

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF MAOIST MOVEMENT IN ODISHA: An Analysis (1968-2016)

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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the historical development of Maoist movement in Odisha, which began around the 1960s and still continues to be a major concern for the state as well as the security forces. The paper further highlights how the topographical position and lack of development governance has made Odisha, a state rich in mineral resources, vulnerable to Maoist conflicts. Furthermore, it talks about the major Maoists insurgencies witnessed by the state and how it all began. Between the tussle of government and the Maoists, common people are the ones who are suffer the most. It also focuses on the issues of the Maoists that has given rise to such conflicts and how can these problems be solved by the different developmental initiatives taken by the government.

Introduction:

Odisha is considered to be one of the poverty stricken states in India. The socio-cultural composition of the state has made it a typical region vulnerable to Maoist conflicts. The Maoists conflict in Odisha is not a recent phenomenon and has been a crucial challenge that the state has been facing since many decades. The prolonged antiquity of Maoism in Odisha does not have a Telangana or Naxalbari to boast about, yet it does have a well defined and distinct in the maps of Maoists from the beginning. Recently, a report on the law and order situation of the state was released by the Government of Odisha, which highlighted that major Maoist activities were operational in 14 out of 30 districts in 2005 in the state. (The Genesis and Current Phase of Naxal Movement in Odisha n.d.) This figure has increased to

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19 districts in 2015, though its intensity has fallen. The difficult terrain, dense forests and poor communication networks in these districts have proved to be a safe haven for the Maoists. The socio-economic deprivation, regional economic imbalance, prolonged underdevelopment in these neglected areas have estranged its rightful inhabitants giving an opportunity to the Maoists to use local grievances to consolidate their hold over these areas since many years.

The Maoist movement in Odisha has not developed over one day or one year or even one decade, making Odisha a part of the '*red corridor*' (the region in East India starting from Nepal in the north to the south, witnessed by heavy Naxal-Maoist insurgency). There's no single reason that can be ascribed for the gradual increase of the Maoist. The upsurge of Maoist in Odisha reveals that the current volatile situation is majorly a result of primary latent issues like underdevelopment and poverty, land alienation, lopsided developmental strategies.

Firstly, the issue of *underdevelopment and poverty* is a major concern. With 17 million people living below poverty line (BPL) in the state, Odisha accounts for 48 percent of poverty, as stated by the report of Planning Commission. (Kujur 2006) The chronic poverty in the state, has provided as an idle ground for the growth and expansion of Naxal movement. Moreover, the movement is majorly concentrated in the tribal rural pockets of the state, especially in the northern and southern regions which witnesses maximum Maoist conflicts. The intensity of poverty is more severe amongst the tribals in these districts than the midland and coastal districts. The Maoists have presented themselves as the liberators of these communities who would ensure them justice, life and livelihood, thus managing to win their support.

The second cause is, when the government or corporate players take over the land of the inhabitants of a particular region giving rise to the issue of *land alienation*. The poor, the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are the ones who suffer the most by land alienation. Factors like manipulation of land records, illegal encroachment of land by outsiders in the name of development and the Benami transfer of land, where the original landowners are reduced to share croppers, are responsible for the alienation of land, adding more dissatisfaction amongst those communities.

The third cause deals with the issue of developmental strategies and activities that has given rise to such conflicts. Most of the extensive developmental projects are carried out in and

around the hilly tracts and forest areas, making the local inhabitants, who are mostly from the backward classes susceptible to *displacement*.

The state has evidently taken quite a number of steps to intervene the Maoist attacks in the northern and southern districts of Odisha, which suffers the maximum number of conflicts. On one hand, the government has deployed security forces in large numbers in these areas and on the other hand, it has taken various development initiatives in areas concerned to deal with the Maoist attacks. Apart from these strategies adopted by the government, the issue needs to be tackled from the grass root level in a more holistic manner. There should be political consensus in the state regarding the issues of Maoists. Effective implementation of the government developmental projects/ programmes, which looks into the needs of the local people should be adopted. Lastly and most importantly, there should be negotiations reassuring people that there is a genuine desire to reconcile from the government's side and bring back peace and harmony.

