

# Social Exclusion and Naxalism: Introspection from Tribal Perspective

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## Abstract

The ongoing Naxalism or Left Wing Extremism has severely challenged the internal security and the development of nation. Though it has affected the entire population and nation as a whole, it is the tribals who suffer the most. They are often caught in the crossfire between the extremists and security forces. Besides, as a socially excluded group, tribals have been deprived from the benefits of development for years. As a result, they remain behind in all developmental indicators as compare to other social groups. At present, it is generally perceived that the emergence of Naxalite movement is rooted in the peasant unrests and class conflicts; it is not the only reason. Though, a plenty of literature have dealt various causes of Naxalism but very few of them have looked social exclusion as the root cause of emergence of Naxalism. It is in this context that the present paper makes an attempt to explain the role of social exclusion in the emergence of Naxalism in India. It also discusses the economic, educational and health problems of tribals as well as human rights violations in left wing extremist affected areas, with special reference to Chhattisgarh.

**Keywords:** Social Exclusion, Left Wing Extremism, Caste System, Colonisation, Displacement, Red Corridor, Human Rights Violation

## Introduction

The Left Wing Extremism has emerged as one of the greatest threats to the internal/national security and peace of the country. An uprising emerged, when a tribal peasant named Bimal Kissan of the Naxalbari village of West Bengal, obtaining a judicial order, went to plough his land and when the local landlords with the support of

their goons attacked him. This event infuriated the local tribals who led a violent retaliation on local landlords to recapture their lands (Verma, 2011). Soon, this agrarian uprising between tribals and landlords led to the emergence of organised armed struggles against the state, which is now known as the Naxalite movement. Emerged from West Bengal in 1967, at present it has spread to 106 districts in 10 states in India. In Chhattisgarh, out of total 27 districts, 16 have been declared as affected by left wing extremism (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2016). It is widely accepted that this class struggle over the possession of land born this movement. But this was not the only sole ground. The emergence of Naxalite movement in India has many reasons. Exclusion of tribals from social, political, economic and educational affairs and developments of the mainstream society has resulted deep unrest and discontent among them. Also, the state's acquisition of tribal land and extraction of rich mineral resources from their habitations to economic benefit to corporate sector have led large scale displacement of tribals in different parts of the country (Dungdung, 2017). In this background, the present article tries to understand how social exclusion has led to the emergence of Naxalism in India and also discusses the various socio-economic problems of tribals, emerged as the result of social exclusion and Naxalism, particularly in the state of Chhattisgarh.

## Process of Social Exclusion

In India, the centuries of prevailing caste system and patriarchal nature of society have excluded tribals and dalits from mainstream of society (Subramanyam & Sekhar, 2010). The social order/stratification has divided people on the basis birth and nature of job into four hierarchal varnas/classes- Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishya and Shudras. The tribals, having a lower status have

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always been subjected to exploitation and oppression by the dominant non-tribal people. They were not allowed to participate in various socio-cultural, economic and political activities and developmental processes of the mainstream society. Denied to access employment and livelihoods, education, healthcare facilities, and benefits provided by governments have further made tribals deprived and vulnerable. However, initially tribals were not part of this varna system, instead they were considered as outcastes or outsiders (Jain, 2007). But the development introduced by the states in the name of economic growth in resources rich zones-homeland of tribals, to develop Special Economic Zone mostly (SEZ) led displacement and marginalisation. As a result, they came in contact with industrial and urban societies. Gradually tribals who were originally independent became dependent for their basic needs on non-tribals where they had to face injustice and ill-treatments. The forced displacement and exclusion from the forests and economy accumulated discontent and rebellion ideas and thus violence emerged in a way to ensue justice in the society.

The other historical root cause of Naxal uprisings is the patriarchal nature of Indian society. Since ancient time, men have been suppressing the voices of women at their every moment of life. The prevailing social system discriminates and devalues women and their works. Moreover, their representation is minimal in all developmental and decision-making institutions. They have been always kept outside the economy. But a different role of women has been observed in Bastar—a severe left wing extremism affected division of Chhattisgarh. In Bastar, tribal women contribute greatly to economic works and are more independent as compare to women in other sections of the society. But due to patriarchal thinking of society, a number of strategies, for example, imposing customary practices, marriage of women to outsiders, and sexual assault and rape by the state's security personnel have been used to keep women inside the houses and suppress their voices (Committee Against Violence on Women, 2006). The various forms of exploitations and oppressions have created dissatisfaction and a feeling of retaliation among women. As a result, women gradually came to participate in Naxal uprisings in different parts of the country. It has been found that 30 per cent in the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army are women which shows the widespread unrest in existing socio-political situation of the nation (Sen, 2017).

