

Indian newspapers and civil society response on naxalite movement in India

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Abstract

The article attempts to know how Indian national newspapers have covered civil society response on naxalite movement in India. The content of four national newspapers has been analyzed over the Period of five years from May, 2009 to May, 2014 to ascertain the trends of the coverage and amount of attention paid to different aspects of the movement. In comparison to other themes like Naxalite movement, law and order, government initiates, the coverage of civil society response in particular is minimal).

Keywords: mass media, naxalite movement, civil society, content analysis of newspapers

1. Introduction

Mass Media is the mirror of the society. It attempts to cover issues and events or anything big/small that occurs in the society. The unusual things attract more attention than ordinary issues. The Indian sub-continent is witness to various socio-political movements and the role of the media has been appreciated in highlighting the movement's strengths and weakness. The movements are generally of two types-reformative movements and revolutionary movements. Indian history is replete with reformist social movements like peasants' movement, labour movement etc. The instance of revolutionary movement in India is Naxalite movement. Naxalite movement does not aim at reforming the existing socio-political system rather believes in replacing it with another system through violent means. Given this distinct feature of Naxalite movement, it is expected that mass media in general and newspapers in particular should pay greater attention to it.

Since 2006, the former Prime Minister Dr. Man mohan Singh has aired his concern about Naxalite movement many a times and opined that it as a threat to internal security. This remark caught attention of the media and general people too. It generated a renewed interest in the Naxalite movement after a long gap. In late 1960s, when the movement was started it was more in news for its violence activities and sporadic attacks on academic institutions and individuals. The present debate is however different and academicians, intellectuals are interested to assess whether Naxalite movement is a threat to internal security or not. This is the prime concern for everybody.

Since 1967, the Naxalite movement has undergone several phases. The splits and mergers of different groups has been part of this movement. It can be broadly divided into phases-i) from 1967-1997 during which the dominant tendency observed was of the splits and forming new faction with another name. In contrary to this, Phase-II (1997 onwards) witnessed merger of various splinter groups. The culmination of the merger process took place in September, 2004 and they all came on large and single platform namely CPI (Maoist).

It is a co-incidence that in May 2004, the Congress led government formed at the Centre with the help of left parties CPI and CPM. For five years known as UPA1, the serious

concern in regard to Naxalite movement was expressed on various platforms. It is a fact that then Prime Minister desired serious action against the Naxalites movement, but the dilly-dally tactics was adopted by the Home Ministry. Only after the Congress formed government at the centre again in the year 2009 without the left parties support Ministry of Home Affairs under Mr. P. Chidambaram, for the first time, announced the ban on the CPI (Maoist).

It has been attempted to see how the national newspapers dailies reflected upon the Naxalite movement and the response of the Congress-led Central government towards the movement during second tenure (2009-2014). The coverage of the newspapers on Naxalite movement has several dimensions such as Naxalite movement per se, law & order issues, development issues, government response, political-legal response, civil society/general people's response.

Many newspapers published from the National Capital Territory of Delhi. The researcher has confined the study to four largest circulated popular newspapers - two English and two Hindi. These selected newspapers are The Times of India, Hindustan Times, Dainik Jagran and Hindustan Dainik. All these newspapers have thrown light on the different aspects of the Naxalite Movement.

1.1 Meaning, Definition, Features and Role of Civil Society

Civil society is considered an important actor in democratic form of government like India. It has considerable influence on the policy-making process of the government and plays constructive role in opinion building on policies of the state. The civil society comprising of International and national NGOs, right activist, social activist and writers, intelligentsia, film makers have openly criticized or favored the government policies on various social and political issues. Their response to naxalite movement in India is no exception to this general rule. The naxalite have found much attention of this section of the society and the civil society from time to time have expressed their views via newspaper report. The present study is an attempt to find the frequency, extent and nature of the news covered by the four national paper on the civil response on the naxalite movement in India.

According to the World Bank, the term civil society refer to "the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit

organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic organizations: community groups, non-governmental organization (NGOs), labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations and foundations.”

The meaning and definition of civil society is highly contested. It has been described and defined in infinite ways by different scholars and organizations. Some of the prominent definitions of civil society has been enlisted below:-

Jan Aart Scholte (2011) [5] has opined that “civil society can be understood to be a political space where voluntary associations deliberately seek to shape the rules that govern aspects of social life. Civil society organizations target formal rules, they seek to change and/or impose social constructs or social orders. It encompass various actors and it is much more than the formal world of non-governmental organization. It exists wherever and whenever voluntary associations of any kind try deliberately to shape rules that govern society, broadly defined.”

