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### The Little Red Book in India

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*Sreemati Chakrabarti*

The Little Red Book gained popularity in India with the outbreak of the Naxalite Movement, named for the hamlet of Naxalbari (in the Darjeeling district of the eastern Indian state of West Bengal), where in the early summer of 1967 a local communist unit led poor peasants to overthrow the local gentry in a land dispute.<sup>1</sup> This so-called victory of the peasant insurgents was short-lived, but it had significant consequences. It split the communist movement in India for a second time, following the Sino-Soviet split of the mid-1950s, and introduced violent revolutionary Maoism (or Naxalism) into Indian politics. The Indian state considers Naxalism a security threat even today, with twelve of its twenty-eight states under some degree of pressure. However, the first phase of the Naxalite Movement ended with the death of its leader, Charu Majumdar, in 1972, after which the Little Red Book rapidly declined in popularity. As chief leader of the Naxalite Movement, Majumdar treated the *Quotations* like gospel, insisting in his writings and speeches that his comrades keep a copy of the Little Red Book on their persons at all times, to be studied in indoctrination classes and also read aloud to aid the illiterate peasants in the midst of their “armed struggle.” A good many students and intellectuals recruited to the organization took this directive seriously and did follow it. However, as will be shown later, no other senior functionary of the Naxalites put so much stress on reading the *Quotations*; in fact, as revealed later, many of them were opposed to reducing the entire Maoist ideology to the short passages in the Little Red Book. Majumdar’s closest comrades believed the Little Red Book to

The author wishes to thank Professor Manoranjan Mohanty, Chairperson, Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi for his suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> On the early phase of the Naxalite Movement, see Biplab Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1974); Sumanta Bannerjee, *In the Wake of Naxalbari* (Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 1980); Sohail Jawaid, *The Naxalite Movement in India* (New Delhi: Associated Publishing House, 1974); Manoranjan Mohanty, *Revolutionary Violence* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1977); and Sreemati Chakrabarti, *China and the Naxalites* (New Delhi and London: Radiant Publishers and Sangam Books, 1990).

be of little consequence to the movement, and after his demise the importance of the *Quotations* among the Naxalites faded.

Nonetheless, during this early phase *Quotations from Chairman Mao* was popular among students and intellectuals who supported and sympathized with the movement, whether they joined or not. Thousands of copies of the book entered India and reached bookstores in the College Street area of Calcutta (now Kolkata), probably arriving from Nepal, Burma, and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh); the book has been banned in India since the mid 1970s and bookstore owners in Calcutta are extremely hesitant to reveal much about its distribution.<sup>2</sup> What is certain is that, next to the *Communist Manifesto*, in the entire history of the communist movement in India from the mid 1920s to the present, the Little Red Book is the one text that most captured the imagination of young revolutionaries. This chapter compares Naxalite propaganda from the Majumdar era with the recollections and interpretations of some former Naxalites to consider the rise and demise of the Little Red Book in India.

### **Indian Maoism and the rise of the Naxalites**

Maoist ideology took roots within the Indian communist movement some years before the outbreak of the Naxalite Movement in West Bengal, with the Telengana Movement (1946–51) in the southeastern state of Andhra Pradesh and the Tebhaga Movement in the state of Bengal (1946–50). The Telengana Movement was a localized peasant insurrection in which communist leaders liberated two districts of Andhra Pradesh from the rule of Nizam, a local despot patronized by the British colonial government. According to historian Mohan Ram, the communists of Andhra Pradesh modeled their movement on Mao's essay "On New Democracy" (1940):

The Telengana struggle incorporated all the basic elements of what later came to be formalized as the Maoist strategy – a two-stage revolution based on a clear understanding of the differences between the stages and their interrelation; liberated bases from where peasant struggles could be conducted to achieve proletarian hegemony and the triumph of the democratic revolution; and a close alliance between the working class and the peasant masses towards a revolutionary front with the national bourgeoisie against imperialism.<sup>3</sup>

However, says Ram, the Telengana Movement was at heart an indigenous struggle retrofitted to the language of Maoism: "The Andhra

<sup>2</sup> Efforts by the author and others to gather further information from booksellers were futile. A few said categorically that since the movement has become a serious matter of internal security, they preferred not to talk about it.