HISTORY:

The Maoist Conflict in Odisha began as a result of the armed peasant rebellion in the northern part of Telangana (formerly known as Andhra Pradesh). People's resistance movement that marked the early movements of communist ideology were evident in districts such as Ganjam and Koraput, both bordering Andhra Pradesh. Movements were carried out against the Bethi (slavery) and Gothii (bonded labour) practices, moneylenders, forest and police officers, etc throughout Ganjam and Koraput districts, which can be regarded as the genesis of the radical communist movement in Odisha.

In 1967, the Odisha State Coordination Committee (OSCC) was formed which gave impetus to the Maoist movements in the state. The OSCC came in support of the Naxalbari Movement headed by Charu Majumdar and amalgamated with the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR). (Behera 2016) But during the period of 1968-1980, differences in the ideologies and views amongst the leaders of OSCC cropped up. Post 1980, the Maoist movements gained substantial momentum in Odisha as the People's War Group (PWG) of Andhra Pradesh started spreading its ideologies in the bordering districts of Odisha. The fact that local issues like the exploitation of tribals, land alienation and poverty was raised on a bigger platform worked in favour of the Maoists, gaining them the support of the locals. The PWG and Maoist Communist Centre of India

(MCCI) consolidated in 2004 and created the Communist Party of India- Maoist (CPI-Maoist).

FLASHPOINTS (Major Attacks):

- **CHTRAKONDA POLICE STATION ATTACK, 1968:** The Chitrakonda police station was attacked on May 1, 1968 by the members of the Odisha State Coordination Committee (OSCC) led by Nagabhushan Pattnaik with the support of the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) headed by Charu Majumdar. (Behera 2016) The cadres of the organisation ransacked the entire police station and looted all the arms and ammunitions, marking the beginning of violence influenced by Maoism ideology in Odisha.
- **KORAPUT ATTACK, 2004:** Maoists belonging to the People's War Group (PWG) attacked the security offices in Koraput district headquarters in February, 2004. The office of Superintendent of Police, Koraput Jail and many police stations were stormed and the District Armoury was ransacked, injuring many.
- **MAOIST ATTACK IN NAYAGARH, 2008:** The Central Military Commission (CMC) of the CPI(M) stormed into the Nayagarh district armoury and many police stations in Nayagarh district headquarters in February, 2008. Like the previous attack, several armouries were looted in the district. 14 policemen and civilians were killed in the series of attacks. This incident changed the perception of the state that these Maoist activities were mere a result of the activities ongoing in the neighbouring states of Andhra Pradesh, Chattisgarh and Jharkhand.
- **BALIMELA RESERVOIR AMBUSH, 2008:** In June 2008, a boat carrying four anti-Naxal police personnel and around 60 Greyhound Commandos, who are regarded as an elite group of anti-Naxal force from Andhra Pradesh, were attacked and killed on the Balimela reservoir in Malkangiri. The primary objective of the Maoists in doing such attacks was to showcase the government their power.
- **KANDHAMAL RIOT, 2008:** In one of the deadliest attacks in Odisha, the Maoists under the leadership of Sabyasachi Panda, the former leader of Odisha State Committee

(OSC) prompted the Kandhamal Riots. The leader of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Swami Lakshmana Nanda Saraswati was killed in August, 2008 by the Maoists as he was suspected of converting the tribals into Hinduism. There was a communal clash between the ring wing Hindus and Christians, triggering massive unrest throughout the state, that claimed the lives of 30 people.

- **FOREIGN TOURIST ABDUCTED, 2012:** In March 2012, the entire state went into shock when two Italian tourists were abducted and held hostage by Sabyasachi Panda (head of the Odisha State Organising Committee) from the Kandhamal-Ganjam forest area. The OSOC demanded the release of the Maoist cadres and Sabyasachi's wife who were involved in the armoury loot case in Nayagarh and Koraput. Panda declared an unilateral ceasefire till the end of negotiation for the hostages.

