

## Natural Resource Conflict and the Rise of Maoist Movement in Chhattisgarh

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### ABSTRACT

The Maoist movement has become one of the biggest threats to internal security in India, affecting nearly 165 districts across 14 states. The widespread discontent in rural areas, especially among tribal communities who have long faced economic hardship, social discrimination, and political exploitation, has allowed left-wing extremist groups to promote their violent political ideologies. Ecological issues, resource exploitation, and the failure to uphold the constitutional protections for tribal communities have further fuelled the growth of the movement. Chhattisgarh, in particular, is considered a major epicentre of the Maoist uprising, with the group exerting influence over 18 of its 27 districts at its peak. This paper aims to explore the situation in the state, highlighting the government's failure and possible ways to address the crisis, and propose effective strategies to tackle the Maoist violence and restore peace.

**Keywords :** *State Profile, Natural Resources, Maoist Movement, Maoist Attacks, Salwa Judum, Lon Varratu, Governance Issues*

### INTRODUCTION

India's remarkable economic growth over the past three decades has earned it the title of the world's fastest-growing economy. However, despite this progress, there are three major challenges that have emerged as formidable obstacles to the country's continued growth and leadership. These are cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, the insurgency in the North-Eastern states, and the Maoist movement that began in the late 1960s. In 1967, inspired by the socialist movement, persecuted workers raised their bows and arrows against feudal landowners in Naxalbari. Among the numerous organizations that represented this movement, the Communist Party of India (Maoist) was founded in 2004, and since then, issues such as industrialization, mining, displacement, and tribal empowerment have remained at the heart of Maoist

politics in India. This banned organization has been responsible for human rights violations, mass displacement, and at least 12,000 deaths by 2018 (EFSAS, 2019).

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Chhattisgarh, a state in central India, has become one of the epicentres of the Maoist insurgency. At its peak, the Maoists had a strong presence in up to 18 of the state's 27 districts. The movement began in the late 1980s, and the 40,000 sq-km Bastar region—comprising the districts of Dantewada, Bijapur, Narayanpur, Bastar, and Kanker—became a war zone. Roughly 25,000 sq-km of this area, including the infamous Abujmar (the Maoist stronghold known as the Red Corridor), was considered a Maoist bastion. The rebels believed they were making significant gains in this territory. The Maoists in Chhattisgarh carried out some of the boldest attacks in the country's history, including the Chintalnar attack in 2010, where 76 CRPF soldiers were killed, and the assassination of top Indian National Congress leaders, including party head Nand Kumar Patel of Chhattisgarh, in 2013 (Sahoo, 2019: 7-8). The Maoist movement has been described as the single greatest threat to India's internal security, a sentiment echoed by the Prime Minister of the country. The Ministry of Home Affairs acknowledges that the movement spread across 76 districts in nine states, though this is widely regarded as an underestimate. According to the Institute for Conflict Management, nearly 165 districts in 14 states have been affected by varying degrees of Maoist violence and mobilization. Violence peaked in 2010, with 2,119 incidents resulting in 960 deaths. Although the violence subsided somewhat in 2011, the overall levels of unrest remain higher than a decade ago.

Peace and security are not mere prerequisites for economic growth and social development—they are the foundation upon which active participation and meaningful change can be built. Without these, people, who are both the instruments and the ultimate beneficiaries of change, cannot engage effectively. Across India's vast tribal regions, which have long been economically marginalized, socially discriminated against, and politically exploited, high levels of discontent persist. This prolonged exploitation, coupled with poor governance, has created fertile ground for left-wing extremist groups to advance their violent political agendas, further deepening the nation's instability and insecurity. While the causes of this violence are complex, three undeniable facts emerge: (a) left-wing extremism (LWE) seeks to seize power through force and improve the conditions of the impoverished; (b) the most vulnerable and impoverished groups in society are the primary victims of violence, exacerbating their suffering; and (c) many of those who fall victim to this violence have no ideological commitment to LWE but

are often drawn into the movement by anger, fear, or personal gain (Singh & Doval, 2014: 54-55).