<sup>3</sup> Mohan Ram, *Indian Communism: Split Within a Split* (Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1969), p. 2.

communists had discovered a uniquely Indian idiom of revolution [and] were in search of a theoretical basis to legitimize it in the eyes of the international communist movement.”<sup>4</sup>

The Tebhaga Movement began around the same time in Bengal. This was a peasant campaign for a greater share of the produce from the land they tilled. Landlords there conventionally claimed half of the crops, but tenant farmers and sharecroppers now demanded that only a third be taken. (“Tebhaga” means one-third in the local language.) Here again the peasantry acted with support from the local communist leadership, and some landlords who protested this demand had their land expropriated. The rapid spread of the movement across various districts threatened the power base of the local gentry, who turned to the police. In the end, many peasant activists and their party supporters were arrested and jailed. Although the direct connection to Maoist doctrine was less clear in this case, the attempt by peasants to seize power from the local gentry resembled the insurrectionary peasant activism depicted in Mao’s famous “Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan” (1927).<sup>5</sup> However, both the Telengana and the Tebhaga Movements were soon overshadowed by political developments at the national level: independence from British colonial rule and the partition of the former Indian empire into India and Pakistan.

Barely two decades into its independence, India in the mid-1960s was confronted by a perfect storm of economic crisis and political instability. Huge defense expenditures resulting from two disastrous wars (against China in 1962 and Pakistan in 1965) had adversely affected development programs. Lack of growth in the industrial and service sectors led to unemployment among the educated. Massive droughts in some parts of India caused food shortages. The economy stalled under the weight of budget deficits, trade deficits, and aggravated inflation. In the political arena, electoral reverses in more than half of the states cost the ruling Congress Party its monopoly on power. Independent India’s government had failed to address issues of development and equity. Discontent spread widely, particularly among the youth and students, and anti-government protests erupted all over the country.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Asok Mazumdar, *The Tebhaga Movement: Politics of Peasant Protest in Bengal, 1946–50* (Delhi: Aakar Books, 1993); D. N. Dhanagre, “Peasant Protest and Politics: The Tebhaga Movement in Bengal, 1946–47,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 3.3 (1976).

<sup>6</sup> Sreemati Chakrabarti, “From Radical Politics to Liberal Economics: China as a Model,” in S. Narsimhan and G. Balachandirane, eds., *India and East Asia: Learning from Each Other* (Delhi: Manak, 2004).

It was in this environment of economic, political, and social turmoil that the Naxalite Movement broke out. In 1964, the Communist Party of India (CPI) split as a result of the Sino-Soviet dispute. The breakaway group that did not unquestionably support the Soviet Union took the name CPI (Marxist), and contested the general elections of 1967 on its own. It was during the preparations for the elections that serious differences in ideology, strategy, and tactics arose between the top leadership of the CPI (Marxist) and its local units in Darjeeling and Siliguri. Some of the local leaders, led by district general secretary Charu Majumdar, not only questioned Moscow but were outright Maoists. Majumdar and others split from the CPI (Marxist) and later in April 1969 formed the Maoist-oriented CPI (Marxist–Leninist).<sup>7</sup>

Majumdar announced that the uprising in Naxalbari marked the beginning of the armed revolution in India – a Maoist revolution. He subsequently became the ideologue of his party, and coined the slogan “China’s path is our path, China’s Chairman is our Chairman.” Majumdar denounced the parliamentary system and completely rejected the Indian constitution. In his view Mao Zedong’s strategy of revolution, which was successful in China’s case, was fully applicable to India. Since only the Chinese model could save India, it was important for Indian revolutionaries to completely immerse themselves in Maoist philosophy and ideology. Mao’s works were essential readings, and *Quotations from Chairman Mao* was the indispensable document to be owned by all of them and carried on their persons at all times.