The Maoists in Odisha were divided into two groups, where one group was led by Sabyasachi Panda of OSOC and the other group was headed by Daya, the Secretary of Andhra- Odisha Border Special Zone Committee (AOBSZC). The differences between the two parties of Maoists was so stark that, within days of OSOC declaring a ceasefire with the Odisha government, the members of AOBSZC broke the ceasefire and abducted a MLA of BJD, Jinna Hikaka.

- **FORMATION OF ODISHA MAOBADI PARTY, 2012:** The central leadership of CPI-Maoist expelled OSOC leader Sabyasachi Panda from the party as he was accused of "betraying the great cause of toiling masses". (Behera 2016) Sabyasachi formed another party named Odisha Maobadi Party, which highlighted the division in the party. A lot of chaos engulfed the newly made party, which was later renamed as CPI-Marxist Leninist Maoist (MLM) in May 2014 before he was arrested in July, 2014. (Behera 2016)

ASSESSMENT OF 2016:

The Maoist cadres of Communist Party of India (Maoist) killed a village headman at Badapadar in Malkangiri district in December, 2015. 10 Maoists barged into the house of the Sarpanch, killed him and escaped. The Sarpanch (or village headman) was killed as a

suspected 'Police Informer'. Another incident happened in the same day when a group of 30 Maoists kidnapped and killed another civilian in the other part of the district.

These incidents reflect a sense of insecurity amongst the civilians. But the data compiled by a trusted portal suggests that, as against 31 civilian fatalities in Left Wing Extremists (LWE) violence through 2014, 2015 recorded 18 such fatalities, showing a decline of 58 per cent. This was the lowest fatality figure for civilians recorded in the state since 2007, when it was 13. These figures state that the safety situation in the state has extremely ameliorated.

In 2015, the Security Forces (SFs) undertook several successful operations against the Maoists. As compared to 2014 where only 9 Maoists were killed, 11 were killed in 2015. Last year, exactly during this time of the year, SFs killed a CPI-Maoist cadre in the Chandiposh Forest area near Rourkela. Furthermore, 29 Maoists were arrested in 2015 in addition to 49 in 2014, and 84 in 2013. The biggest headway of 2015 was the diminishing impact of Maoists in the district of Koraput which recorded a single fatality in that year, when compared to 14 deaths in 2014.

The movements of Maoists in Odisha has declined dramatically in 2015 as compared to movements in others states like Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Maharashtra. The Maoist wing that was operational in Odisha realized that their hold in the state was weakening after Sabyasachi Panda, the leader of the Odisha State Organising Committee (OSOC) split from the CPI-M and formed his own outfit in the state. Moreover, the year 2015 witnessed 135 Maoists surrenders. Similarly, 94 Maoist cadres surrendered to the government in 2014 in addition to the overwhelming number of 1787 in 2013, most of who belonged to the CMAS.

Of all the ambushes that took place in the state in 2015, the district of Malkangiri lone reported 25 out of 33 fatalities, emerging as one of the most violent LWE-affected districts in the country, along with Sukma, Dantewada in Chhattisgarh, Gadchiroli in Maharashtra and Palamu in Jharkhand. During a bandh call given by the Maoists across the Dandakaranya region on November 25, 2015, normal life was paralyzed in the Mathili Block of Malkangiri District. (Assessment of 2016 2001) The Maoists are profoundly a big challenge in the Malkangiri district. Nevertheless, many developmental initiatives have been taken throughout the year which has been successful in subverting the Maoist movements in the district. On April 15, 2015, a tribal organisation namely, the Malkangiri Adivasi Sangha (MAS) retaliated

and protested against the Maoists when the latter kidnapped eight villagers in the Kantapalli area of Malkangiri. Their protest forced the Maoists to release all the villagers the very next day.

