



# ISSUE BRIEF

No. 52

April 2015

## Seeing Through the Maoist Myth



**Shashank Ranjan** is a Senior Fellow at CLAWS.

This *Issue Brief* contextualises the Left Wing Extremism (LWE) in east-central India, in terms of exploitation of Adivasi aspirations by the Maoists to foster their ulterior intentions. The Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) was formed with the merger of, mainly, the People's War Group (PWG) and Maoist Communist Centre (MCC). Since the inception of LWE, splintering and factional rifts have been rampant amongst the Maoists over issues concerning ideology and leadership. The PWG, which forms the backbone of the CPI-Maoist, was active in Andhra Pradesh (AP), during the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, with its activities in neighbouring Chhattisgarh. By 2006, with pressure on the cadres nearly absolute in AP, they decided to shift their focus to the forested areas of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand (by the erstwhile MCC).

The Maoists movement has undergone ideological flip-flops, right from the Charu Mazumdar era. The stress has been on "annihilating the class enemy", with negligible attention towards any form of mass struggle. Kanu Sanyal, one of the founding fathers of the movement, realised

### *Key Points*

1. The Maoists have exploited Adivasi sentiments by pretending to champion the Adivasi cause to foster their ulterior agenda. Maoist intentions vis-à-vis Adivasi aspirations need to be perceived and handled as different entities.
2. Adivasis constitute the rank and file of the CPI-Maoists, controlled by a non-Adivasi leadership. The Adivasis have been the worst sufferers in this ongoing conflict.
3. Undermining democracy and keeping the Maoist controlled areas underdeveloped and isolated, suits the Maoists' purpose.
4. The Maoists have used the relatively well off sub-section of Adivasi society (rural elites), to establish themselves. They have a symbiotic relationship with the rural elites with the aim of sustaining revenue generation in the name of Adivasi welfare and revolution.

The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), New Delhi, is an autonomous think tank dealing with national security and conceptual aspects of land warfare, including conventional and sub-conventional conflict and terrorism. CLAWS conducts research that is futuristic in outlook and policy-oriented in approach.

## Seeing Through ...

the flaw in the ideology of preferring a blood bath of “annihilation” over cultivating a “mass base”. His advocacy found takers in many of the factions who went on to modify their means and methodologies. A few of them, like the CPI-Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML) Party Unity (PU) opted for embracing the parliamentary system. However, groups like the MCC (in Bihar) and PWG (in AP / Telangana) continued with the murderous politics, later merging to form the CPI-Maoist, in 2004. This umbrella organisation has tapped on the Adivasi dissatisfaction to build its mass base, towards achieving the ultimate goal of “armed insurrection”.

### **Myth: Adivasis are Maoists**

In the past, due to their history of isolation and exploitation, tribal traditions had acquired a considerable degree of militancy. Resistance movements in the Adivasi belt preceded the advent of the Maoists by centuries. The adopted means of “annihilation” has translated into targeted and often ruthless killings of the landed class (large / middle / small), traders, officials and so-called traitors and informers. It is pertinent to mention here that apart from the few prosperous ones belonging to the category of the declared “class enemy”, most of the targeted individuals are from the middle or lower class – mostly, the poor Adivasis.

It would not be unreasonable to infer that the Adivasis have been bearing the brunt of the conflict, being on both sides. This is also to be seen in the light of the fact that Adivasis constitute the larger part of the rank and file of the CPI-Maoist, led by an exclusive leadership. While orders emanate from essentially a non-Adivasi leadership, hiding safely in their secure bases, it is the Adivasi foot soldiers on the ground who execute the assigned tasks.<sup>1</sup>

Victimisation of the tribals is likely to continue as long as the state does not perceive these Adivasis

as being different from the Maoists, who have a vast pool of human resource at their disposal and will ensure that the fight continues down to the last Adivasi. Also, as long as the Maoists continue with their militarism in the name of the people, the state will continue its efforts to monopolise violence with perfect moral authority. The Adivasis are trapped in this vicious cycle of conflict, with no stakes in the revolutionary politics of the Maoists.