### **Appeal and popularity of the Little Red Book**

Political indoctrination through reading and discussion (and sometimes debate) has been a notable aspect of Leninist party practice. Before being initiated into the party organization, it is almost mandatory for all activists and cadres to become well versed in the writings of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. Depending on the orientation of the movement, this might also include the writings of other Marxist ideologues such as Stalin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Gramsci, Mao, etc. In the Indian communist movement, despite the proximity to China, until the 1940s works of western (including Russian) Marxist thinkers formed the bulk of the reading list. Even when the Chinese revolutionary experiences were discussed in political classes, the leadership put little weight on reading Mao’s writings. Nevertheless, some emerging leaders from educated

<sup>7</sup> Bhabani Sengupta, *Communism in Indian Politics* (New Delhi and Stockholm: Young Asia Publications, 1978), pp. 319–28.

backgrounds came on their own to read works of Chinese communism. Liu Shaoqi's *How to be a Good Communist* (1939) was well known, as were Mao's articles on guerrilla warfare and military strategy. Other essays by Mao that attracted interest were "Analyses of Classes in Chinese Society" (1926), which purportedly showed the striking similarity between the Chinese and Indian rural situations in early twentieth century; Mao's treatise on dialectical ontology, "On Contradiction" (1937); a textbook called "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party" (1939); and "On New Democracy" (1940), a war-time analysis of the Chinese revolution's past, present, and future. The audience for these works was, again, young and educated. Peasant communists, even those with some education, showed little if any enthusiasm for Mao's writings. A major reason for this was that Mao's works were available mostly in English, and not in Bengali or Telugu.

Under Majumdar, the Naxalites adopted the Maoist canon promoted by Lin Biao, the military leader named Mao's successor during the Cultural Revolution. The Little Red Book formed the foundation, of course, but other important works were Lin Biao's paean, "Long Live the Victory of the People's War" (1965) and the so-called Three Constantly Read Articles – a brief compilation of "In Memory of Norman Bethune" (1939), "Serve the People" (1944), and "The Foolish Old Man who Removed the Mountains" (1945). Initially the Little Red Book was available only in English, but soon a Bengali version appeared, followed by Nepali, Sinhalese, Tamil, Malayalam, and Urdu. Most often, the Little Red Book was presented free of cost to younger recruits when they joined the movement or in their first indoctrination session. Sometimes this was accompanied by Lin Biao's essay on people's war. Even among peasants with a sincere interest in Maoism, the Little Red Book and other texts were received tepidly, while young, urban, educated, middle-class, would-be "revolutionaries" were willing to pay to purchase a copy.

In fact, it is likely that urban, educated youth were familiar with the Little Red Book before joining the Naxalite Movement. A former Naxalite recalls this introduction to the Little Red Book as Bible:

We came to revolutionary ideas via a re-assessment of Marxism and China played a major role in this. I remember the hubbub caused on Delhi University campus when [British economist] Joan Robinson visited the Delhi School of Economics wearing a Mao cap. She was on her way back from a trip to China, and full of enthusiastic admiration for the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. I didn't get to see her but my close friend (the late Arvind Das) did, and told us all about it. She was actually brandishing a copy of the highly prized Little Red Book of *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*, he said. And whenever someone threw her a critical question about China, she would read out an

appropriate quotation. For example when someone asked her: “Don’t you think Marxism is dogmatic?” her answer was “Chairman Mao says dogma is worse than cow dung!” And so on.<sup>8</sup>