Ecological issues have also played a central role in uniting Maoists in regions where marginalized areas are being exploited for rapid industrialization. Environmentalism in India can be understood in two ways: (a) as a concern for the ongoing degradation of natural resources and the need to protect them, and (b) as a call to respect the rights of tribal communities to these resources and ensure their fair distribution and sustainable use. Maoist philosophy, in this context, highlights the "atrocious exploitation" of forest resources, claiming that "radical powers have looted their forests and disrupted their way of life." The politics of ecological degradation thus becomes a focal point of conflict between local populations and those advocating for industrialization. On a smaller scale, ecological issues have sparked controversy due to attempts by the state and citizens to utilize natural resources for the nation's economic development. Logging through commercial forestry in the 1970s, for example, sparked a fierce reaction from the residents of the hilly regions, culminating in the famous Chipko Movement in Uttaranchal. In this and other similar ecological movements across the country, the clash between the state's monopolization of environmental resources and the growing demand among local people to assert their rights over natural resources becomes clear. This conflict represents a broader struggle between economic progress, as defined by the state, and the increasing desire of individuals to safeguard their environment from irreversible harm due to commercial exploitation (Chakrabarty & Kujur, 2010: 7).

The objective of this study is to analyse the relationship between natural resource conflicts and the rise of the Maoist movement in Chhattisgarh. It seeks to explore how the exploitation of natural resources, combined with poor governance and lack of tribal representation, has created a fertile ground for Maoist insurgency. Furthermore, the study will evaluate the state's response to this issue and propose effective strategies to counter the Maoist violence while addressing the root causes of the conflict.

The study employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods to examine the growth of the Maoist movement in Chhattisgarh. Primary data were collected through interviews with local government officials, tribal leaders and security personnel through field visits to Maoist-affected areas. Secondary data

sources include government reports, security agency assessments, and academic articles related to the Maoist movement in India. A comprehensive review of literature on the political and economic background of Chhattisgarh, as well as historical and sociocultural contexts, was also conducted to build a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

### MAOIST MOVEMENT: A HISTORICAL SOJOURN

The term *Naxalite* comes from Naxalbari, a small village in West Bengal, where in 1967, a group from the Communist Party of India (Marxist) led by Charu Majumdar, Kanu Sanyal, and Jangal Santhal began an uprising involving local tribal farmers. On May 18, 1967, the president of the Siliguri Kishan Sabha declared support for the movement started by Kanu Sanyal and announced their readiness to take up arms to redistribute land to the poor and landless. However, just a week later, a tenant farmer near Naxalbari was brutally killed by the landlord's men over a land dispute. On May 24, when police attempted to capture the peasant leaders, the police inspector was attacked and killed by arrows. This incident led many Santhals and other disadvantaged people to support the movement, and they began attacking local landlords.

The political philosophy of Mao Zedong gave the Naxalbari movement its ideological direction, advocating that Indian farm workers, peasants, and marginalized tribal people should overthrow the upper classes and the government. This philosophy resonated with many urban elites, especially through the writings of Charu Majumdar, particularly the "Historic Eight Documents," which outlined the core beliefs of Maoism. These documents helped spread Maoist ideas, focusing on the belief that the poor and oppressed should rise up and fight for their rights, challenging both societal structures and government authority (Narayan 2015: 20-21). Maoism, therefore, can be understood as an ideological framework that presents an alternative to both traditional Marxism and the Chinese version of socialism. It goes beyond the theoretical ideas of "armchair revolutionaries" and seeks to inspire the marginalized and dispossessed to fight for their rights and overcome their suffering. Maoism emphasizes the critical role of the oppressed in bringing about change, particularly at the grassroots level. As a doctrine, it aims to address the specific socio-economic challenges faced by people in Maoist-affected areas by promoting social balance, which remains the core goal of the movement. While the objective of achieving a just society may not