### **Myth: Maoists are for the Empowerment of the People**

Indian democracy has “empowerment of the people”, as its bottom line. The Constitution, political parties, media, human rights, minority organisations, etc have all reinforced the democratic fabric of our nation. In spite of several faultlines, India is looked up to as one of the better examples of a functioning democracy. This soft power that has become characteristic of India, has worked to its advantages on the global platform, which has an obvious bias for equality and liberalism.

The Maoists have ‘overthrow’ of this democratic polity at the root of their ideology. They undermine and reject the enabling function of democracy manifested in the election system that empowers the marginalised. By exhorting their so-called mass base to boycott elections, the Maoists deny people their only instrument of “exercising and expressing power”. However, people have often boycotted such diktats in the recent times, by going ahead to exercise their rights—a clear indication of the unsustainability of the Maoist ideology.<sup>2</sup> At times, the Adivasis have also defied the Maoists’ call for boycotting Gram Sabha meetings.<sup>3</sup>

The fault of the state lies in the growing democratic deficit that has led to the expansion of Maoist ideology. The electoral democracy in our country has not been able to ensure the people’s access to state power. As a result, the concept of a welfare

state serving the interests of the population has lost appeal. One can, thus, appreciate the emergence of radical elements like the Maoists, propagating anti-electoral doctrines of “direct control” of governance, in the name of the people.<sup>4</sup>

Answering the question as to why the CPI-Maoist declines to fight elections and refuses to participate in the democratic process, Maoist leader Ganapathy remarked, “You think raising issues in the Parliament is the democratic way whereas we believe that people are raising their issues in a democratic way through organised protests, supported by us.”<sup>5</sup> The Maoists term parliamentary politics as a “dog-eat-dog world” and the Parliament as a “talking shop”.

The Maoist viewpoint on shunning elections as a matter of strategy is surprisingly similar to the anarchist perspective. Anarchists believe that “utilising the state, standing in elections, etc only prepares people to *follow leaders* – it does not encourage the self-activity, self-organisation, direct action and mass struggle required for a social revolution.” Likewise, the Indian Maoists also believe that “participation in Parliament does not help in developing the subjective forces; rather it only drives people into legalism and diverts them from intensifying the revolutionary class struggle.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Myth: Maoists are for Adivasi Development**

Although vigour in Maoist activities in the neighbouring state of Andhra Pradesh (AP) intensified in the years 2004-05, their activities in Chhattisgarh commenced as early as 1979. There have been pockets controlled by the Maoists in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand that are claimed to be “liberated zones”, characterised by an absent state or “governance vacuum areas.”<sup>7</sup> On moving here, the Maoists took up the Adivasi cause concerning land, forests, livelihood, displacement, mining, etc – primarily to build up and consolidate their

(guerilla) bases. The expansion and expression of the class-based struggle, premised on the tenets of egalitarianism, was a cause of celebration for the Adivasis. In the Maoist, the Adivasis saw somebody who supported them against the oppressive higher class and the state. For the first time, the most marginalised had a chance to move from the consistent betrayal by the dominant classes to genuine “people’s power.”<sup>8</sup>

From the early years of 2K, these regions were directly administered by the Revolutionary People’s Committee (Janata Sarkar). Considering the protracted length of time that the Maoists have been governing these sub-regions, the lives of the poor Adivasis have not witnessed any revolution in terms of development and welfare. The Maoists, on the contrary, have widened the gap between the poor and the state—a gap that was already substantial. Especially interesting in the context has been the sizeable amount of revenue that the Maoists generate from their industry of protection, extortion, kidnapping, indirect taxation regime, etc. It is reported that more than 50 percent of the generated income is allocated for military capability building, 12 percent for agriculture, 9 percent for health and merely 0.9 percent goes towards education.

While the government cannot be absolved of its responsibilities towards the welfare of the Adivasi population in the Maoists’ controlled regions, what is being flagged is that by forcing the state out and not doing enough for development, the Maoists really owe it to the Adivasis. Recently, an incident came to light when, under the Maoists’ pressure, the Forest Department employees urged the state government to shun development activities.<sup>9</sup>

The exploitative system of contractors and pilferages suits the Maoists. The funds generated thereby are their primary source of income and the enabler for their ‘revolution’ – and while all

this manifests, the poor Adivasis continue to toil at subsistence levels. Arundhati Roy, in an article, has brought out the corruption and cheating on the part of contractors, vis-à-vis their dealings with the Adivasis.<sup>10</sup> She, however, misses the link manifested in the contractors-Maoists nexus that exploits the Adivasis to fund the Maoists' war.