Likewise, Indian Maoists were expected to see Mao’s Little Red Book as their Bible – both the source of all answers and the symbol of a greater cause. An essay in an early issue of the Naxalite Bengali periodical *Deshabrati* (also published in English as *Liberation*) describes the valiant death of a peasant guerrilla after a four-hour standoff with the police: “A true revolutionary and a true disciple of Chairman Mao, Comrade Babulal died with a gun in one hand and the little Red Book of quotations from Chairman Mao in the other. The Red Book was his constant companion. He was hardly thirty at the time of his death.”<sup>9</sup> A later issue describes the killing by police of a young recruit named Niranjan Rao. He was a bright thirteen-year-old boy who worked as a tailor, says the article, and “whenever free he read *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tsetung*, recited and explained them to his mother even while taking his food. He fought with his parents who were reluctant in consideration of his age to allow him to join a guerrilla squad. He was killed the same day he got the permission.”<sup>10</sup> According to an informant who quit the movement early, these sorts of reports were meant to show that non-intellectuals were also enamored by the Little Red Book. Majumdar called young, fresh recruits of whatever class “revolutionary intellectuals,” and stated again and again that reading the *Quotations* was of utmost importance for learning Mao Zedong Thought and spurring revolutionary activism.

In an article titled “To the Youth and Students” published in *Liberation*, Majumdar projects the Little Red Book as the essential guide for the young and educated Naxalites who in substantial numbers were leaving colleges and universities to join the movement.<sup>11</sup> In this article, Majumdar repeats the Maoist argument that since Stalin’s death the Soviet Union has abandoned Marxism–Leninism, established a “bourgeois dictatorship,” and emerged as the number one accomplice of American imperialism. Due to these developments Mao’s thought is now the “only Marxism–Leninism,” which Mao has greatly developed and enriched through the Cultural Revolution. Echoing Lin Biao, Majumdar says the world has entered into the era of Mao Zedong Thought – the Marxism of the era of the complete collapse of

<sup>8</sup> Dilip Simeon, “Glory Days,” in Ira Pande, ed., *India China Neighbours Strangers* (New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers India with India Today Group and India International Centre, 2010), p. 441.

<sup>9</sup> *Liberation* 1.12 (October 1968).

<sup>10</sup> *Liberation* 2.9 (July 1969).

<sup>11</sup> *Liberation* 2.6 (April 1969).

imperialism.<sup>12</sup> “The political task of the student and youth workers,” at this stage of history, “is to study this new and developed Marxism, the thought of Chairman Mao and put it into practice. He who shuns this task can never acquire the knowledge about the principles of Marxism. They must, therefore, study the *Quotations of Chairman Mao Tse-tung*.”<sup>13</sup> Majumdar put particular emphasis on the quotations “On People’s War,” which apparently were published separately in an even littler, pocket-sized booklet with a red plastic cover. This booklet, available in English or Bengali, “is meant for revolutionary workers and peasants,” said Majumdar. “We should make this our propaganda and agitation material. *Whether a worker is revolutionary or not will be judged on the basis of the number of workers and peasants to whom he has read out and explained this book.*”<sup>14</sup> Majumdar advised young recruits to form small squads of four or five students from each school or college in every locality, and each member of the squad must possess a copy of the *Quotations*. They were instructed to go to the villages whenever they found free time, to live and work among the poor and landless peasants, to learn from them, and to “read out quotations of Chairman Mao to them to acquaint them with Mao Tsetung Thought as much as you can.”<sup>15</sup> For Majumdar, the Little Red Book was the glue to hold together the revolutionary intellectuals and youth with the workers and peasants. If Naxalite propaganda is to be believed, Majumdar’s emphasis on reading the Little Red Book created enthusiasm among a large number of his young followers. According to an article called “Story of a Red Guard Squad of Youths and Students” written by a “Revolutionary Student Organizer,” reading out relevant sections of *Quotations from Chairman Mao* to poor and landless peasants was an important task carried out zealously.<sup>16</sup>

Majumdar may have felt encouraged in his promotion of the Little Red Book by a report filed by a *Xinhua* news correspondent based in Beijing. Titled “Revolutionary Indian People are Advancing,” the report was republished in *Liberation* in January 1969:

This year has witnessed the extensive spread of Marxism–Leninism, Mao Tse-tung’s thought in various places in India . . . The Indian revolutionaries have translated and published Chairman Mao’s brilliant works in large quantities and reproduced Chairman Mao’s writings and quotations in their revolutionary journals. They have spread the revolutionary truth among the broad masses of the Indian people, especially among the poor laboring people most brutally

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 94–95. Compare Lin Biao, “Speech at the Peking Rally Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the October Revolution” (November 6, 1967), [www.marxists.org/reference/archive/lin-biao/1967/11/06.htm](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/lin-biao/1967/11/06.htm).

