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TRIBAL POVERTY, ALIENATION AND GROWTH OF NAXALISM IN KORAPUT AND MALKANGIRI DISTRICTS OF ODISHA

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Mr. Prafulla Kumar Lakra

Lecturer In Political Science, Government College, Koraput.

ABSTRACT

The concept of poverty and the linkage between Alienation and Naxalism has become an issue of national importance to debate on for the people of all ages. Odisha being one of the poor states of India facing a great threat from a host of poverty and Naxalism so called “Red Corridor.” It is mostly being seen in tribal populated districts of Odisha. Of late, it has posed a great threat and challenge in the development process of Odisha. The Planning Commission of India has identified Odisha as the highest poverty ridden population compared to any other states with around 48 percent of its population living Below Poverty Line (BPL). Out of the total population of BPL, 73.08 percent belong to the Scheduled Tribes and 52.30 percent belong to Scheduled Castes. Overwhelmingly, among the Naxal affected areas of Odisha, the BPL percentage is the highest in Koraput district with 83.81 percent followed by Malkangiri district with 81.88 percent. And, the poverty is considered as one of the most important driving force for the growth of Naxalism in tribal areas. The tribals being very poor with their deplorable socio-economic condition and with no other alternative option easily fall prey to Naxal ideology and activities. Although, the Naxal stronghold of Koraput and Malkangiri districts of Odisha fall under the KBK region, where a number of special programmes are in operation for development of the region but, poverty refuses to subside till date. The development of the region is far from satisfactory and calls for some serious and genuine measures for development. Thus, this paper makes an analytical study of the socio-economic conditions of the tribals and the breeding grounds of Maoism in the concerned districts. At the same time, it also aims to provide some policy recommendations and suggestive measures to combat Naxalism.

INTRODUCTION

To begin with Mr. Paul O. Wolfowitz, President of the World Bank, “We live in a world of extraordinary inequalities in opportunity, both within and across the countries.”¹ Odisha has been always in the news for its poverty and socio-economic backwardness. Odisha by all its indicators has failed to reduce level of poverty to any significant level over 10 years or more. The State of Odisha has been always described as a hopeless Cinderella of modern India. The tribals and tribulations of Odisha are unique and no other state in the Indian Union is adversely placed in the context of development as this state. It has been pointed out time and again that Odisha represent a paradox, a land well gifted by nature with widespread of poverty. Odisha has 97.93% of Chromites, 92.46% of nickel ore, 50.98% of Bauxite, 35.15% of manganese, 24.61% of coal and 33.17% iron ore deposits in the country. It has around 480 kilometers of coastline, its soil is alluvial, climate is favorable for cultivation, many rivers are able to provide year long water for the purpose of irrigation and also Odisha has 37.33% of forest area to the total area.² Even though, the present Chief Minister Mr. Naveen Patnaik has signed MoUs with many industries like POSCO, VEDANTA, MITTAL, TATA and Power Plants for the development of Odisha, t Odisha still suffers from the abject poverty. The Planning Commission of India has identified Odisha as the highest poverty ridden population compared to any other states with around 48 percent of its population living Below Poverty Line (BPL). Out of the total population of BPL, 73.08 percent belong to the Scheduled Tribes and 52.30 percent belong to Scheduled Castes. It has been always noticed that the southern Odisha is deep-rooted with the problem of acute poverty and regional backwardness. It has maximum numbers of ultra poor category population. The districts like Balangir, Sonepur, Nuapada, Kalahandi, Koraput, Malkangiri, Nawarngpur and Rayagada are vulnerable to frequent droughts and famines like situation almost every year. These eight districts are popularly known as KBK region of Odisha named after the three undivided districts of Kalahandi, Balangir and Koraput. Interestingly, among all these KBK districts, the BPL percentage is the highest in Koraput district with 83.81 percent followed by Malkangiri district with 81.88 percent.³ And the poverty is considered as one of the most important driving force for the growth of Naxalism in tribal regions. The tribals being very poor with their deplorable socio-economic condition and with no other alternative option easily fall prey to Naxal ideology and activities.