ISSUES:

The Maoist affected areas in Odisha are primarily concentrated in 19 districts. 8 out of 19 districts i.e. Malkangiri, Kalahandi, Koraput, Nuapada, Rayagada, Bolangir, Nabarangpur and Bargarh witness severe active presence of the Maoists. In 11 districts out of the 19 districts, the SCs and STs account for 50 percent of the total population. (Census 2011)

The backward communities, especially the tribals, SCs and STs, poor farmers in the state have been trying to fight for their rights which they have been denied off for a long period. But the Maoists have brought out these issues and problems of the people in the public, thereby creating a perfect hold in the hearts of the poor communities. The issues that have contributed to the growth of the Maoist movement in the Odisha are as follows:

- **Land Alienation:** Issues like land ownership, land acquisition, land transfer and land alienation have contributed to major conflicts in the backward and marginalized regions of the state and tribals and other backward societies have been affected the most. All the governments at power have failed to address this issue. This issue of land alienation in Odisha in the tribal dominated areas can be attributed to three factors. First, the records and accounts of the land are manoeuvred wherein the tribals are denied off the legal ownership of land that they have cultivated for a long time. Second issue is, the problem of encroachment where huge tracts of land owned by the poor tribals are trespassed without their permission. It is a very common phenomenon in the Maoist dominated areas of the state. And the third important factor leading to land alienation is the 'Benami Transfer' in which the original owners of the land are mere tenants though the land remains in their name.

Before the British rule in India, the tribal areas of Odisha enjoyed autonomy in terms of ownership of land and administration. But, with the introduction of the Zamindari system, the Britishers began to bereave the tribals from their customary land rights, leading to forced displacement and migration of the tribals to the plains. Slowly, the zamindars under the British rule manipulated with the administration in those tribal areas. They settled lands with those who were non-tribals who indulged in settled cultivation. (Shakti Padhi 2011) The Orissa Scheduled Area Transfer of Immovable

Property Act 1956 was passed in order to end the transfer of tribal land to the non-tribals. This Act ensured that the land of the STs cannot be transferred to the non-tribals without the permission of the Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO). But unfortunately, the Act could do nothing substantial as the elite class did not find difficult in getting permission of the SDO. (Mohanty 1997)

Many Acts relating to land like the Central Provinces Land Revenue and Tenancy Acts, the Orissa Tenancy Act, Orissa Estate Abolition Act, etc were incorporated in 1900s, yet land alienation is still a major issue in the tribal areas. Eventually, organisations such as the Kui Lawang Sangha (KLS) and Chasi Mulia Samiti (CMS) made successful attempts to reclaim the land from the rich farmers and moneylenders in the 1990s. In Odisha, the Maoists have consolidated their position raising the age old issue of land alienation, thereby legitimizing their movement.

- **Underdevelopment and Poverty:** The acute problem of underdevelopment and poverty in Odisha are the major issues that have been capitalized by the Maoists. The Maoist affected districts in Odisha are more underdeveloped and poverty stricken when compared to other districts of the state. The profound prevalence of underdevelopment and chronic poverty in these districts have helped the Maoists to spread their ideology and strengthen their foot to fight against the government. Districts such as Koraput, Malkangiri, Rayagada and Nabarangpur fall under the KBK (Kalahandi Balangir Koraput) region where special steps have been taken by the government to eradicate poverty, but the issue refuses to cease. During 2003-04 and 2004-05, an overwhelming amount of Rs 500 crore was allocated (Kujur 2006) for the development of the KBK region as Special Central Assistance. The government reports claim that the money was spent, yet the actual situation narrates something else. As per the Planning Commission reports, these KBK districts appear among 150 of the most backward districts in the country, posing a question mark on the government's initiative. Conversely, tribal districts like Keonjhar and Sundargarh which boasts of having abundant mining resources and iron units have contributed minimal amount to growth.