<sup>13</sup> *Liberation*, 2.6 (April 1969), pp. 94–95. <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* (emphasis added).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 87–88. <sup>16</sup> *Liberation* 3.6 (April 1970).

oppressed and exploited. It has been leaked out in the Indian press that among the 'adivasi' (indigenous) peasants living in Chota Nagpur area, Bihar state, many can recite quotations from Chairman Mao.<sup>17</sup>

Majumdar may have interpreted the report as a signal that the Chinese leadership supported and endorsed his stress on the Little Red Book. *Liberation* also republished a similar report on the Malaysian Maoist movement from *Peking Review*. The article said that many fighters in the Malaysian National Liberation Army were new recruits, and also that many were women. They lacked military training, combat experience, weapons, and equipment. In order to overcome these shortcomings, the fighters followed Lin Biao's advice: take firm hold of the study of Mao's works in order to arm yourself with Mao Zedong Thought. The fighters read the Three Constantly Read Articles and "Quotations from Chairman Mao on people's war, people's army, revolutionary heroism and other subjects *over and over*."<sup>18</sup> Only then was the fighters' confidence strengthened, and they found more and more ways of overcoming difficulties.<sup>19</sup>

Emphasis on the Little Red Book is most evident through the summer of 1970. After the Naxalites suffered setbacks in a series of violent clashes with the police and other security forces, Majumdar published a write-up in the party mouthpiece titled "Rely Fully on Landless and Poor Peasants and Combat Revisionism." He stressed the need to make sacrifices and accept bloodshed as part of the revolution.

Educate the landless and poor peasant in Mao Tsetung Thought. Let him learn to fight with guidance from the *Quotations*. Teach him to plan on his own. Help him so that he can develop into a leader. In order to do this it is necessary to help him read the quotations and the three constantly read articles; it is also equally necessary to politically educate the masses. Today the oppressed masses who have suffered from exploitation and tyranny for thousands of years yearn for their liberation and want revolution. Never hesitate to give them politics.<sup>20</sup>

In waging people's war, the people themselves are the main asset of the partisans. Majumdar envisioned the Little Red Book as the way to make and train new soldiers for revolution.

### **Decline of the Little Red Book**

The rise and fall of the Little Red Book in the Naxalite Movement was linked with the personal fortunes of Charu Majumdar. Not all of

<sup>17</sup> *Liberation* 2.3 (January 1969).

<sup>18</sup> "Fighters Armed With Mao Tsetung Thought are Invincible," *Peking Review* 3 (January 16, 1970), reproduced in *Liberation* 5.3 (March 1970) (emphasis added).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Liberation* 10.3 (August 1970), p. 2, speech dated July 14.

Majumdar's comrades in the Naxalite leadership agreed with his approach, which emphasized the Little Red Book almost to the exclusion of other Marxist literature. Majumdar seemed to be more Maoist than Mao himself – and he abandoned other Marxists for the cult of Mao. Majumdar's attachment to the Little Red Book is perhaps inexplicable on the face of it; some of his erstwhile supporters and admirers consider it to have been an obsession. One former comrade speculates that the attraction lay in the overall form of the Little Red Book – nothing else was published in that distinctive color, size, shape, and weight. Moreover, it was inexpensive (often distributed free), easily carried in one's pocket, and no dictionary was required to understand its contents. Majumdar himself may have found it far more readable than the denser writings of Marx, Engels, or Lenin. A pocket edition of Mao's thoughts was most convenient for the formulation of political instructions: one had only to pull out the Little Red Book and read a few passages.