yet be fully realized, Maoists remain motivated by the belief that such a society can and will be achieved (Chakrabarty and Kujur 2010: 9). In the early stages, Maoist cadres relied on weapons seized from landlords. However, the situation today has evolved significantly. Groups like the PWG, MCC, and CPI Maoists have attacked police stations and seized weapons from several locations, repeatedly capturing large quantities of arms. According to an assessment by the Ministry of Home Affairs, the CPI Maoists are believed to possess around 6,500 firearms, including SLRs, rifles, carbines, and AK-47s, in addition to a large number of 12-bore guns. It is also likely that the PWG managed to acquire more AK-47 rifles from the LTTE (Rammohan et al., 2012: 32).

### CHHATTISGARH: BASICS ABOUT THE RED BASTION

Chhattisgarh, located in the heart of central India, covers an area of 135,194 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of 25,540,196. The state shares its borders with six other states: Uttar Pradesh to the north, Jharkhand to the northeast, Odisha to the east, Madhya Pradesh to the west and northwest, Maharashtra to the southwest, and Andhra Pradesh to the southeast. Raipur, the largest city, also serves as the state capital. The official languages of Chhattisgarh are Hindi and Chhattisgarhi, with Urdu and Marathi also spoken by some communities. The state is known for its relatively high quality of life, with well-developed physical infrastructure, and has a literacy rate of 64.7% (Balasubramanian 2013: 2). The State currently consists of 27 districts and is predominantly covered by the Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, which grants special rights to the local indigenous populations. The former Chief Minister, Shri Raman Singh of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), was elected for three consecutive terms, with the 2013 election marking his third win. Since 2003, Raman Singh's government brought political stability to Chhattisgarh and implemented various preventive measures to curb the Maoist insurgency, which had previously made the state one of the most affected by Left-Wing Extremism, with the highest number of casualties since 2005, including police personnel, activists, and civilians. Despite these efforts, however, the state continues to face significant challenges, including high rates of violence and brutality caused by Naxals. Chhattisgarh ranks poorly in terms of the Human Development Index, living standards, health, sanitation, and hygiene. Furthermore, the state's road infrastructure is one of the worst in the country, with road density (measured in kilometres of road per 100 km) falling below national standards (Shapiro et al., 2017: 36).

According to the 2001 Census report, Chhattisgarh's population was 2.08 crore, with 80 percent of the population residing in rural areas and 20 percent in urban areas. The state is richly endowed with mineral resources and forests, including diamonds, gold, iron ore, coal, corundum, bauxite, dolomite, lime, tin, and granite. The people of Chhattisgarh have a deep connection with the land and its forests, treating them with great respect and reverence. Over centuries, communities in the state have developed a way of life based on these natural resources, relying on them for daily sustenance. Indigenous knowledge, especially related to rice cultivation and the use of herbal medicine, has flourished over time. However, this valuable knowledge is rapidly disappearing due to the influence of modern technical practices and pharmaceuticals, and there is little documentation of these traditional systems (Chhattisgarh Human Development Report 2020).

### **THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF MAOIST MOVEMENT IN CHHATTISGARH**

Chhattisgarh, located in the Dandakaranya region, has been the center of Maoist activities since the beginning of the People's War. It was Seetharmaiha, known as the father of the People's War (PW), who proposed the idea of establishing a Guerrilla Zone in Dandakaranya, particularly in the Bastar region, due to its unique geopolitical and socio-economic conditions. In 1979, Maoist leaders identified this area as crucial for their roadmap, and a small team of six members, later joined by five others, was sent to create progressive awareness in the region. The significance of the area became more apparent in the late 1990s when the Maoists successfully built a strong guerrilla warfare network in Bastar and Surguja. By 1995, the mass movement in the Dandakaranya region had grown to include over 60,000 participants, and today, this number exceeds 150,000 (Kujur 2006). A government intelligence report from May 2005 stated that Maoists had established dominant control in nine of the 16 districts of Chhattisgarh (now 27), specifically in Kanker, Dantewada, Bastar, Surguja, Balrampur, Rajnandgaon, Koriya, Kawardha, and Jashpur, with growing influence in four other districts. The Police Director of Chhattisgarh, Mr. O.P. Rathor, noted that Maoists were operating across more than 40,000 square miles, covering 10 out of the 16 districts in the state. According to sources within the Chhattisgarh administration, there were approximately 3,000 Maoists in the state, organized into two main units: 'Dalamas' and 'Sanghams.' The Dalamas are responsible for armed attacks, while the Sanghams consist of a larger network