The tribal agitation became more prominent and structured during the late medieval history (between 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century) when Mughal invaded India and the emperors began to restructure the agriculture sector. Further, the commencement of East India Company of the British government led imposition of many restrictive policies on Indian peasant and tribals (Merwah, 2009). They drafted many laws and policies such as Permanent Settlement Law 1793, Forest Law 1865, and Land Acquisition Act 1894 to regulate the India's economy (Dungdung, 2017). This pro-industrial framework attributed commercialization of agriculture in which many small and landless farmers were kept aside from agriculture system. They compelled peasants to cultivate a few crops such as cotton, indigo, tea, and coffee. Due to the cheap price and easy availability, they exported raw materials to their country. In return, India received final goods of exported raw materials. Besides, the British government under the permanent settlement law fixed the revenues which were collected from the peasants despite low production or the failure of crops. The colonial expansion into forest land and restrictive forest policies further pushed out thousands of the tribals from forests which were traditional sources of their livelihoods. Besides, tribals who were involved in some traditional activities such as collecting certain forest produces and hunting of animals were declared as criminals. This system of administration led exploitation of tribals and widened socio-economic gap between tribals and landlords in the country. A large number of poor and marginalised tribals became victims which in turn reinforced them to take up weapons to fight against the semi-feudal and oppressive colonial government. Surprisingly, even after independence, the government of India had followed, and continue to follow, many of these colonial policies and acts. This is how social exclusion has led to the emergence of left wing extremism.

According to Ministry of Home Affairs (2017), a sum of 3000 incidents of LWE violence, an average of 428 incidents each year, has been recorded in Chhattisgarh from 2010 to 2016. The very frequent extremist attacks mainly in Bastar division have utterly dominated all other developmental issues of tribals. It is, therefore, imperative to discuss some of the major problems such as displacement and indebtedness, poor education, physical and mental illnesses, malnutrition, physical violence and human rights violations faced by the tribal communities in Chhattisgarh.

## Development or Displacement?

Chhattisgarh has rich deposits of natural and mineral resources. There have been almost 29 different types of minerals explored in different parts of Chhattisgarh. Some of the important minerals include coal, iron ore, bauxite, dolomite, stone, tin ore, gold, and diamond (Kujur, 2008). Of the total, nearly 45 per cent of the land is covered with deep forests. The natural settings and mineral resources invite Multi-National Companies (MNCs) and big industries to set up mines and factories which require hundreds of hectare of lands, generally owned and settled by tribals. The Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act of 2013 entitled the government to acquire privately owned land for the public benefits and welfare. Since tribals have been living in forests and minerals deposit zones, they have been forcibly evicted from their inherited lands and habitations by corporate sector and states. In this development process, however, it is claimed by the governments and multi-national industrial houses that they ensure proper rehabilitation and fair compensation. But in this regard a number of fundamental questions arise: Is the eviction based on the interest of tribals? Is resettlement area based on the choice of people? How many displaced tribals have got employment in the company or organised sector? The answer will be quite disappointing. Most of the families are resettled to an area where they are not familiar with and have less opportunity to continue their traditional culture and knowledge system. This traumatic situation poses threat to the cultural capital of the tribals.

There is no official declaration of the exact figure of Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs). However, some unofficial records reveal a sum of nearly 60 million have been displaced from independence to 2007. Out of this figure, tribals who account 8.2 per cent of the total population of the country, they are 40 per cent of the displaced masses (Planning Commission, 2008). When the declaration of Achanakmar Tiger Reserve Project was approved by the government, 245 Baiga families were displaced from the Achanakmar village to different parts of the Chhattisgarh (Xaxa et al., 2014). However, there were some re-settlement colonies constructed but very soon it collapsed due to its poor standards. There was no possibility for Baigas to continue their traditional livelihoods and cultural practices.

In addition to what is called this development-induced displacement, the Chhattisgarh government had started a campaign called *Salva Judum* - a counter-insurgency operation against the Naxalites by employing local civilians in June 2005 (Asian Centre for Human Rights, 2006). After two years of its initiation, it had displaced a total of 57,528 villagers; they are living as internally displaced persons in 23 different relief camps in southern Chhattisgarh. Besides, around 45,000 to 60,000 villagers migrated to neighbouring states specifically to Andhra Pradesh and some of them fled to deep forests (Mohapatra & Jayasooriya, 2007). These internally displaced people were ordinary villagers, mostly tribals who have been caught in the crossfire by extremists as the informants of state on the one hand and by the government as the supporters of extremists on the other hand. The campaign of *Salva Judum* has resulted indiscriminate killing of civilians, abduction and rape of tribal women.