In terms of United Nations Development Programme, “Civil society is an arena of voluntary collective actions around shared interests, purposes and values distinct from families, state and profit-seeking institutions. The term civil society includes the full range of formal and informal organizations that are outside the state and the market-including social movements, volunteer involving organizations, mass-based membership organizations, faith based groups, NGOs, and community-based organizations, as well as communities and citizens acting individually and collectively.

John Keane (2009) has defined civil society as “a realm of social life- market exchanges, charitable groups, clubs and voluntary associations, independent churches and publishing houses-institutionally separated from state institutions.”

According to Neera Chandhoke (2005) [1], “Civil society can be seen as that part of the society where people, as rights-bearing citizens, meet to discuss and enter into dialogue about the polity.

Veneklasen (1994) has defined Civil society as “a sphere of social interaction between the household (family) and the state which is manifested in the norms of community cooperative, structures of voluntary association and networks of public communication...norms are values of trust, reciprocity, tolerance and inclusion, which are critical to cooperation and community problem solving, structure of association refers to the full range of informal and formal organization through which citizens pursue common interest.”

Civil society is composed of autonomous associations which develop a dense, diverse and pluralistic network. As it develops, civil society will consist of a range of local groups, specialized organizations and linkages between them to amplify the corrective voices of civil society as a partner in governance and the market (Cornnor 1999).

In his article Varsheney has mentioned that in conventional notions of the social science, “civil society” refers to that space which 1) exists between the family, on the one hand, and the state, on the other. 2) Makes interconnections between individuals or families possible 3) is independent of the state. Additionally some definitions also suggest about two more requirements: that the civil space be organized in associations

that attend to the cultural, social, economic and political needs of the citizens and that the associations be modern and voluntaristic, not ascriptive.

1.2 The key features civil society

- It is separate from state and the market but simultaneously have implications for both the actors.
- Members have common needs, interest and they have intricate values of tolerance, inclusion, cooperation and equality;
- Development through a fundamentally endogenous and autonomous process which cannot easily be controlled from outside.

It is essential to note that non-government organizations and civil society should not be used interchangeably. NGOs are one of the variants of civil society. They play pivotal role in enhancement of people participation in socio-economic development and politics. NGOs often play important role in formulating and influencing public policies. Civil society has much broader connotation and contains all organizations and associations within its ambit that exist outside the state and the market.

1.3 The Universe of Study

The scope of the study is confined to four leading national newspapers (two English and two Hindi dailies) that have highest readership in National Capital of Delhi. These papers are The Times of India, The Hindustan Times, Dainik Jagran & Hindustan Dainik. The headquarters of these dailies are located in the capital city of New Delhi. All these newspapers that have been selected have their satellites located even at the fringes. The probability of unreported news related to important socio-economic and political aspect like naxalism is minimal in these newspapers. The policy makers, the think tanks, intellectuals and masses in general relay upon these newspapers as authentic source of information. The other reason for taking into consideration these newspaper has been to understand and analyze the communication channels and filtration of such news at grass-root level.

2. Methodology

The present study is based on both quantitative as well as qualitative methodology. The newspaper reports on Naxal and Naxal related issues were traced from May 2009-2014. The newspaper stories covered were both news and views.

The data was collected was performed from the press-clipping division of Parliament Library and various libraries including Indian Council of World Affairs library, Jawaharlal Nehru University Library. The press clipping section of the library enabled us to gather the news systematically date wise and year wise of the four selected newspapers.

The next stage involved the usage of data for our study. First and foremost all the collected news items (3516) were arranged newspaper wise, date wise and year wise for ease of study. These news-reports were read and accordingly some broad categories were made. These news-reports were codified and process of data compilation went through various rounds of coding and decoding under the following themes Naxalite Movement, law and order, development issues,

government initiatives, political and legal response, civil society/civilian response.

A) Data Analysis of news covered

Data Analysis of the news shows there were very few news items on civilian response to the Naxalite movement. There are altogether 120 news-report related to civil society and civil response. The news on response of civil response are categorized into response from civil society comprising of writers, intellectuals, right activists and think tanks on one side and general people on the other side. Out of 120 news-report on civil society /Think Tanks 36.7% are on civil society/Think Tanks., 35% are on general people, 20% are from International NGOs, National NGOs, Human Rights and rest 8.3% are from eminent personalities.