of overground cadres. Most members of the movement are tribals or Adivasis, and the Maoists have adopted a strategy of forcibly recruiting one person from each Adivasi family. If no male family member is available, young girls are often recruited. The leaders and key decision-makers of the Maoist movement are mostly from outside the Bastar district (Asian Centre for Human Rights 2006: 12).

### **MAOIST MOVEMENT IN CHHATTISGARH: MAPPING THE NATURAL RESOURCE CONFLICT.**

Before delving into the discussion of Maoism and the movement, it is essential to first understand the key factors that have driven the youth in rural and tribal regions of Chhattisgarh to wage war against the state's mechanisms. There are several socio-economic indicators that can help determine the standard of living, including education, health, housing, livelihoods, employment, accessibility to basic services, and the overall level of development in these areas (Kumar and Singh 2015: 223). These factors contribute significantly to the grievances and unrest among the local population, particularly in marginalized and underdeveloped regions. Chhattisgarh is the ninth largest state in India, covering a geographical area of nearly 135,000 square kilometers. It is one of the wealthiest states in terms of mineral resources, with an abundance of essential minerals, including precious diamonds. The state is home to major industries such as steel, electricity, mining, aluminum, and cement, contributing significantly to India's industrial sector (India Brand Equity Foundation 2008: 4). Chhattisgarh represents about two percent of India's total population, with 20 percent of the state's population living in urban areas, while the remaining 80 percent reside in forested regions. The state's total population is approximately 20.83 million, of which 43.4 percent are from scheduled tribes and scheduled castes. These communities largely depend on forest products and land for their livelihoods, as they have historically lived in dense forest areas (Ibid: 4).

Agriculture has traditionally been the primary source of livelihood for most people in India. However, after gaining independence, the country adopted an industry-based development strategy to achieve rapid economic growth, which required large tracts of land. While this approach contributed to improving India's economic condition, it also led to the forced displacement of marginalized sections of society. As land was acquired for industrialization, many people were uprooted from their property and access to natural resources, causing



significant hardship for these communities (Rathod 2019). Forests play a crucial role in the livelihood of many tribal communities, providing jobs and income through various forest products like Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), such as Tendu leaves, Mahua flowers, and honey. These products are consumed by the tribal people and also sold to government-run cooperatives, societies, and commercial traders. For generations, forests have served as a guardian, especially during the harsh horticulture seasons. Harvesting and selling forest products often provide employment for at least 40 days a year, and these activities are increasingly important for cash benefits, including wages and other rewards. In addition to providing cash, NTFPs offer food security (through mushrooms, fruits, tubers, and leaves), medicines, and access to resources that might otherwise require payment. However, in recent times, these forest products are steadily declining. The land traditionally used by tribal communities has become a source of ongoing conflict, with their legal rights frequently contested by government officials. This has created a sense of insecurity, displacement, and injustice, highlighting the flaws in India's development model (Green 2015: 2). The Government's own investigations highlight the marginalization of poor communities, particularly tribal populations who have lived near forests for generations, developing a deep dependency on the rich natural resources in these regions. However, violations of land and forest rights often lead to their resettlement or alienation, disrupting their economic relationships and social practices. These harsh realities, including the loss of traditional livelihoods and cultural practices, are common in the lives of marginalized communities. The expansion of industrialization and mining has exacerbated these challenges. According to government reports, between 2006 and 2012, around 21,000 hectares of land were allocated by the Chhattisgarh government—more than any other state, including Madhya Pradesh—for coal mining and other developmental projects (Ibid: 2). For more than 70 years, India has been implementing developmental projects, resulting in the displacement of over 50 million people, with tribal communities often bearing the brunt of these displacements. It is estimated that around 40 to 50 percent of the displaced people have not received any rehabilitation to date. As a result, many of these displaced individuals have turned to Maoism as a means of asserting their constitutional rights. In short, the displacement of tribal people from their ancestral lands and forests is a primary driving force behind the rise of Maoism in India (Rathod 2019). The natural resource