The preceding perspective also explains as to why the Maoists never encourage genuine development based on the empowered local governance model which the state stands for as enshrined in the Indian Constitution through the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act. Empowered Gram Sabhas and cooperatives administered by the local bodies tend to threaten the system of private contractors, thus, hindering the revenue inflow of the Maoists. Also, there have been instances when the Maoists have subverted democracy by forcing contesting candidates to withdraw from local polls, thereby ensuring that their own candidates win in an unopposed manner. This ensures diversion of development funds to the Maoists, through their proxies.<sup>11</sup>

It is in the interest of the Maoists that the so-called 'liberated zones' do not open up to the outside world. Influx of state officials, political cadres, service and goods providers, etc could seriously compromise the secrecy, security and inaccessibility of the network of guerilla bases. In turn, this is used as an excuse by the state officials for not venturing into these areas.

As against the views expressed by the Maoists and their sympathisers, it is not the welfare of the Adivasis but establishment of guerilla bases, that has been the priority for the Maoists, and any semblance of tribal welfare is purely incidental. Thirty years is a long time to set up schools and health centres, achieve competitive wages, etc - the parameters on which the Maoists have been found wanting.

### Myth: Maoists War is Against the Exploiters of Adivasis

There is an important and often missed out class dimension to the entire Adivasi identity. The middle class, the educated and well off section of the Adivasi society is distinct from the grassroots Adivasi and tends to marginalise the poor. The initial spread and rise of LWE was supported and propagated by this category of 'rural elites'. This category supported the Maoists not because of a shared ideology, but because it offered better security to them towards accessing the informal economy of state resources.<sup>12</sup>

Most of the research work and analyses concerning the Maoists tend to focus exclusively on their *modus operandi*. Contextualisation of their activities vis-à-vis the prevalent social processes is normally overlooked. The advent, and settling down, of Maoist cadres from outside into the newer regions unfolded a typical process. While making forays into rural Jharkhand, the Maoists started 'selling protection' to the rural elite. The rural elites, since they knew the local dynamics well, introduced the Maoists to strategically selected people who further oriented the cadres to the local settings.

The Maoists gained support by practising populist vigilante activities such as 'resolving' local disputes in Jan Adalats. Such activities were carried out in the backdrop of taking up the tribal cause, based on an egalitarian leftist ideology. When, over a period of time, more villages came into their fold, a few youths would be recruited for the Maoist bases in other places, to be trained and armed as members of squads of the underground guerilla army. The connotation was contrary to the established rhetoric that Maoists espoused the cause of the poor Adivasis against their exploiters. As a matter of fact, the Maoists gained a foothold in the new areas, by aligning with these very exploiters i.e. the rural elites, contractors, etc. The Maoists used them to gain grassroots support and

later the agenda of these elites was promoted by the Maoists, as a return favour.<sup>13</sup>

As far as the class of rural elites were concerned, beyond their own elevation within the society hierarchy, they had other pressing motives to support the Maoists. In Jharkhand, abolition of the *zamindari* in the early 1950s meant that these elites, who faced impoverishment, increasingly attempted to sustain their lifestyles through state resources—either directly (by gaining jobs) or indirectly (through contracts). They became entrepreneurs who maintained their financial position by participating in the informal economy of development programmes. As a result of their close connections with state officials, they were particularly effective in siphoning money from the state and, in turn, were of great utility to the Maoists.

To obtain a contract, one needed a patron, a powerful person with leverage over the state officials. One also needed supporters to perform the two-fold function of threatening competitors as also promoting own interests, based on muscle power. In effect, there existed a symbiotic equation of offering protection on the part of the Maoists and earning contracts on the part of the rural elites. Also in this equation were the crucial links provided by the local politician who was connected with the rural elites. The state officials, with their yearnings to be on the right side of the local politician, completed the picture.