Out of 120 news items 36.1% of news- reports on civil society and civil response has been covered by *Dainik Jagran*. 30% of news- reports on civil society and civil response has been covered by *Hindustan Times* followed by *Times of India*. 8.2% of news-reports on civil society and civil response has been covered by *Hindustan Dainik*.

2.1 Frequency of News Items on the Basis of Themes

Out of 3516 News items, 35.8% are on government initiative to tackle naxalite menace. It is followed by law and order (30.5%) and Naxalite movement. Least number of news are based on civil response followed by development issues. Only 3.5 % of the total News-items are based on civilian response while 5.0% of the news-items are on development issues. 8.1% News-items are on political response.

Table 1: Frequency of News items on the basis of themes

Themes	Frequency	Percent
Naxalite movement	595	16.9
Law & Order	1074	30.5
Development	178	5.1
Government Initiative	1266	36.0
Political-Legal Response	283	8.0
Civil Society/Civil Response	120	3.5
Total	3516	100

Table 2: Frequency of news-reports on sub-themes of civil society/civilian response on Naxalite movement

Sub-themes	Frequency	Per cent
Eminent Personalities	10	8.3
Civil society/Think Tanks	44	36.7
International NGOs, National NGOs, Human Rights	24	20.0
General People	42	35.0
Total	120	100.0

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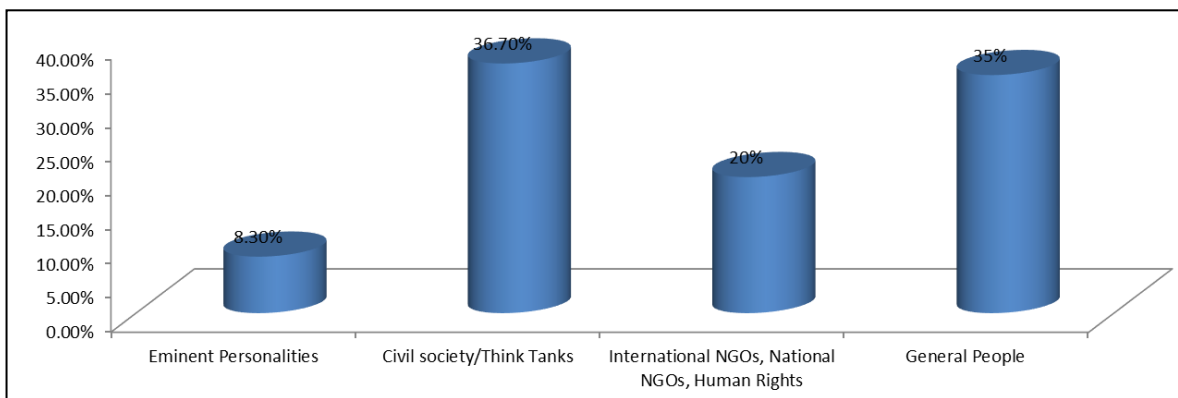


Fig Frequency of news-reports on subthemes of civil society/civilian response to Naxalite movement

The response of civil society and the general people on Naxalite movement are very different. The news reports on civil society on Naxalite movement revolved around peace talks, government initiatives to tackle naxal menace, arrest of naxal leaders, encounter of naxal leaders or around development issues. Most of these were of anti-establishment slant as they support the cause of Naxalite movement.

On the other hand, news related to response of general public relates to clashes with security officials, response towards government initiatives including police operation and development activities, response of families and their condition in the aftermath of naxal related violence, evacuation of villages due to fear of life. Some of the news revolved around the concern of general people on their social and cultural life due to naxal activities in the region. There

may be news report on opinion poll on the response of general public on various aspects of Naxalite movement. The news are basically from naxal hit areas of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal and Odisha. The subsequent part of this section deals with the content analysis of the news based on response of civil society and general people newspaper wise and year wise. The exercise has been conducted to capture the changing trend in response of the civil society and general people, and also the changing trend of the newspaper in capturing these issues.