conflict in India can be attributed to the non-fulfilment of the Fifth and Ninth Schedules of the Indian Constitution. These schedules were designed to provide a limited form of tribal independence, yet they fail to adequately address issues such as the tribes' access to natural resources on their lands, including medicinal plants and quarrying rights. Additionally, the schedules overlook important aspects like land ceiling laws, the restriction of property ownership by landlords, and the allocation of surplus lands to landless farmers and workers (Narayan 2015: 21).

#### **MAOIST ATTACKS IN CHHATTISGARH: THE FEAR FACTOR**

In November 2002, Madhya Pradesh was divided, resulting in the formation of Chhattisgarh. During this time, Chhattisgarh became a focal point for Maoist operations, particularly in the Bastar region. In February 2000, a devastating landmine blast claimed the lives of 22 security personnel, including an additional Superintendent of Police. The People's War Group (PWG) infiltrated Chhattisgarh after being squeezed out by the well-equipped Greyhounds, an elite police force from Andhra Pradesh. The PWG received special training from a former guerrilla commander-in-chief, renowned for leading forces capable of battling the Maoists. When the PWG retreated to Chhattisgarh, they found the local tribal communities to be largely inactive and unwilling to join the fight against the government. Many villagers refused to participate in the training or battle, and as the PWG resorted to forceful recruitment, many people fled rural areas for urban centers to escape the conflict.

Meanwhile, ambitious tribal leaders, aligned with the Congress party, began organizing the local population to voice their opposition to the guerrilla forces. This led to the formation of the Salwa Judum movement, which initially played a significant role in advocating for equality. However, over time, the movement was halted due to the tragic loss of innocent tribal lives at the hands of Maoists. (Narayan 2015: 21). Let's examine some significant incidents that occurred between 2005 and 2015, as outlined in the table below.

#### **(Fatalities in Left-Wing Extremist Violence in Chhattisgarh: 2005-2015)**

Year	Civilians	SFs	Naxals	Total death
2005	52	48	26	126
2006	189	55	117	361

2007	95	182	73	350
2008	35	67	66	168
2009	87	121	137	345
2010	72	153	102	327
2011	39	67	70	176
2012	26	36	46	108
2013	48	45	35	128
2014	25	55	33	113
2015	8	9	2	19
Total	676	838	707	2221

(Source- Kumar. Praveen and Singh, Manoj Kumar. (2015). *Chhattisgarh: Naxalism, Human Rights and Role of Media, International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development*)

Between 2005 and 2015, Chhattisgarh saw a tragic toll from Left-Wing Extremist (LWE) violence, with a total of 2,221 fatalities, including 676 civilians, 838 security forces personnel, and 707 Maoists. Civilians were the most vulnerable group, making up 30.4% of the deaths, while security forces accounted for 37.7% and Maoists for 31.9%. The highest casualties occurred in the early years, particularly in 2006, which recorded 361 deaths, driven by intense violence. 2007 and 2009 also saw significant fatalities, especially among security personnel, reflecting the ongoing conflict and military operations aimed at countering the insurgency.

However, from 2010 onwards, there was a noticeable decline in fatalities, particularly among Maoists, with 102 deaths in 2010 dropping to just 2 in 2015. This shift suggests that government counterinsurgency efforts became more effective over time, leading to reduced Maoist activity and casualties. Although civilian and security force deaths remained significant in the early years, the overall trend towards lower fatalities by the end of the decade points to a shift in the conflict's dynamics. Despite this, the total loss of life underscores the enduring human cost of the violence, emphasizing the need for continued efforts toward peace and stability in the region.