People in these regions are continuously neglected in the last seventy three years of independence. Odisha politics is always dominated by the leaders of coastal Odisha. Even though Western Odisha generates the highest revenue for Sate Government, it always gets step- motherly treatment. Both the Government of India and the Government of Odisha have formulated number of special programmes for the upliftment of the KBK regions. But still these regions are far away from the prosperity and modernity. It suffers from acute poverty and backwardness. This region has not been able to take off till today largely because of lacuna at the implementation stage. They are now demanding separate Koshal state because of their cultural and linguistic uniformity and economic backwardness. This region contributes 35 per cent of state's population and around 66 per cent of its revenue, but in the Civil Services of Odisha they have less than 7 per cent of representation. In the 1996 the then Prime Minister Sri Narasimha Rao while initiating special development plan for KBK region had expected KBK would be laboratory for development. But after 24 years development programmes could not be able to change the ground situations. The region has become the epicenter of backwardness and poverty.

Peaceful and democratic agitations in this region have failed to address their genuine grievances. And, in this region the tribal alienation has grown at a massive pace. It is among this anger and alienation that Maoists are increasingly finding supports and recruits. Maoists believe in armed struggle to overthrow the state machinery and bring socio-economic changes. And they follow the tactics of their predecessors Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) rejecting Parliamentary democratic set up and capturing entire political power through protracted armed struggle based on guerrilla warfare. Many tribals are opposed to use of violence, but left with no option to pick up the gun to counter the violence of state and its police and paramilitary forces. Many tribals still engage in mass politics and agitations to address their grievances, but are being pushed to embrace the Maoism and armed struggle. The targets of Maoist violence are often to those who exploit the tribals like landlords, police and money lenders. It has been always pointed out by analysts that it is the failure on the part of the state government to address the tribal grievances that is fueling support for Maoist not only in Odisha but also in the country.

Causes for the spread of Naxalism in Koraput and Malkangiri:

Naxalism expands its attraction from growing unfairness of the consequences following from the direction of financial allocation, economic disparities and human displacement. There is no sensitivity in public policy to the growing marginalization and income insecurity of the population so targeted. It is a well-known fact that the leadership of this movement is in the hands of the upper class but the cadre and strength are in the hands of marginalized groups.

The Naxal 'infested' districts as identified by the state government are Koraput, Malkangiri, Nabarangapur, Rayagada, Gajapati, Ganjam, Sundargarh, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Sambalpur, Kandhamal, Deogarh, Jharsuguda and Jajpur. Today, Peoples' War Groups has made a formidable base in the underdeveloped, rural lands of these districts particularly in Koraput and Malkangiri. However, the development has not taken place within one day or one year or even one decade. No single group can take credit for making these two districts a happening place in the Naxal roadmap. Equally, it is difficult to identify any particular reason for the growth of the Naxalite movement in these two districts. Several factors – poverty, underdevelopment, lopsided development strategy, failure of systemic governance and use of violence and counter-violence in the name of development seem to have contributed to the growth of the ultra-left extremism in Koraput and Malkangiri. People in these backward regions lack economic opportunities. They are deprived of the fruits of prosperity and modernity. People in socio-economically depressed regions often carry a deep sense of frustration and discrimination against their better off neighbors. Poor and illiterate tribal people are often easily manipulated by anti-social elements and powerful vested interests.

The State-led planned economic development has failed to bring about uniform development in KBK region particularly Koraput and Malkangiri. There seems to be no interval for those living in rural Koraput and Malkangiri because governance is equated with 'corruption', 'nepotism', and 'miss-appropriation of funds' in the name of development. It is therefore not surprising that Koraput and Malkangiri, despite being a rich depository of natural resources, remain most backward districts in Odisha. In such a context, Maoism has emerged as an alternative mode of articulating one's existence free from 'hunger', 'malnutrition' and 'ill-health'. Maoism is a politically-charged ideological battle against human misery, which is, at the same time, a powerful critique of the state-directed development model. What is most paradoxical is the fact that despite 'liberal' state funding for development projects in the 'poverty-stricken' Koraput and Malkangiri districts of the state, the areas remain severely 'backward' and the target groups barely have access to the benefits.⁴

Further, the forest resources in these two districts too have been commercialized thereby alienating the adivasis from forest produce. Constructions of big dams have caused massive displacement of tribals without proper re-settlement policies. Moreover, governments have been immune to the problems facing the Tribals. The tribal development programmes over the years have created new elite structure in the community, leaving patches of acute poverty. This phenomenon of governing elite against equity and fairness, despite the existing laws, does give rise to Naxal violence. This reflects the social dimensions of the Naxalite problem.⁵

Several developmental schemes have been announced over the years but the expansion of Naxalism shows that the factors breeding rebellion remain. No doubt, the anti-poverty programmes have found a boost with the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), National Food for Work Programme (NFFWP), and Sanjay Gandhi Rozgar Yojna

(SGRY), but they are not fairing any better than the earlier programmes in reducing poverty. "These Schemes seem to be a theoretical antidote to starvation. Now if these schemes are totally inadequate, what else can be done? What is the solution? The real answer to the question lies in raising the potential for increasing agricultural productivity.