B) Content Analysis of News report on the civil society/civil response on naxalite movement

There has been considerable coverage of civil society/ civil response on naxalite movement by the newspapers. However,

the frequency of such reports are comparatively low with respect to other aspects of naxalite movement. The news on response of civil response are categorized into response from civil society comprising of writers, intellectuals, right activists and think tanks on one side and general people on the other side. The response of civil society and the general people on Naxalite movement are very different. The news reports on civil society on naxalite movement revolve around peace talk, government initiatives to tackle naxal menace, arrest of naxal leaders, encounter of naxal leader or around development issues. Most of these will have anti-establishment slant as they support the cause of naxalite movement.

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2.2 The Times of India coverage of civil society response to naxalite movement

The Times of India has covered some news reports associated with naxalism and civil society. Most of these news were triggered by action of state against the naxalite. The newspaper during the given paper has come up with few interviews as well as views on response of civil society on naxal activities in the country.

In 2009, the newspaper did not paid enough focus on the civil society reaction on naxal activities. The response of the civil society has been covered under some major story but no full fledged story has been dedicated to civil society during this phase.

The Times of India started coming up with the reports on civil society in year 2010 especially at the end of the year. The newspaper also had interview with Mahasweta Devi in early 2010 to bring about the perception of civilian society on naxal menace. The interview revolved around issues like reasons for consolidation of naxalism in West Bengal and the perception of naxal movement and violence as an unending war. The Interview also brought up the reaction of the prolific writer on her association and aid to naxals. The story reflected her strong opposition towards the murder of Eastern Frontier Rifles personnel as well as the murder of naxal leaders. She also showed her inclination towards being a mediator between the state and the naxals if the people want. By the end of year the newspaper came up with comparatively more news as well as views on civil society. It came up with a small news reported by agency in which Arundhati Roy had glorified and supported naxals and portrayed them as a true patriot. The story had anti-establishment slant

The newspaper has extensively covered news reports on the response of civil society on conviction of Binayak Sen. The civil responses was taken into consideration both in news as well as views. The newspaper brought full -fledged stories on reaction of Arundhati Roy, Teesta Setalvad, human rights group- the People Union for Democratic Rights. Reports also

included the perception of the international organizations like Amnesty International on Sen's convictions. These stories are either reported by the correspondent or agencies and has extensively criticize the judicial decision. The Right Activists have cried foul on Binayak Sen's conviction, staged protest and referred the decision of Raipur Court as dangerous crisis in Indian Democracy. Another news was on Teesta Setalvad showed her concern about the discrimination in Indian judicial system that are tough on the common man and favors the rich and powerful.

The news covered by agency on the response of Amnesty International on Binayak Sen has glorified Binayk Sen to full extent. The definer of the news, the then Director of Amnesty International' Asia- Pacific has been critical to the laws under which Sen was convicted. He also showed his disappointment over the state policies in the region and advised the state to work for the welfare of the people. The newspaper also brought about editorial on the civil society response on the Binayak Sen conviction. The editorial argued that the intensity of civil society outrage would consequently bring debate on sedition law.

The perception of foreign author like Jan Myrdal has been also covered by the newspaper who visited India in early 2012 for the launch of his book "Red Star over India." In his interaction with Times of India, he shared his experience in Bastar region and his conversation with cadres and leaders. The story brought about that many like him have abandoned the Communist Party as it has taken a wrong direction and also the ways the movement can get back the lost grounds.

The newspaper has brought about the news from Chhattisgarh area about the welfare work done by the Ram Krishna Mission in Narayanpur. The news reporter brought about the schools and hospitals run by the mission in the region and the harassment they face from the police. The newspaper also brought about the news whereby the Human Right Watch have concluded in their report that the civil society and the right activists are the scape goat got the Maoists as well as for the government. The news were not only informative but also educative.

2.3 Hindustan Times coverage of response of civil society on naxalite movement

In one of the editorial the Hindustan Times has criticized the famous people of Kolkata to come in way of police action in Lalgarh the editorial was in a form of satire whereby the presence of famous people like filmmakers, poet and actors in lalgarh was questioned.

The newspaper covered the news whereby the Maoists have nominated few members of the civil society to mediator. The reporter brought forward the unwillingness on the part of Arundhati Roy to play the role of mediator and retaliated that she would be more willing to play the role of an independent observer rather that negotiator/mediator.

The newspaper also covered the news about the response of Swami Agnivesh on the death of Maoist leader Cherukuri Raj kumar alias Azad. The story covered by the correspondent in Kolkata, where the activist expressed his condolence for the death of Azad and also told the newspaper his request to the Maoist to declare ceasefire.