During its operations, the People's War Group (PWG) covered the entire undivided Bastar region, which included the districts of Bijapur, Bastar, Dantewada, and Kanker. In 2003 alone, there were 103 gunfights, resulting in the deaths of 31 security personnel. On May 7, 2005, the Maoists attacked Hindalco Industries officials in Saridihi, located in the Surguja region. Later

that year, on March 3, 2005, a landmine blast at Kupjemala in Bastar killed 22 CRPF personnel. Around this time, the People's War Group imposed strict bans on tribal people, prohibiting them from worshipping Hindu or Christian gods. In 2010, the Maoists ambushed five CRPF units in Dantewada, killing 86 police personnel, marking the region as one of the deadliest zones for security forces (Ibid:29). On March 11, 2014, Maoists launched an attack on security personnel during their daytime patrol in Sukma, killing 16 police officers, including 11 CRPF jawans. This attack occurred in the same area where, in 2010, the Maoists had killed 76 CRPF personnel (Live Mint, 2014). Later that year, on December 1, Maoists killed 14 paramilitary forces in Sukma district while they were conducting a raid in a forested area. Following the attack, the rebels declared that they were fighting for tribal rights and the welfare of the rural poor (BBS News, 2014). In response, Chhattisgarh police stated that they had enhanced their use of technology and adopted new strategies to counter left-wing extremism. By then, 202 encounters had taken place, resulting in the deaths of 133 Maoists, 55 civilians, and 41 security forces. Additionally, around 1,202 Maoists surrendered, while 881 were arrested (Mishra, 2016).

In 2017, one of the deadliest years for security forces in the past seven years, 26 security personnel were killed in Sukma district. In total, 72 police personnel lost their lives that year, while 20 civilians were also killed, and 70 Maoists were neutralized (Saha, 2017). On March 13, 2018, a security team en route from Kistaram to Palodi in Sukma district was ambushed, leading to the deaths of 9 CRPF jawans and the injury of 2 others from a group of 212 security personnel (Mishra & Ahuja, 2018). Later that year, on July 13, another attack in Sukma district resulted in the deaths of 24 security personnel. Initially reported as 11 deaths, the toll was later revised to 24 jawans killed, with several others wounded (The Economic Times, 2018). On March 23, 2020, Maoists attacked a CRPF unit in Sukma, killing 17 personnel. This attack, one of the deadliest in the region, came almost two years after a similar attack in 2018, where 24 security forces had been killed (Das, 2020). Finally, on April 4, 2021, a large-scale anti-Maoist operation was launched by a joint force comprising the CRPF, CoBRA, DRG, and STF in the dense forests of South Bastar. During a patrol in the forests near Jonaguda, a security team was ambushed by the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA). The encounter, which lasted for about four hours, led to the deaths of

22 security personnel, the injury of 32 others, and the disappearance of one officer (The Times of India, 2021). Since then, there have been no major casualties reported between Maoists and police forces in the state.

#### **SALWA JUDUM: A SAGA OF FAILED EXPERIMENTS.**

The Salwa Judum, which marked the beginning of the anti-Maoist movement in Bastar, emerged in June 2005 as a response to growing anti-Maoist sentiments within the local population. The movement was triggered by a meeting of eight villagers in Toemar, near SP Kutru in the Bijapur police region, where local people expressed their frustration with the disruptive tactics of the Maoists, which led to disturbances and widespread hunger due to the loss of employment opportunities. In response, the Salwa Judum mobilized villagers and tribals against the Maoists through rallies, gatherings, and padayatras (foot marches) in the Maoist strongholds of the Bijapur and Bhiramgarh blocks in south Bastar. What began as a peaceful and local movement rapidly expanded to the regions of Bijapur, Bhairamgarh, Usoor, Sukma, and Konta in the Dantewada district. The Salwa Judum's activities included over 150 anti-Maoist marches (Agrawal 2014:97), significantly contributing to the growing resistance against the Maoists in the region.

