land ownership on head count. The government jobs were very few. This socio-economic change in the state robbed the Zamindari status from the upper castes. This led to the beginning of new social order of accommodating all castes in a

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group and work accordingly. The beginning of new social order not only left the upper castes militia irrelevant but also challenged the naxal outfits.

The Naxal groups in Bihar have recruited the largest chunk from scheduled castes. The conflicting social order had pushed the scheduled castes in the terrain of crimes. Many of them turned criminals by joining Naxal groups and left their families to

suffer in the villages. The new social order in many respects provides space to all other castes. It has challenged the ever expanding feet of Naxal groups in Bihar. The young generations of scheduled castes find their happiness and economic activities within their villages along with their families. They do not want to be hunted by police force nor want to be coerced by Naxal outfits. Implementation of new schemes of the state and the central government have added value in generating a cohesive social order.

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### **Social Sector Challenged and Weakened the Naxal Movement:**

Extensive research at the grassroots level reveals many different perspectives. One of the less known facts is about the role of a silent killer of Naxal forces, has come into notice. That is about the role of social entrepreneurs. One case study from Bihar amplifies this fact. It is very interesting to know how social entrepreneurs can defeat Naxal Outfits without fighting a war against them. Recently a social entrepreneur from Bihar, Mr. Arbind Singh of Nidan won the social Entrepreneur of the year Award at the World Economic Summit in 2009. Nidan works in different districts of Bihar. Its target groups are dalits and extremely marginalized sections of the society. The journey of Nidan, very closely, starts with self-help groups. From three groups in Patna in 1996, the number, at present, (as of 2009) stands around 4800 in 23 blocks spread over six districts with a total membership of approximately 57,433. Around 72 per cent of SHGs are in the rural area. About 62 per cent of the SHG membership is that of scheduled castes. This process of collectivization generates social capital, representing the voice of extremely poor, majority of them from Dalit community. The initiatives of Nidan generated awareness campaign of good and stable lives for the marginalized sections of the societies. It has developed a strong voice of dalits to fight a legal battle against the state. The legal aid to the poor has been delivered by the organization. A campaign for policy change at the state and national has been initiated for the social security of the dalits.

The creation of self groups and connecting them through banking system has brought magical changes in the lives of the poor. It taught them many lessons. First, peace and cooperation in the society is the ideal condition for the development. The violent method of naxalites is not going to bring any substantive changes in their lives. Infact, it has pushed them in more precarious condition of insecurity. Second, collectivization of income developed the feelings of togetherness and brotherhood. The loan from bank at the moment of their crisis generated confidence in the social and political system. Moreover, the association of the organization which addresses their major issues raised the hope of composite society which does have a space for the violence.

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### **Democratic Sentiments are Stronger and Resilient than Revolutionary:**

Charu Mazumdar's logic of barrel of gun and Kanu Sanyal's thesis of grabbing political power at any means were proved failures. In fact, due to their excessive reliance on underground activities and violence, the Naxalite groups have been reduced to an insignificant political force in the current Indian political scenario. They lack any decisive power to tilt the balance of forces in favour of the revolutionary transformation of Indian society. The class solidarity of the Indian poor has always had a fragile base and the Naxalites have not been able to mobilize these sections. It is a generally accepted belief today that Naxalism is rooted in the economic and social deprivation of common people and the state's abdication of its fundamental duties. There are many reports in the media indicating that, to execute any development work in the affected areas in Bihar, the contractors have to pay 30 per cent of the allotted money as commission to the local area commander of the Naxalites. In some areas, the Naxalite "collection" is far higher than the commercial tax collected by the government. According to other reports, in some parts of Bihar many government officials do not even attend their offices due to the threat posed by the Naxals of the area. But the government's funds are being used up. The extortion business has become so lucrative that, in many areas, unemployed youth and petty criminals posing Naxalites are finding it an easy way to make money.

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The lure of money, and the diminishing role of ideology, has affected the Naxalite movement at the grass roots level. This has led to a growing criminalization of the cadre base, a trend that is most visible in Bihar. The common cadres, who have very little education and lack proper indoctrination, are more involved with local issues, a tendency

which is against Naxalite ideology. With arms in their possession, these young, lower-rung Naxalites more often than not behave like ordinary hoodlums and criminals. Caste consideration and the criminal background of some local Naxal leaders also play a powerful, influential role. The recent encounter between police and Maoists in Lakhi Sarai which killed seven police men proved this fact. Maoists in Bihar are not the same brigade which worked within the frame work of Ideology.

### **Changing Power centre from the Upper Caste to the Lower Caste:**

The block data from five districts of Central Bihar shows that the one particular caste i.e. the Yadav has purchased almost 30 per cent of total land sold. The upper caste hold on the land gradually slipped from upper caste to the lower caste. Consequently, the yadav community tried to distance itself from the Maoist movement. Once the yadav became economically powerful they themselves feared the Maoist attack. The other backward castes toed the same line. Infact, the schedule caste community also liked the new social cohesiveness which emerged from the extreme contradiction of caste rivalry.

### **Counterinsurgency Mechanism in Bihar:**

The change of strategy of Naxal makes it clear that they primarily target the police forces and state infrastructures. The recent Naxal attacks in Bihar have clear signs of their new strategy. So, untrained and ill-equipped police became vulnerable before the Naxal attacks. In the last few years, a few of the police personnel were killed

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in Naxal attacks in Bihar. Nitish Kumar's initiatives of recruiting the Special Auxiliary Forces (SAP) to fight against the naxal outfits were appreciated by all. It has been very effective. The turn out of the SAP definitely reposed confidence among the people, which forced the state government to boast about it, which was unique in the country. Many other states also planned to follow the Bihar model. Initially 5,000, ex-army men were recruited on two years contract. The procedure of screening was judged on merit. The age criteria were also followed strictly. As the SAP was raised as one of

the elite forces of the state for tackling Maoists. With an Army background, SAP definitely pushed back Naxalites on the back foot though in the process suffered few casualties. The recent figures show the rapid decline of Maoist attack against the police force in Bihar.