Odisha is rich in natural as well as mineral resources. The state has 99 per cent Chromate ore, 92 per cent of Nickel ore, 65 per cent of Graphite and Pyrophyllite, 66 per cent of Bauxite, 31 per cent of Mineral sand, 32 per cent of Manganese of the country. Odisha also accounts more than 35 per cent (mines 2014) and 24 per cent of the country's iron ore and coal resources respectively. Many industries and irrigation projects have come up in these areas over the years. But these projects failed to rehabilitate and resettle

those who had been displaced in the developmental process, with very low income, less work opportunities, poor lifestyle, etc.

The tribal dominated areas in the northern and southern regions of Odisha have been suffering from the issue of chronic poverty due to factors such as lack in governance and failure in proper implementation of state led development models. The state government, until recently, did not take appropriate steps to bring development for the backward communities. But the government officials, the rich and powerful local people and other players have manipulated the rules and regulations that have gone against the interests of the SCs and STs.

The tribal communities have been influenced by the Maoist movement so much so that the development initiatives taken by the government seem to them of no use. As a result, they have taken the Maoist and their ideologies as their last resort to ensure their rights and livelihood.

➤ **Development induced Displacement:** The issue of displacement has been a cause to many major conflicts in the state. Odisha's richness in mineral resources has made it a hub of various large scale development projects like construction of dams, setting up of factories and industries and extraction of mineral resources, etc. Generally, such projects are undertaken in and around hilly and forest areas posing the threat of displacement to the locals, especially the tribals, SCs and STs.

The ongoing large scale projects in the state, in a way, have vindicated the organisational displacement of those who are its local residents. More than 20 comprehensive large scale projects are going on in Koraput district, which is one of the Maoist dominated areas, have displaced huge number of tribals. . Some of the major projects undertaken by the government which were responsible for the displacement of many families residing in the vicinity are Hirakud Dam (32718 households), Machhakund Dam (2938 households), Upper Kolab Dam (3179 households), Rengali Multipurpose Dam (10872 households), Upper Indravati Hydro Electric (5301 households), Balimela Dam (1200 households). Other industries like the National Aluminium Company (NALCO), Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Ordnance factory have displaced 3,143 households. (Behera 2016) Of the total families displaced during these projects, majority belong to the SC and the ST categories. Furthermore, 4094 families were displaced when the Rourkela Steel Plant in Sundargarh district was set up and 60 percent (Meher 2009) of these families belong to the tribal community. The displaced communities have been calling for rehabilitation and compensation measures ever since the projects began,

which, unfortunately went unheard by the state officials and corporate players, causing immense disappointment amongst the tribals. This issue of displacement was taken up by the Maoists, which eventually helped them get the support of the locals to fight against the state.

STATE RESPONSE TO MAOISTS: The Congress Party that ruled the state for about 35 years, adopted the method of non-intervention towards the issue of Maoism. It was only during the government of the Biju Janta Dal (BJD) in 1990-95, that the state took the issue seriously as that of a threat to the socio-economic structure of the state. In 1992, the then Chief Minister of Odisha, Biju Patnaik divided the large districts into smaller ones, with an aim to control the Maoist movement and make the administration more approachable. But the steps that government took had no impact on the movements of the Maoists. Conversely, they also expanded their territory of work and the target groups.

But the current Chief Minister, Naveen Patnaik seems to have achieved some results as he has adopted the following approaches to check on the Maoist movements.

The state government has prominently tried to intervene and bring peace in the Maoist affected areas by adopting security and development initiatives.

- **Military Approach:** The Odisha government has deployed the Special Operation Group (SOG) along with 17 battalion of Central Armed Police Force (CAPF), the best of state Police force and the District Voluntary Forces (DVF) to 'securitize' the locals (Behera 2016) against the development projects and the Maoists. The government claims that the violent activities of the Maoists have declined due to the high level security measures in the form of deployment of the skilled and trained security commandos in those areas. But in reality, the problem is still a big challenge for the state as well as the security forces. Factors like lack of coordination among the CAPFs and the state security forces, insufficient deployment of local police in the affected areas and lastly, the lack of modernization of Odisha police has put the security centric approach of the government in question.
- **Development strategy:** This approach aims at addressing age old issues pertaining to growth and development to win hearts and minds of the people against the Maoists. It plans to empower the tribals in remote areas through development programmes and provide them with proper job opportunities. In the present scenario, the Maoist movement has significantly benefited a lot from the presence of companies in the Maoist prone areas. It can be well substantiated by the fact that, there have been quite an