Besides, tribals as having fewer opportunities in economic sphere because of social exclusion and coercive inclusion imposed by the governments have caused indebtedness and consequently trapped into bonded labour. Since they have no longer ownership of land and control over natural resources, livelihood opportunities remain limited. As a result, they have to work as labourers at low wage rates. However, they neither get work throughout the entire year nor receive payment regularly. In such situations, they have to take loan at high interest rate from the local moneylenders, landlords and non-tribals for meeting their daily needs (Srivastava, 2005). It is found that in Bastar division, where more than 60 per cent of tribal families live, the indebtedness among tribals was ranged between Rs. 10,000 to 15,000 per family (Pastakia et al., 2012). This indebtedness is the outcome of mortgage of tribals' land; as a result, most of the tribal families have pushed out of agriculture system. When they are unable to pay back their loan and interest they have to work as bonded labourers to pay off their indebtedness. Thus, social exclusion has aroused many problems in the sovereign life of tribals but Naxalism has dominated all the socio-economic problems of tribals.

## Educational Problems

The educational development of the tribals is not just low, but it is very low in left wing extremism affected districts

as compared to other social groups. Chugh (2014) found that in Chhattisgarh, the literacy rate is less than 60 per cent in severely affected civil strife districts as compared to the less or non-affected districts against the overall literacy rate (70.3 per cent) of the state. Similarly, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) are also very low with varying degree in Naxal prone districts. Districts such as Bastar and Dantewada had GER and NER lower than 75 per cent and 50 per cent respectively at the upper primary level in the academic year of 2010-11. All districts which are not affected by extremism have GER and NER higher than 90 per cent (excluding Raigarh) and 60 per cent respectively. The dropout rate is too high in extremism affected districts of Chhattisgarh. There are several reasons for the poor educational attainments of tribals in this region such as occupation of schools by security forces, destruction of school infrastructure by extremists, lack of teachers, etc. (Kumar, 2017). Further, many of the children do not go school or drop out merely because of fear of attacks and abductions. Molestation of tribal girl children by the security personnel has severely affected the education of girls in these areas. Apart from, tribals as being excluded community are not in a position to equally access education. Non-availability of schools in tribal habitations and lack of communication means have widened the educational deprivation among the tribals. Discrimination by the non-tribal teachers and students compel tribal students to discontinue education. Apart from these, there are certain infrastructural and administrative problems in tribal areas: improper school management, the paucity of pedagogic tools, and irregular inspection of schools by the higher authorities, poor quality of education and culturally alien nature of the school system (Rani, 2013). Moreover, the curriculum and medium of instruction do not serve the interest of the tribals and syllabus does not attract them towards education as it is not based on cultural values and beliefs of tribals (Gandhi, 2014). The existing education system is neither practically useful to their life nor immediately income generating. Due to poor economic condition of tribal families, many of the elder children discontinue education after the elementary level and give hands to their parents at workplaces or work as daily wage labourers (Duary & Haldar, 2006). All these hidden ongoing challenges have severely affected the educational development of the tribal communities. The lower graph of educational attainments of tribals develops

a common stereotype that they do not want to be educated and parents do not send their children to school. Under this terror circumstances getting/providing education is not easy for tribals and hence that graph automatically goes down.

## Health Problems

As like education, poor health of tribals across the state and country has some way obstructed the overall development of the nation. The health delivery institutions (sub centers and public health centers) are mostly found at the periphery of severely Naxal affected districts of Bastar, Narayanpur and Bijapur. Most of them are non-functional. These healthcare institutions are often obliterated by the extremists (Chaudhary et al., 2013). It was found that tribals in Chhattisgarh had a significantly higher proportion of tuberculosis, hypertension, cancer and other illness as compare to non-tribals. However, there is little and scattered information on the actual burden and pattern of illnesses among tribals (Jain et al., 2015). The indigenous people or tribals have very close relation with forest and environment because of the fulfillment of daily nutritional requirements and livelihoods. They practice shifting cultivation to produce subsistence food grains and collect some minor forest produces, hunt small animals and mammals to feed their stomach. But the prohibition from practicing certain traditional livelihoods on the ground of the forest and environment conservation acts has threatened the very existence of tribals, particularly in Red Corridors of Chhattisgarh. Consequently, they are not able to get nutritional and hygienic foods. These interferences of state have put them into a vicious cycle of poverty, starvation, malnutrition and other severe health problems. There are many other reasons, for example, poor socio-economic conditions, illiteracy, lack of transport facilities, and little access to the health care system for the poor health of tribal communities. In addition to these, the scarcity of healthcare institutions in tribal areas further makes them helpless. However, there are some institutions but being marginalised and stigmatised by the society, tribals face discrimination to access them. Moreover, the income of the majority of tribal families does not allow them to regular visit private healthcare centres or even public hospitals for health check-up and treatment. As a result, tribal communities prefer to use their indigenous healthcare system and medicines. It is believed that