Koraput is highly Naxal affected which has a poverty ratio of 78.65 per cent and the literacy rate is miserable at 36.20 per cent. With a tribal population of 5,85,830, this district has been a hotbed of Naxal activity since decades.⁷ It was as early as in 1980 that an armed group of the PWG moved into interior areas of Koraput and established its control by successfully motivating the Bangladeshi refugees and local tribals against the corruption-ridden and failed state. The government's selfishness towards basic problems of the poverty-stricken rural tribals is the main cause for the rapid Naxal growth in Koraput. It is a sad reality in Koraput that the government-declared programmes never really reach the people for whom it is really made. It was in March 2000 that the state government made a declaration that the tribal people have the right to collect minor forest products. But to the shock, the declaration has not been implemented till date. Government measures on development have been mostly limited to lip service only, without really understanding the problem typical to the lifestyle of most of the tribal people in Koraput. There is no market for minor forest products in Koraput and tribals do not even have the access to financial institutions to secure loans for investments. It is surprising as well as shocking that the government has never thought of developing self-help groups for the forest dependent communities in Koraput. Koraput has no lack of mineral deposits, but the government's failure to take a proper approach to utilize these resources in favour of local people has worsened the situation further. Taking advantage of this alienation among the masses, the Naxals have shown them the dream of a revolution– a Maoist Revolution. In the name of revolution the Naxals now control over 400 villages in Koraput, where they collect tax (extortion) and have established a sort of parallel administration. There are several reports of Naxals holding training camps, recruitment campaigns as well as Jan adalats in remote villages like Kanduruguda, Suvaput, Jadei, Badiput, Pantulum, Pudub, Ankaput, Pudu, Dabang, Tamdingi, Pradhaniput, PatangiandMachhakund.

Now let us turn our focus to another Naxal-affected district that is Malkangiri. Poverty, rampant corruption, failed government mechanisms and programmes are some characteristics associated with this area. The CPI (Maoist), under the banner of the erstwhile PWG has created a red bastion in remote areas of Malkangiri. In the 1970s, the government of Odisha constructed the Balimela dam project in Chittrakonda at Malkangiri. Villagers from more than 250 villages were displaced as well as a number of villages of Kudugulugumma block remained cut off from the mainland and from supplies provided by the government system. The government's performance on the rehabilitation front can be simply termed as disastrous. Thousands of people are still living in tiny islands within the dam area, which the government terms as the "cut-off area". One would find hardly any sign of governance in these areas of Janbai, Panaspur, Jodamba and Andrapali panchayats; where there is no school, no hospital and even no public distribution system even though Guru Priya Sethu has been recently constructed. Government-sanctioned development projects in these areas remain on paper; residents of these areas complain of gross financial irregularities because of an unholy nexus between contractors and government officials. It is an irony that habitants of these areas have sacrificed everything for the dam but till date they haven't seen the benefits of the electricity produced by the dam. Who says big dams bring prosperity; for the people of Malkangiri, the Balimela dam has only brought broken dreams. Extreme poverty and lack of basic requirements of life in most areas of Malkangiri have

made people move closer to Naxals. As of now Naxals have created a strong base in different areas of Chitrakonda, Balimela, Motu, Gomphakunda, Mv 90, Janbai, Jantabai, Jantri, Jodamba, Panasaput, Maliguda, Bhaluguda, Padmagiri, Gunthabeda, Padia, Korkunda, Kudumulugumma, Mathili and other areas adjoining the Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh borders.

The response of the State is naturally official. While there may be talk of development, the greatest emphasis is on police or security operations. But the security response too lacks vision as the Naxalites clearly have an edge over the security forces in Koraput and Malkangiri. With kidnapping of the former Malkangiri collector, R.V. Krishna, abduction of Jinha Hikaka and killing of legislator Jagabhandu the Naxalites have improved in their guerrilla tactics to perfection, while the security forces do not have a counter-strategy either of offence or defence.

Land alienation is a cause for the growth of Maoism.

'Land to tiller' continues to be a powerful slogan of the Naxalite Movement. The problem of land alienation has been one of the major causes of Maoist base in the tribal areas of Odisha. There are three major factors solely responsible for land alienation in Odisha. Firstly, 'Manipulation of land records' is the single largest problem that has contributed a lot for the growth of land alienation among the tribal rural areas. In most of the cases the tribals are not legally recognized as the owners of their lands that they cultivated for a long time. Secondly, 'Benami Transfer' is another important factor of land alienation. In this case actual owners of the land are reduced to share croppers though the land remains in their name. The third most important problem is the 'encroachment' that is divesting the tribals of their lands. This is a common feature found in Naxal- infested districts of Odisha particularly in Koraput and Malkangiri in relation to land alienation.