occasions of exchange and deal between the Maoists and big corporate houses. Giant companies like JK Paper Mills, NALCO, etc are believed to have given huge amount of grants to the Maoists as protection money. Moreover, the contractors of various development projects also share a quid pro quo with the Maoists. They tend to blame the Maoists movements for the delay of development projects and in return, the Maoist demand a particular share of the money that has been allocated for the project. The Maoists also demand a particular share of the daily wages from the bamboo fellers and Tendu leaves collectors, who are predominantly SCs and STs.

- **Surrender and rehabilitation strategy:** Under this, the government tries to encourage the Maoists to surrender and join the mainstream. As per the government guidelines, the scheme offers employment and job opportunities to those Maoists who have surrendered so as to encourage them to join the mainstream. But the scheme has not yielded anything substantial. The new surrender and rehabilitation policy of Odisha, 2012 focuses majorly on the employment and monetary benefits.

OPTIONS FOR PEACE:

The Maoist conflict needs negotiation from the government's part which would ensure them that the government is genuinely trying to understand their issues and that their demands would be fulfilled. But unfortunately, all the governments that have been in power till date have done nothing striking and satisfactory in order to bring the Maoist to negotiate. So positive measures should be taken like releasing the Maoists who have been jailed on the basis of suspicion. Unless the Maoists are ready for negotiation, no proper steps can be taken. The civil society organisations should engage in bringing the state and government face to face for negotiation. Similarly, the perception of the government towards the Maoists should change as it has always considered it to be a threat to the law and order of the state. The state generally sees the violent side of the and overlooks the issues that bother the people. The state should understand that there are a set of genuine issues like unemployment, corruption, poverty, displacement, etc that are of concern for the Maoists and take steps to fulfil the gap. Moreover, the general idea that all the inhabitants in the Maoist dominated areas, who tend to be mostly tribals, support the violence meted out by Maoist, requires a change.

The local security forces of the state need to modernize themselves with adequate arms and ammunitions, combat methods and recruit more skilled and advanced commandos. Moreover, the deployment of CAPFs commandos conveys a wrong message to the local residents as they are often regarded as outsiders and their camps terrorize the people.

One of the most important factors in the process of reconciliation is avoiding politicization of the Maoist conflict issue. Both politics and the Maoist issue should be kept away from each other as the issue demands a sensitive approach from the political area too. There should be political consensus and the will to deal with this issue effectively. Another important factor is to employ more number of government officials who would look into solving the local issues which should compensate for years of non governance.

There is a need for effective rehabilitation programmes for the Maoists who have surrendered so as to encourage more of them to give up the life of rebellion and start leading a conventional life.

CONCLUSION:

The fact that the lack of proper development governance in the vulnerable areas has led to underdevelopment, exploitation and inequality in the region cannot be denied. Furthermore, the presence of Maoists and the fear they have create in the minds of people has altogether added to their plight. Between the tussle of government and the Maoists, common people are the ones who are suffering the most. If any person is suspected of being an 'informer', he is killed either by the government or by the Maoist group.

It is ironical that how the communist-led peasant movement in the northern and southern districts of Odisha in the 1960s, has now turned into a big concern for the law and order body in as many as 19 districts of the state. However, Odisha has been suffering from this grave issue since the past 40 years, yet no appropriate and rational strategy has been incorporated. This issue needs an robust administration that is approachable and that understands the plight and problems of the poor people. Moreover, there is an urgent need for systematic strategies and policies that would yield long term solution, which can help in fighting against the Maoist movement in Odisha, ensuring that the people are not made to suffer anymore.

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