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## Welcome, all members

Abhijit Banerjee  
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Digvijay Singh, in his now famous oped in The Economic Times, did all of us an enormous favour by posing the right question: if the Naxalites are really as deserving of opprobrium (and bullets) as many of our leaders seem to believe, why are local tribal young men lining up behind them? Singh is also probably right in describing a lot of the Naxalite leaders as political entrepreneurs who are harvesting the anger of the local population to build profitable careers in rent extraction (my words, not his). But why is there so much anger?

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Singh emphasises the need for a political solution to the Naxalite problem. If that means transferring political power to a local leadership — thereby making the insurgency their problem rather than ours — we have been there before. This is what we tried both in the final rounds of divisions of states as well as when states in the North-east got created. Without suggesting that the alternative would have been better, it is hard to claim that these were spectacular successes. All you

have to do is think of Jharkhand.

Indeed, the history of decolonisation is full of instances in which the colonising power threw a national envelope around a set of populations united by not much of than a memory of being oppressed (which they certainly were); or worse, a population divided by a history of mutual antagonism that the colonial power might have initially instigated, with disastrous consequences.

Being founded in resentment, these states proved a fertile ground for the rise of a political class that quickly discovered that stoking the anger against the erstwhile oppressors and their alleged allies was a very effective way to conceal their incompetence and/or cupidity. And as the economies started failing under the pressure of too much greed — and too little deed — while frustrations rose, other identities, other dimensions of resentment, were called forth by canny politicians and the whole story ended all too often, usually with a little help from some friendly foreign country, in civil strife. This is the history, give or take a detail, of a big chunk of sub-Saharan Africa. Think Uganda, Nigeria, Rwanda, from the 60s to the 90s.

I don't say this to imply that decolonisation was a bad idea. I say this to recognise the genius of our founding fathers, who knew that to be a nation we need more than resentment. We need an idea, and an ideal, and Jawaharlal Nehru, in Discovery of India, explicitly sets out to give us one. My strong hunch is that the fact that India has mostly escaped the kind of implosions that much of the rest of the decolonised world has had to deal with — despite a history of relentless brutality towards our lower castes and tribals, and a gaggle of corrupt leaders who are happy to invoke that history to justify their venality —has something to do with the power of the idea of India has over all of us on so many of us, rich, poor, young and old.

India, of course, means very different things to each one of us: Gandhi, Nehru, elections, a chance to get into an IIT, the possibility of a job carrying bricks in Delhi, Shah Rukh Khan, Sachin Tendulkar. But it is something that invites us to focus beyond our immediate setting, with its disheartening realities. This is what has not worked in the Kashmir Valley, with tragic consequences, and to a lesser extent in the North-east.

If this is right, then we should worry that trying to turn the Naxalite problem into a set of local problems — the so-called 'political solution' — may not entirely be the right idea for the long run. It is the equivalent of what the colonisers tried, and it probably will not work for the same reason: because it leaves in place the idea of the rest of India as the source of oppression, from which some partial liberation was

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achieved.

The new leadership, especially if Digvijay Singh is right in thinking of it as comprising clever political operators, clearly has every reason to emphasise the history of oppression and resistance that brought them to power. And to the extent that the history provides them with a cover, it is not clear that they would be particularly interested in making the State function better. This, for example, is still how a lot of Jharkhand politics functions: Shibu Soren survives despite his many transgressions because he remains 'the liberator'.

To really 'solve' the Naxalite problem we need to reclaim the idea of India for these unwilling people. For that, India has to be a promise — not as a source of war planes coming to intimidate, but as a not-so-distant place that is not indifferent to their fate.

The alienation among the tribal youth that underpins Naxalism today has a lot to do with the gap between the claimed policies of the State and the ground reality. The way to reverse that is to get the State to start delivering in these areas, working with the local leadership wherever possible, but not hesitating to fight it when it is not. And above all, never relenting to stake a claim for that greater ideal that can be India.

*Abhijit Banerjee is Ford Foundation International Professor of Economics and Director, Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, MIT*

*The views expressed by the author are personal*

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In India, we allow a problem to fester too long until it becomes unmanageable and defies easy solutions. This problems have been compounded by the fact that leaders who came from within the disadvantaged sections of the society have utterly failed. Leaders like Lalus, Mulayams, Mayawatis and others have only enriched themselves and their cronies by foul means, moved to the other side of the fence and have done precious little for the people they claim to represent. The list of their misdeeds are too well documented. Their only legitimacy is that they contest elections and win. They do not care for the idea of India, their vote bank is all that matters. Similarly the Naxalites, instead of being helping the people to improve their lot, are behaving exactly like the leaders mentioned above, enriching themselves, the difference is that in this case it is the barrel of the gun is used for rent extortion and indulging in violence to target the symbols of the idea of India.

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people who die are glorious and without worry. The survivors are kicked in their butt and tossed around, because he needs to survive, hence needs to talk his way through. The bull has to be caught by the horn, nothing less or more. With vast resources at disposal, we require a dedicated team, with authority and power, to solve this menace time bound. There are lots of spirited officers, who can do it, but they are afraid is of vicious political bosses.

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Gulshan 2 months ago

Everyone, from Anundhati Roy to the esteemed author of this article, fails to see one critical aspect of this whole issue. We are trying to take up the issue of Naxalism, as it was perhaps when it started - the premises of lost opportunities, lost employment, etc. Agreed that a lot of economic growth is still bypassing these regions but then, should every region that has progress bypass it lay down land-mines to kill 76 CRPF officers? Does each one of the 600-plus districts of India go ahead and abduct District-Level Officers, and threaten to cut off his tongue or hands or head?

Before trying to take the tame way out and say that progress is required, remember those who have been killed by this menace to society. Progress can and has to happen - there's no two opinions about that. But to say that only progress is the way out of this problem is to be blind to the whole situation. The Nation has to wake up and brush aside these armchair opinion-holders, and tackle this problem with the two-pronged approach that it deserves. Progress, but with an iron-hand. If they give up violence and arms, we can consider absorbing them into the social stream. But even that would not mean that those who planned massacres like Dantewada will be pardoned. Never should that be allowed to happen, for that would be insulting to the sovereignty of India.

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