The term Salwa Judum is derived from the Maria dialect, where "Salwa" refers to the sprinkling of holy water over an ailing person with the hope of restoring their health, and "Judum" means community. Thus, Salwa Judum essentially signifies the act of sprinkling holy water over a community that has been affected by the "sickness of Maoism" (Narayan 2015:100). The movement was initiated by Mahendra Karma, who quickly garnered support and assistance from the Chhattisgarh government. Many young men joined the Salwa Judum movement, receiving military-style training and were designated as Special Police Officers (SPOs).

However, the movement faced significant challenges. Tribal communities endured torture and killings by Maoists, and several innocent children were also killed when their parents were away. These atrocities, along with the loss of innocent lives, led to the formation of the anti-Maoist Salwa Judum. As reports of violence and killings emerged, Salwa Judum members were increasingly viewed as an unregulated force, often engaging in violent retaliation with the support of the government. Eventually, the Supreme Court suspended the movement, and Mahendra Karma, the leader of Salwa Judum, was killed by Maoists (Kumar and Singh 2015:224).

#### **LON VARRATU: THE HEALING TOUCH**

The police in Chhattisgarh are continuously working to guide Maoists back to the right path, and the Dantewada police have launched a unique initiative known as Lon Varratu, which means 'return home'. As part of this initiative, the police have released a list of the most wanted 13 Maoists. Several senior police officers have been designated to assist in encouraging Maoists to take advantage of the government's surrender policy. The campaign started in Chikpal, under the jurisdiction of the Katekalyan police station. Through this campaign, the police are appealing to the Maoists to return to their communities (Zee Media Bureau, 2020).

Sundarraaj P., the Inspector General of Bastar, emphasized that Lon Varratu is a special initiative by the Chhattisgarh government and the police forces, aimed at encouraging Maoists, particularly those who are local villagers, to return home and begin a new life with government assistance. He highlighted that unlike previous policies that were focused on subjugation, Maoists who surrender are not only offered employment opportunities by the police but are also given access to bank loan facilities and support from other government departments. Officials say that the Lon Varratu campaign is being piloted in Dantewada as a project, and its progress will be thoroughly assessed by the end of the year. If it yields positive results, the campaign will be expanded to other Maoist-affected regions of the state. Authorities have also stated that this initiative is different from the Salwa Judum, which was an anti-Maoist operation launched in 2005 (Singh, 2020).

#### **GOVERNANCE ISSUES: A CAUSE OF WORRY**

Good governance is typically defined by the rule of law, people's participation, transparency, flexible administration, accountability, economic efficiency, and services that inspire confidence in the fairness and effectiveness of institutions. However, surveys conducted in some remote areas of Chhattisgarh reveal a lack of trust in the government, with its representatives often being perceived as corrupt (Singh and Doval, 2014:68). The tribal population has a deep emotional connection to the forest, which plays a central role in their lives. If the transparency regarding the spatial and functional jurisdiction of the Gram Sabha and the PESA Act is clarified, this connection can be better nurtured. The forest is integral to the livelihoods of tribal communities, and the PESA Act recognizes their constitutional rights in this regard. However, government interventions regarding small forest



products have a long history, initially aimed at ensuring that the tribals received their fair share, as these forest products were considered state property (Sharma, 2014:138).

Tribal communities in India have historically been self-governing, a system that often brought them into conflict with the state's formal governance. The establishment of government regulation and development programs after 1947 led to the gradual erosion of the traditional systems of governance. Tribal self-administration traditionally involved managing natural resources, financial matters, and social practices, but these responsibilities were shifted to the state system from 1947 to 1995. To counter this, the PESA Act was introduced in 1996 to restore tribal self-governance, yet its implementation remains inconsistent across many states (Mehrotra, 2014:16).