**Table - 1: Maoist attack against the police in Bihar**

Year	Events	Killings	Weapon loot
2003	205	27	68
2004	342	03	57
2005	192	27	56
2006	63	08	17
2007	73	17	11
2008	79	21	08
2009	123	15	06
2010	94	05	05

**Recent Initiatives of the Central and State Government:**

The Bihar as well as the state government has realized this fact that Naxalism has originated from the skewed economic policy of the government. Most of the Acts like Land Acquisition Act, Forest Act, Wild Life Act many others have followed the footsteps of the British policy. This has uprooted the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes from their own land. On the other hand,

these acts strengthened the hands of the governmental institutions to implement the developmental packages on whims and wishes. It had accumulative impact on the poor. A void was created in which Maoist stepped in to run their violent system of political of change. The Central government realized this fact and new schemes was planned out. Special package was earmarked for the Naxal-infested district of the country. One major scheme was NREGA. In the first phase of NREGA was implanted in the most backward districts of the country in 2006. The NREGA has effectively created a hope among the poor community that this state works for them. Major survey on the impact of NREGA brought substantial changes in lifestyle of the poor people. The present Bihar government has built road and transportation to speed up the business activities in the state.

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There are two major case studies to showcase that Naxalism from Central Bihar has eroded to a great extent. One is Bhojpur and another is Jehanabad. These two districts were the epic centre of Naxal Movement in Bihar. How has it happened is a matter of research and study.

**Story of Sandesh:**

Sandesh block has seen gradual elimination of Naxalite. Sandesh comes under Bhojpur district. There are 11 panchayats under the Sandesh block. A grassroots' view of the end of Naxal dominance in panchayats of Sandesh block would be illuminating. Naxalism in Bihar started from two blocks of Bihar. Sandesh was one



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of them. Another adjoining block was Sahar. The most important factor, which proved instrumental, in dismantling Naxal dominance was the Panchayat election initiated in Bihar. Six panchayats had maoist Mukhiyas under 2000 panchayat election in the sandesh block. The second panchayat election was held in the Sandesh block in 2006. It was the first important signal of unpopularity of Maoists in the villages. It also created a significant distance between the Maoist leaders and the Community.

The process of social cohesion against the Maoist started in many panchayats of Sandesh block. They started respecting the lower castes and accommodating them in any decision making process for the development of the villages. This new attitude of the social order pressurizes sympathizers of Naxalites to mend their ways or leave the villages. Social pressure changed many naxalites to switch over to farming and shed off their association with Naxal outfits. The process of social change has reduced the number of naxalites from many villages under the Sandesh block dramatically. The hard core naxal leaders left the villages. Gradually Sandesh block which has 11 panchayats has been cleansed of Naxal violence. Now the doors in the villages are not shut when the sun sets. People move around freely till late night. The corrupt practices of Maoist leaders under the Panchayat Raj system exposed their true colour. During their tenure as Mukhiya, they remained cut off from the people. All mal-practices were being followed by them. They minted money and used the power for their own vested interest. That revealed the real picture of Maoists leaders. Their calibrated plan of hate against the Upper castes got exposed to the lower castes. Elucidation of Naxal tactics brought social cohesiveness among the different castes. They came together to elect a leader who can work for the development for the villages.

### **The Aasdwar Project in Jehanabad:**

There are many initiatives started by the state government to curb Naxal violence in Jehanabad diatrick which remained in the news for Naxal violence for more than two decades. But the recent initiatives of Aasdwar project in Jehanabad have eroded the Naxal base to a large. The scheme is currently underway in five Naxalite affected panchayats of the district. These are Sikariya, Sewanan, Mandebigha, Surungpur-Bhawanichak and Jamuk, all in Jehanabad sadar block. Villages under these five panchayats are witnessing a flurry of developmental activities on a war footing. The state government has come out with a liberal package of Welfare Schemes under Aasdwar including construction of Cement lanes, drains, chaupals and link roads in these panchayats worth Rs. 29 crore. Other works include construction of buildings for schools and Aanganbadi centres, culverts and individual toilets. Government has also taken some good recent actions in respect of forest rights (forest Act 2008), Displacement (R&R Policy), Livelihoods (NREGA), all Naxal districts are


included. The people at large seem to have embraced the state's Aasdwar programme in a big way. So as this case study of Sandesh amplifies Naxalism can be defeated and eliminated by the process of development and new social order but the change has to come from within. People as Jhulan Devi were first to reject the Naxals, others followed.

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## Conclusion

The Maoist problem is still thriving in many other districts of Bihar. It is merely due to the political factors of vote bank. All political parties are in race to lure the

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Maoist in anticipation to get votes of the Dalits. The forthcoming Assembly election in Bihar will be very crucial. In fact, the Maoist political parties have lost ballot. It only managed to win Ara parliamentary seat in 1989. Since then its political space has shrunk rapidly. The people have reposed their faith in the state and denounced violent practices. Still there is need to work hard on the complete elimination of the Maoist. Nevertheless, the Central Bihar has seen the decline of Maoist forces. 

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