90 percent of the various health issues are cured by themselves (Xaxa et al., 2014). They have very diverse knowledge of indigenous cure and treatment. Birhor, one of the backward Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) of Chhattisgarh, known as 'People of Jangle' has vast knowledge of traditional healthcare and uses 27 types of different plants and herbs to cure ill health and diseases such as vomiting, dysentery, wound, body ache, typhoid, paralysis, asthma, and jaundice (Ekka & Ekka, 2013). Furthermore, geographical/spatial isolation makes them vulnerable to access health care services rendered by the government. They wish for accessing modern healthcare system but due to inaccessibility and expensiveness, they could not.

## Violation of Human Rights

The most severe repercussion of Naxal uprisings is the violation of human rights, particularly of tribals in Bastar division. The repressive response of the state to the extremists has resulted in serious human rights violations. Civilians, mostly tribals are caught between extremists and security forces for the support or inadequate support to either their side (Human Right, Watch, 2012). According to Asian Centre for Human Rights (2008), a total of 208 persons including 46 civilians, 134 security personnel and 28 alleged Naxalites were killed in Naxal uprisings in Chhattisgarh from January to September 2007. During the operation of Salwa Judum, police and Judum activists, with impunity from Chhattisgarh government, burned a number of tribal villages and looted livestock. In March 2011, 160 homes were burned by security forces in Sukma district of Chhattisgarh alone (Ghose & Anand, 2016). Also, the government of Chhattisgarh had recruited many children including girls as Special Police Officers (SPOs) to assist security forces. However, there is no official data on the number of death of SPOs in their retaliatory recourses (Human Rights Watch, 2012). People are often arbitrarily arrested and intimidated, sometimes detained and tortured by the security forces and police. They are often kept in police custodies for several months without filing First Information Report (FIR) and then released without producing them before any magistrate. The most regressive form of human rights violation is the rape of tribal women in these areas by state actors with no or rare justice. According to a news report, 16 tribal women were raped and physically assaulted by policemen

in Bastar in November 2015 (NHRC, 2017). In another case, 8 tribal women were repeatedly gang raped by the security forces in Bijapur district, Chhattisgarh (Dahat, 2016). These kinds of news often do not find space in the mainstream media; nor are there any protests for justice to victims. Rape often serves as an instrument of patriarchal domination to suppress the voice of proactive women and to create a sense of fear if one attempts to raise voice against the oppressive system (CAVOW, 2006). Moreover, many members of civil societies, lawyers and journalists who report instances of human rights violations from these areas are often branded as extremist's sympathizers and in many cases, arrested on the suspicion of having a link with Naxalites. The extremists too are often reported to be involved in human rights violations. They are said to employ threat and killing as brutal methods to those villagers who refuse to cooperate with them or who are suspected of being police informants. They often demand money, food, and shelters from villagers. As like government, extremists too recruit tribal children into different Naxalite cadres (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

## Conclusions

The emergence of Naxalite movement has very broad and diverse bases in India. Its emergence was not just because of conflict and class struggle over the possession of land but was the result of traditional social system that deprives tribals and weaker sections from the development. The patriarchal nature of Indian society has always looked down and devalued women. Also, the colonial policies of European countries had favoured just aristocrats and big landlords and undermined the interests of tribals and small peasants. Thus, the contemporary Naxal uprisings are the results of centuries of gradually accumulated unrests and discontents, aroused due to social exclusion among tribals and marginalised sections against the exploitive nature of dominant classes and states. Therefore, it is imperative that in order to root out Naxalism, the governments need to comprehend the root causes of left wing extremism. First of all, it should be understood that Naxalism is not the problem of law and order; it is a political ideology that cannot be dealt through violence and repressive response of states. The government has to properly assess and then formulate suitable policies to resolve the various problems of tribals in LWE affected areas. In this order, social inclusion, based on the interest of tribals can be an

effective approach so that they can ensure full participation in the social, economic, political and cultural affairs of the mainstream society. It is also important to respect the indigenous rights of tribals. Moreover, the government interventions should not threaten the cultural beliefs and practices of tribals. By these means, the ongoing Naxal uprisings in red corridors can be minimised/eliminated.

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