Hindustan Times has covered extensively the story on Arundhati Roy declaring naxals as patriots. The story covered by the correspondent the report brought forward her sympathy

towards the naxalites, and anguish towards the development agenda of the government that has been greatly responsible for neglecting the tribal population from the benefits of development.

The paper did not give much focus on the civil society response on the Binayak Sen conviction. Unlike Times of India, it has brought about only one news report on the same. There has been an article on the same whereby the writer has argued the sentence given to social activist happened in the court subject to intimidation by a state government run by paranoid politicians.

The paper has covered the reaction of intelligentsia in wake of arrest of Sai baba and his subsequent suspense from the college. The story being reported by the correspondent covered the views of the supporters of the professors as well as those who were critical to his involvement in spreading Maoist ideology in the campus. The news also covered the response of the People Union for Civil Liberation that has criticized the arrest and demanded the intervention of NRHC.

2.4 Dainik Jagran & Hindustan Dainik coverage of civil society response to naxalite movement

The two Hindi newspaper have come up with very few reports on civil society response on naxalite movement. The staffs of Dainik Jagran has covered the story on perception of secretary of Bihar Pradesh Dalit Samta. The secretary who was also a former MLA of the state opined that negotiation and talks are the only way forward to eliminate the naxal influence from the country. A part from that development of the area should be the priority for the government.

The paper brought forward an article of Arundhati Roy where she argued for the rights of the tribal people. She was critical to the development agenda of the country and held it responsible for the naxal violence in the state.

The Jagran team has also covered the story whereby Arundhati Roy has declined to be as a mediator between the naxal and the Maoist. The newspaper also covered the news on the response of Amnesty International on the conviction of Binayak Sen, The story being reported by agencies from London came in support of Binayak Sen. A part from this the newspaper has also covered the story on the reaction of NRIs in USA on Binayak Sen conviction. The news reported by the agency clearly reflect the disappointment of the NRIs on the court decision and were in support of Binayak sen. The newspaper has also carried a small article on the support extent to Sen by the group of intellectuals and intelligentsia.

The newspaper came up with an article on the movie Chakarvu that was based on the naxalite movement in bastar. The article describes that the movie has not brought forward various aspects of naxal issues. The movie has sidelined the torture being committed on the villagers by the naxalite but also other aspects of naxal problem in Bastar. The article argues that whether it's a movie or a book, naxal problem were never discussed in holistic manner.

Contrary to other newspaper Hindustan Dainik has covered very minimal news on civil society the news were confined to the demand of intelligentsia and civil society to start the peace talk with the naxalites. The newspaper has covered the story through its special correspondent that reflected the apprehensions of the civil society on the motive of the government in delaying the peace talk.

The paper also covered the news reported by its reporter on the Banki Moon appeal to the Jharkhand Government to protect the children and the schools from the Maoist influence. The General Secretary of United Nation Organization had shown his concern over the human right violation of children in the Maoist hit area of Jharkhand. The news was covered has covered all aspect of news.

The news covered by Hindustan Dainik has however not been covered by any other newspaper understudy. Also Hindustan Dainik has come up with any story about the civil response on important issues like conviction of Binayak Sen.

3. Conclusion

The four national newspapers under study have covered the response of civil society/civilian response on naxalite movement. In general the frequency of news report on civilian society/civilian response has been very low in comparison to other themes. There has been more views on civil society and civilian response than news. The nature of the news on civil society response is basically anti-establishment. The civil societies has been sympathetic towards the naxal cause and have been immensely critical to the government actions towards naxals. English newspapers have been more successful in capturing the response of the civil society. However, the leverage of the news covered has been different in all the newspapers under study. Both the Hindi dailies have poor coverage of general people response on naxalite movement.

The content analysis of news reflects that the stories covered by all the four newspapers differed not only on the incidence covered but also in terms of definer, nature and extent of news covered. While the Times of India and Dainik Jagran has successfully captured the response of civil society on important incidence like conviction of Binayak Sen. In Times of India as well as in Dainik Jagran the frequency of news and views on civil society have been high at times of major incidence. Hindustan Times did not give much space to this aspect. Hindustan Times has successfully captured the response of general people on naxal menace of the villagers. It has captured the response of the various social aspects. It has covered both pro-establishment and anti-establishment in nature. Among Hindi dailies, the number of news-reports on civil response has been minimal in Hindustan Dainik.

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