There has been a huge alienation of tribal lands in Odisha. According to the Annual Report 2007-08 of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, a total of 105,491 cases alleging alienation of 104,742 acres of land have been filed in the court in Odisha. An estimated of 104,644 cases were disposed of by honorable court of Odisha. Out of these, 61,431 cases were disposed of in support of tribals and 56,854 acres of land were restored to tribals.⁸

Access to land is very important in rural Odisha. The incidence of poverty is high when there is lack of access to land. When Orissa was created in 1936 it had three sets of laws from Bihar and Orissa, the Madras presidency and the central province. This presented a kaleidoscopic (multicolored) view of the different laws. The Orissa Tenancy Act was in force in northern Orissa; the Madras Estates Land Act was enforced in southern Orissa; the Central Provinces Land Revenue and Tenancy Acts were enforced in the Sambalpur and Khariar areas.⁹ There was not much change in the land related regulations during the initial years of post independence till 1952 when the Orissa Estate Abolition was passed. From the very beginning of 1952, the state has legislated a number of Acts relating to land. Despite of these Acts land alienation among the weaker section of the society continues to be one of the causes.

Policy Recommendations:

1. The villagers are not against the state per say but against corrupt officials, politicians and contractors. It is corruption, which is one of the main problems. Unless the state is able to identify and punish the people, who are stealing money meant for development of these areas, it is not going to be able to deal with problem.
2. Development should come simultaneously with counter-insurgency measures. Grouping of public health, education, public work, agriculture and irrigation to form cohesive multi-disciplinary task force and efforts to

generate employment opportunities for people will send a message of the government seriousness in addressing the basic problems of the people. Moreover, it is important to provide good and sophisticated weapons to the security personnel and to train them in all aspects including networking with the local population, intelligence gathering, sharing, combat operations and coordinated developmental activities.

3. In order to tackle the problem, there is a need for simultaneous and coordinated action on all the core fronts of trustworthy governance including development, security, perception-management and political form. The state must re-establish connectivity with local and tribal people as this can hit the Maoist the most where it matters. The process of development must also have a human face to prevent tribal alienation. Moreover, displacement without compensation should be avoided. The government must device a public-private partnership to ensure implementation of developmental projects and utilize the media to spread awareness of its good intentions.
4. Referring to Naxals as terrorists is incorrect. There is an urgent need to change the nomenclature as they are our countrymen.
5. The Naxal problem cannot be curbed until the government makes significant changes in its policies. The differences between the law made and the law enforced has to disappear. One has to identify the gaps that exist in the thought process and this gap has to be squarely met. In terms of development, the gap between the political process and the commercial interests has to firstly meet and then it has to come to work including the local tribal people. It is generally seen that there is lack of sympathy from the government towards local workers. The only way of attaining a common ground would be the inclusion of the tribal people in the entire process. Proper measures should be taken by the government to run the schools and not give it as a shelter to the army and police personnel.

Some Suggestive Measures to combat Naxalism: Constitutional Safeguards

The founding fathers of Indian Constitution were aware of prevalence of social, political and economic inequalities of the nation. Even, they were aware of miserable and horrendous condition of weaker section of the society particularly STs crippled by poverty and backwardness who were segregated from main stream of the society. To emancipate them from such clutches number of constitutional provisions have been incorporated in the Constitution of India. But, it is regrettable to state that the constitutional provisions to safeguard STs have not been properly implemented till now rather they have been followed more in breach which has today resulted in tribal insurgency against state. It has been repeatedly seen that states overrule PESA and apply the central Land Acquisition Act of 1894 vintage to capture tribal land for corporate purpose which has brought great victimization of tribal population. Therefore, ensuring the proper implementation of provisions particularly Article 244 and PESA without violating them shall do much to eliminate tribal grievances and break the support base of the Maoists.

Reform in Administrative set-up

The problem of Naxalism started in 1967 is not a new. Its manifestation is going to be almost five decades with us. It has now been branded as the worst enemy of India dream and become the greatest challenge to national security because of lackluster attitude of administration. Therefore, the administrative set up modeled on British system needs to be recommenced to suit the requirements of a free and democratic country. In pace of British model, a better administrative set up must be constituted which will render good governance with accountability and transparency. If implemented in spirit, it will surely mitigate the law and order

problems in LWE affected areas.