Dissatisfaction with Majumdar's "short-cut" revolutionary methods certainly contributed to the disunity and factionalism that became visible by mid 1971. Majumdar answered his critics in a piece titled "Strengthen the Party Organization" written in October 1971. He expressed dismay at his colleagues for conceit and arrogance, and unhappiness with the fact that his comrades underplayed the importance of the Little Red Book.

We have united for making a revolution. That is why our relation should be of mutual respect and cooperation. Each of us must study deeply the chapter titled "Communists" in the *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tseung*. It is then that the unity of our Party will be as strong as steel . . . The struggle between the two lines exists within the party and it will always be so.<sup>21</sup>

Majumdar attacks those who think that enough political work has been done and there should be more stress on military work. This to him was clearly a deviation which could not take the struggle forward. Following Lin Biao's doctrine of people over weapons, and politics as the most important aspect of military work, Majumdar argues: "Our people's Liberation Army will be able to achieve success only when the number of guerrilla units in the villages increases through political work. There is no way of building guerrilla units except through political propaganda. Political work must be given priority at every stage of the class struggle. This is the Chairman's teaching."<sup>22</sup>

By that time, however, Majumdar's position on the Little Red Book already had been undercut by the Chinese. Sometime in 1970, a Naxalite leader named Souren Bose made a secret visit to China. In one of his

<sup>21</sup> *Liberation* 5.1 (July 1971–January 1972).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

long meetings with Zhou Enlai, Bose was told in no uncertain terms that the Indian revolutionaries must refrain from calling China's Chairman their Chairman, and must find an Indian path to revolution rather than mechanically copying the "Chinese model."<sup>23</sup> Naxalite propaganda did not publicize anything pertaining to this – most likely due to Majumdar's objections – but the fact that the Chinese leadership no longer approved of his position became well known, and in many formal as well as informal party meetings it led to heated discussions and acrimonious debates. As Majumdar's influence waned, there was less and less mention of the Little Red Book in Naxalite discourse.

Majumdar was now vulnerable over another contentious issue: his policy of "annihilation of the class enemy." Under the pretext of this so-called Maoist principle, all opponents of the Naxalites, regardless of class, could be killed. Police constables, primary school teachers, petty shopkeepers – people who by no definition belonged to India's exploiting classes – were frequent targets of the revolutionaries. Actually, Mao had never advocated such indiscriminate annihilation, and the main target in Mao's writings on guerrilla warfare was the Japanese occupation army. Majumdar seems to have missed this point rather deliberately, as the annihilation policy initially helped him retain his dominant position within the party. Even within his own flock, however, Majumdar's annihilation line eventually came under attack as patently un-Maoist, and his leadership was challenged by other sections of the party.<sup>24</sup>

The final blow against the Little Red Book was the unexpected death of Lin Biao in September 1971 and the incredible revelation that he had been a traitor conspiring with the Soviet Union to kill Chairman Mao. That Mao's "comrade-in-arms and successor" could be a traitor left many Indian Maoists confused, disappointed, and disillusioned. According to some former Naxalites, the Lin Biao incident raised questions about the infallibility of the "great, glorious and correct Communist Party of China" and troubling doubts about Mao Zedong himself.<sup>25</sup> Majumdar's own opinion of the Lin Biao incident is not clear from his writings, but when his erstwhile comrade Ashim Chatterjee split from Majumdar in 1972, Chatterjee made a scathing and insinuating remark about those who were "supporting the black conspiracy of Lin Biao and, in actuality, registering their approval of the vile attempt on the life of Chairman Mao."<sup>26</sup> Majumdar had hitched his star to Lin Biao and the

<sup>23</sup> Chakrabarti, *China and the Naxalites*, pp. 110–18.

<sup>24</sup> Mohan Ram, *Maoism in India* (New Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1971), pp. 132–33.

<sup>25</sup> Chakrabarti, *China and the Naxalites*, pp. 118–22.

<sup>26</sup> Ashim Chatterjee, "A Statement," *Frontier* 7.4 (May 18, 1974).

