

# Extremism and Its Causes

Asghar Ali Engineer

A presentation was made at the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism in-house seminar by Ms Chitralkha on comparative study of extremist violence by Naxalites and Hindu extremists which was quite interesting.

According to Ms Chitralkha there are certain striking similarities between Naxal and rightwing Hindu violence. She divides them i.e. extremists of both types into three categories: 1) those motivated by ideology; 2) those who are simply drifters i.e. join extremist groups either by chance or to achieve some purpose and 3) sheer opportunists. According to her drifters in both the categories form majority roughly sixty percent whereas those who commit violence for ideological reasons are in small minority.

It is not much different as far as terrorist violence by groups like Lashkar-e-Taiyyiba or Taliban or al-Qaida is concerned. For outsiders it appears that all the violent attacks by such groups is motivated by ideology and hence media immediately blames either Communism or Hindutva philosophy or Islam for these attacks. It is only in-depth study which leads to proper understanding of these violent acts, especially detailed and freewheeling interviews of the perpetrators and actors.

It was found through this study that many young persons join Naxalite Brigade at a very young age when they hardly have any understanding, much less serious commitment. They are, in a sense, foot soldiers who carry out commands passed out to them. In case of Hindutva brigades those who attend RSS Shakhas or VHP and Bajrang Dal camps the young boys are used to commit violence. They are highly indoctrinated through Shakhas and camps without any serious understanding.

It was found in case of Naxalites in Bihar that many Rajputs and Yadavs also join the Naxalite squads when they are around 15 or 16 having little understanding of Marxist ideology. Interviews with them showed that some of them join just for what Chitralkha called *izzat* i.e. prestige and honor. In villages of Bihar carrying a gun itself is a matter of prestige. It was found in the study that these boys of 15-16 years of age display their guns proudly. Some of them were scions of middle and rich peasants but instead of taking to agriculture took to guns. Some of them did so to avenge death of their caste people or fellow villagers or relatives.

Also there are those among Naxalites who have understanding of Marxist ideology and among these are members of Central committee or those who are known as ideologues. They themselves do not commit violence but pass on orders to do so. Then there are those who belong to front organisations. They neither commit violence nor pass orders to that effect but justify violence. They are part of Maoist ideology, as interpreted by Maoists.

Ms Chitralkha had studied Hindu extremist organisations, actors and perpetrators in Gujarat 2002 violence. Here also there are various levels through which violent operations take place and motives, as discussed above, motivate various actors and perpetrators.

The foot soldiers and perpetrators are derived from Shakhas run by RSS, VHP and Bajrang Dal. Their information base is extremely narrow. They do not read any literature except that of these organisations. Even if they read news papers or watch TV channels, they read those papers or watch those channels which are sympathetic to their ideology or 'cause'. In many cases they do not have any access to alternative sources of information or wherever they have, they dismiss these sources as 'biased' and 'hostile'.

In case of Hindu extremist violence, there is another section which participates in violence which can be referred to as rioters. Rioters could be from both sides and they just use the opportunity to loot or settle scores with neighbours with whom they have running feud.

Chitralkha also created a category in case of Gujarat which she calls those of killers and rapist-killers. These are those who act only on hearsay and justify their acts saying they heard Hindu women were raped and killed and so they avenged it. Or, they say they read in some Gujarati papers and they argue what appeared in news papers cannot be wrong. Newspapers always publish true stories. And those who know English among them, dismiss English papers' news as 'anti-Hindu'.

Then among Hindu extremists there are those who belong to leadership tanks from amongst RSS, VHP, and Bajrang Dal ranks. They are highly motivated by ideology and as in case of Naxalites they may not participate in violence themselves but pass orders. These leaders and ideologues always belong to higher castes and economically better off.

Like Naxalites finding justification from Marxist ideology, the Hindu extremists also find justification from Hindu religion.

However, in case of Naxalites, the main motive is to fight for justice at ideological levels and also to counter state violence in the form of police encounters shooting down innocent citizens. It is also motivated by fight for unjust development which ruins tribals and Dalits and captures their land and very means of survival. But in case of Hindu extremists violence is motivated 1) by political considerations i.e. to capture Hindu votes and 2) by hatred of minority communities like Muslims and Christians whom they consider as 'outsiders' and enemy communities. The RSS ideology is based on hate and violence.

Then there is 'jihadi' violence. There is again lot of similarities. Here also one finds different levels of people who are part of 'jihadi' violence. Suicide bombers are a mixed bag. Among them there are those who have extremely narrow base of information and they only believe what is told to them by their ideologues or immediate trainers. They too have no access to alternate sources of information.

In some cases religious might outweighs economic and in some cases economic might outweighs religious. Many suicide bombers are highly motivated by religion and they think by blowing themselves off they will directly enter paradise and will enjoy eternal comforts compared to temporary life on earth. Also, if they die their families will be looked after by their organisation and will not suffer economically.

Then those who control *jihadi* organisations have again very complex motive. Some of them want to fight US imperialism and its unjust foreign policies. Some

of them are frustrated by lack of freedom of opinion in their own countries like in many Arab countries and they find no other outlet for their grievances except setting up Jihadi organisations.

Then there are those from Kashmir who have faced violence at the hands of state institutions like army and police and think India is an occupying power in Kashmir and Kashmir 'belongs rightfully' to Pakistan and Kashmir cannot be liberated without an armed uprising. All these organisations depict their fight as 'Islamic jihad' to motivate their followers and foot soldiers. Like in case of Hindu extremist organisations indoctrination is well sustained and powerful through highly simplified propaganda.

In case of both Hindu and Muslim extremist organisations they control very powerful establishments flush with resources.

In case of Muslim extremist organisations oil rich countries are source of rich donations who think extremists are doing 'great service' to the cause of Islam and it also helps politically as this reinforces conservative religious order.

It is not known whether some social scientists or researchers have probed the minds of suicide bombers but it will be very interesting to do so. □□□