Restoration of tribal Rights

In the era of globalization, tribal rights are increasingly violated for the corporate purpose in spite of the protective legislations. Tribal people are displaced in large number without proper rehabilitation and resentment which has now become a big factor of protest against displacement. Further, the land alienation is another problem in LWE areas which needs to be dealt strongly. No doubt, the increase of big industry into the region to utilize the mineral wealth for prosperity of country is invited but, proper rehabilitation and resentment package should be provided to victims of displacement based on a life cycle concept which includes employment guarantee schemes. It is most likely to reduce the grievances if done in true sense.

Accountability in administration

It is a general accepted fact that accountability and honesty are the gate ways to good governance. When there is good governance there is progress in the country. Therefore, the utmost care must be rendered to see that the administrative establishments do not breed corruption and exploitation at any level. For this purpose, the Department of Audit must carry out the audit of expenditure of funds of actual work done and not just go on paper works. If implemented in true sense, this will generate zero corruption and neglected segments of the society will be benefitted largely.

Reform in Justice delivery System

In the era of globalization the country is rapidly scaling up in the field of Science and Technology. Yet, its fruits have not been properly used in justice delivery system causing the excessive delay in pronouncement of verdicts to the victims. Hence, the technology present today, must be used as acceptable proofs to have a better rate of conviction and enable the law enforcement system. In addition to this, there must be constitution of fast track courts and mobile courts in unreachable belts which will surely disallow the local people to get redress from the Courts of People (Janatana Adalat) operated by Naxals.

Socio-economic issues

In spite of acceleration in GDP, today, a large number of populations remain marginalized and backward. No doubt, after adoption of globalization the country developed rapidly but at the same time majority of the population was left behind with acute poverty and backwardness causing a huge disparity between rich and poor. This has now become the main reason of protest to industrialization, mining activities, construction of dams and creation of SEZs initiated by the Government for rapid development. To get rid of such blockage to development what is required on the part of the Government is to strengthen grass root initiatives which will surely promote better standard of life of the neglected and significantly reduce the disparity between rich and poor caused by globalization. Further, education must be the main interference in Naxal infested regions which will amply generate opportunities and employments to abandon the path of Naxalism what they think is the salvation of their pain.

Development Issues

Development is just not only to counter Naxalism but, it a process of change of underdevelopment in the country. Hence, Development needs to be followed with the bottom up approach instead of top down one and centrally sponsored schemes for the development of rural areas are to be fitted with the local initiatives which will benefit actual beneficiaries of the marginalized segment of the society reducing the tensions among ST Population.

Addressing security Concerns

Nodal Agency: Though Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) selected as Nodal Agency to deal with the problem of internal

security, it greatly lacks training and leadership quality to combat Naxalism. However, by the help of Central Government most of the States have now established training institutions to train the police personnel to fight the LWE. No doubt, the step initiated by the Government deserves appreciation but, the capacities are miserably short. Thus, the army could take over the entire responsibility to run and monitor all the training institutions as they have excellence on the subject which would surely help to combat LWE.

Naxal links: The need of the time is to disconnect Naxal links which has to be part and parcel of India's counter-Naxal strategy. And, to have permanent disruption of the external sources of support to Maoists India needs to handle tactically at the level of bilateral and multilateral relations. So that Naxals do not get any external support and their presence leaves them with no option, but to surrender.

CONCLUSION

The learning of Naxal violence in Odisha shows that today's volatile condition is mainly generated by a nonstop process of mismanagement and mal-development. But aggression or violence itself is no way to accomplish the development; rather it is the severe form of exploitation. To dodge mal-development and restore the ambiance of disorder and fear what is required today, is to establish suitable establishments and systems completely free from corruption and exploitation which would surely reduce societal tension by guaranteeing equality of status and opportunity as enumerated in the Constitution of India. To tackle the rising tide of Naxalism, the state is expected to adequately increase and properly run fund allotment in the field of health care, education, nutrition programmes, disease manage, irrigation, rural electrification, rural roads and other essential necessities in the affected belts. The state must make sure that its institutions and establishments do not breed exploitation and corruption. In spirit, for the people affected by LWE violence, the democratic system of governance must reach them and make them aware that the Maoist route is not the route of salvation of their pain rather it is extreme form of exploitation by Maoists. An answer to LWE is only to address the local issues. But, use of force is just an anesthetic and can never be the silver bullet for eternal conflict resolution.

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