Lin Biao version of Maoism. After Lin Biao's star fell, and the aura of China, the Chinese Revolution, and Mao Zedong began to fade, the Little Red Book lost its revered status in the hearts and minds of Indian Maoist intellectuals. Charu Majumdar was arrested on July 16, 1972, and he died ten days later in police custody, under mysterious circumstances. The Majumdar era was over.

The Little Red Book was formally banned in India in 1975, but even prior to that those who merely owned the book were harassed by the police, especially in the city of Calcutta. Many activists or suspected activists had their houses raided by the police looking for copies of Mao's *Quotations* and other "incriminating" documents. By the late 1970s, due to various domestic and international factors, the Naxalite Movement had become more or less dormant. The ban on the Little Red Book continues today, but those who possess copies of it are no longer secretive about it. This latter fact is somewhat surprising, since the Naxalite Movement has reemerged after more than two decades of quiescence and is today considered by some to be a greater threat to India's internal security than cross-border terrorism. Reportedly twelve of India's twenty-eight states have come under Naxalite influence in varying degrees, and periodic incidents of violence between insurgents and security personnel have brought death and destruction on both sides.

However, the Naxalite Movement is no longer a peasant revolution led by the so-called petty-bourgeois intellectuals, but an insurrection of tribal locals whose livelihood has been compromised by the Indian state due to liberalization and globalization. There is an ongoing debate whether Maoism in India today should be viewed as a social problem or as a law-and-order issue. Many, including this author, believe that the so-called Maoist movement is now devoid of specifically Maoist characteristics.<sup>27</sup> What is clear is that Maoist ideology itself, as represented by its vector the Little Red Book, is no longer considered a fearsome weapon on its own.

## Conclusion

The popularity of the Little Red Book peaked in the period 1969–72. Its readers included members of the Naxalite Movement, as well as its sympathizers and not a few curious observers. Of the latter two groups,

<sup>27</sup> Recent works on the reemerged Maoist/Naxalite movement include: Bidyut Chakraborty and Rajat Kumar Kujur, *Maoism in India: Re-incarnation of Ultra-left wing Extremism in the 21st Century* (Oxford and New York: Routledge Contemporary Asia Series, 2010); Santosh Paul, *The Maoist Movement in India: Perspectives and Counter-Perspectives* (New Delhi: Routledge India, 2012); and Nirmalangshu Mukherjee, *The Maoists in India: Tribals Under Siege* (London: Pluto Press, 2012).

nearly all were educated – mostly college and university students – and from middle-class or affluent backgrounds. The Little Red Book played an important role in the radicalization of reasonably large numbers of urban students and intellectuals in the late 1960s. Classes for ideological indoctrination at that time included the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin, but Mao's *Quotations* had a special kind of appeal due to the proximity and supposed similarity of China, and because Mao was projected as the charismatic chairman of India's most ardent, anti-revisionist Marxist–Leninists. According to some former Naxalites, Charu Majumdar was solely responsible for the propagation of the cult of Mao, the elevation of the Little Red Book to the status of relic, and the overly mechanical application of the Chinese model to India. As a result, some blame him for the precipitous decline of the movement in Bengal in the early 1970s.

Integrating the views of former Naxalites, the problem with the Little Red Book is clear: it encapsulates thought without context. First, the historical context of revolution in India was quite different. In China, the Little Red Book was used to mobilize social forces against the entrenchment of a ruling communist party; in India, the Maoists were a minor faction within a minor faction of a minority party. Second, the textual context was absent. In China, the Little Red Book was a pocket reference to a much larger and well-known corpus of works; in India, it became an inadequate substitute for systematic ideological indoctrination. Mao's ideological vigor comes out in his long essays and speeches (which form part of his selected works) and not from a few loose quotations. Third, the philosophical content without context could not be translated into meaningful action. The Little Red Book reduced Maoism to a derivative and inert system of thought, rather than a creative and vibrant system of thinking, ready to be put to use in new situations. As one former Naxalite activist put it, the “revolutionary” exercise of reading and recitation was at best symbolic.

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