Forced evictions of tribal people from their lands and natural resources have been an ongoing issue. Displacement is often the result of government-led development projects such as large irrigation systems, industrial and mining operations, power plants, and the creation of private parks and national parks. As a result, ancestral communities lose their land, employment, and way of life, while others benefit from these developments, often at the expense of marginalized groups. The lack of adequate compensation and rehabilitation for displaced tribal families exacerbates their hardships, leaving them without resources, jobs, or a sense of security. The disruption of their culture and communities further deepens their suffering, as they struggle to deal with the loss of resources that directly threaten their livelihoods. In this way, national development projects often have a profoundly negative impact on the traditional rights of tribal communities (Sankaran, 2014:156).

#### COUNTERING MAOISM: A DISCUSSION

The state of Chhattisgarh has become a focal point of Maoist insurgency, largely due to the deep-rooted issues surrounding tribal communities and their struggle for rights over natural resources. Approximately 80 percent of the state's population resides in forested areas, heavily dependent on land and forests for their livelihoods. Unfortunately, these communities have often been displaced and deprived of these critical resources, leading to a growing sense of injustice and alienation. When tribal people feel neglected by the state and denied justice, many are increasingly drawn to Maoist ideologies as a means to assert their rights and fight against perceived oppression.

To address this, it is crucial for both the Union and State governments to effectively implement laws like the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act and the PESA Act, which were specifically designed to protect tribal communities' rights. These constitutional provisions provide the legal framework for ensuring tribal self-governance and control over local resources, which, if properly enforced, can alleviate much of the discontent fuelling the insurgency.

In parallel, the government must prioritize the socio-economic development of Maoist-affected regions. This should include the expansion of basic infrastructure—such as education, electricity, roads, and employment opportunities—that directly impacts the tribal communities. By investing in these regions, the government can rebuild trust and demonstrate its commitment to the well-being of its citizens. Additionally, adopting a rehabilitation policy similar to Andhra Pradesh's successful model, alongside launching initiatives like the Lon Varratu campaign to rehabilitate surrendered Maoists, could significantly contribute to peace and reconciliation.

A sustainable approach to development is also essential. The government should prioritize eco-friendly mining technologies, forest conservation, and community-based tourism. These initiatives would provide economic benefits to tribal communities without causing further environmental degradation, ensuring that development does not come at the expense of the people's traditional way of life. By focusing on sustainable development, the state can foster long-term growth that is both economically viable and environmentally responsible.

Moreover, fostering political trust and dialogue is key to resolving the conflict. The government must engage in direct conversations with local tribal leaders and grassroots organizations, ensuring that their voices are heard in the decision-making process. Decentralized governance will give these communities a greater say in matters that directly affect their lives, further bridging the gap between the state and its citizens.

Finally, the government must adopt a balanced security strategy that integrates human rights protections with law enforcement. Rather than relying solely on force, security operations should focus on winning the support of local populations by ensuring justice and maintaining public trust. A strategy that combines security, socio-economic development, and political inclusion will not only address the root causes of the Maoist insurgency but also lay the foundation for a more peaceful, prosperous Chhattisgarh. By empowering tribal



communities and restoring their faith in government institutions, a lasting solution to the Naxal issue can be achieved.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Maoism is one of the main problems in India. In all those years of existence the Movement has never shown any sign of fading away from the canvas of India's Internal Security. Among the infested states Chhattisgarh is the worst affected state. Maoists have chosen Chhattisgarh as their zone and they claim that they are fighting for tribal rights. The movement attracts so many young tribal to take up arms against the government by choice or force or greed. So, there is constant struggle between Government and Maoists to influence the tribal to choose their paths. As noticed above that around 80 per cent of population of the state lives in predominantly tribal villages and these tribes totally depend on common natural resources as their source of income and livelihood. But many a times some developmental schemes drive them out from their lands and homes. Therefore, the governments must deeply rethink upon these issues and adopt appropriate measures to bring young minds into the governments' mainstream by rendering quality education, employment opportunities for tribal youths, better medical facilities, sanitation and non-interference in common natural resources. If these measures are adopted properly followed by their proper and time bound implementation then the Maoist threat may automatically disappear and make roads or sustainable peace.

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