When the Maoists showed up in Jharkhand, they marketed a similar kind of protection to the rural elites—what local politicians had been offering earlier. The Maoists, thus, became one more group that protected entrepreneurs' illicit access to state resources, and politicians too stood to gain by receding into the background. In fact, as the Maoists gained further support in the respective area, the dividing line between local officialdom and the Maoists became thinner, with certain officials themselves seeking the

Maoists' protection. By cultivating a mutual web of linkages, the Maoists and the local bureaucracy started enjoying a degree of interdependency.<sup>14</sup> As a spin-off, the Maoists got on the right side of the state officialdom. Resultantly, during security crackdowns, those most likely to be arrested were the grassroots party cadres, the Adivasis, and not the non-Adivasi leadership.

The Maoists have presented themselves as a dual power structure: a visible and an invisible one. The visible power includes involvement in local politics, an embodiment through the local people and their everyday activities; while the invisible power involves secrets, vast hidden resources and a capacity for violence.<sup>15</sup> The invisible power got manifested in several ways. Firstly, it was created through the idea of a highly centralised, hierarchical, and organised movement, with the overall purpose of creating an expansive Red Corridor. Secondly, an image of immense power was perpetuated through the clandestine nature of the Maoists' operations, and the circulation of secrets and hidden resources. False names were used and the people recruited at the local level had only a vague idea about who else was involved in the hierarchy above their immediate commander. Also, this cloud of secrecy generated uncertainty about the size and spread of the organisation. The belief generated was that the Maoists were omnipresent. Thirdly, rumours added to the myth: block, police and forest officials were all said to be Maoists. Such rumours created an image of the Maoists as all powerful, increasingly infiltrating the government.<sup>16</sup>

## Conclusion

In the *Brief*, examples have been drawn from the Maoists controlled areas to bring out the lack of development and show how little has been attempted by the Maoists towards the same. Notwithstanding the aforesaid, the prime onus for the penury and backwardness of these Adivasis

## ...The Maoist Myth

falls on the state and its policies, or the absence of the same. The government is endeavouring to address the issue in a holistic manner. In the current governmental approach, perception management has rightly been dovetailed, and needs to be shaped for busting the Maoist myth.

However, given the historical baggage, the law and order domain still holds primacy in the approach. Unsurprisingly, the logic is that the Maoists are squarely responsible for the conflict and their

armed control over a vast area has prevented the state from undertaking developmental and welfare measures. And since the authority of the state is required for the development of the Adivasi belt, the priorities over the course to be charted get confused. In the context of the terror by the Maoist cadres, the state often falls into the trap of justifying its attempts to monopolise violence. Given the diverse nature of the Maoist challenge in different regions, flexibility is the need of the times, rather than going for a “one size fits all” approach.

### Notes

1. Nirmalangshu Mukherji, “Examining the Myth of Maoist Concern for Tribal Welfare”, *countercurrents.org*, 2010.
2. [www.claws.in/1294/boycotting-the-boycott-masses-maoists-and-democracy-shashank-ranjan.html](http://www.claws.in/1294/boycotting-the-boycott-masses-maoists-and-democracy-shashank-ranjan.html)
3. “Tribal People Defy Maoists’ Diktat, Attend Gram Sabhas”, *The Hindu* August 17, 2013.
4. Nirmalangshu Mukherjee, “The Maoists in India – Tribals Under Siege”, in *Fragile Democracy* (Amaryllis, 2012).
5. [www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/documents/papers/interview\\_ganapathy.html](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/documents/papers/interview_ganapathy.html)
6. Ibid.
7. Talk by Hon’ble Shekhar Dutt, former Governor, Chhattisgarh, on “Naxalite Movement in Chhattisgarh and the Challenges of Governance”, January 21, 2015, at VIF.
8. Prakash Louis, *People’s Power; The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar* (Delhi: Wordsmith, 2002).
9. Ashutosh Bhardwaj, “Forest Staff Write to Raman: Stop all Departmental Works in Maoist Hit Areas”, *The Indian Express*, March 23, 2015.
10. Arundhati Roy, “Walking with the Comrades: Gandhians with a Gun”, *Outlook*, March 29, 2010.
11. Bidyut Mohanty, “Odisha: Panchayat Election Results and their Meaning for the Assembly Poll”, *Mainstream*, Vol 1, No 30, July 14, 2012
12. Alpa Shah, *In the Shadows of the State* (OUP, 2010).
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Jonathan Spencer, “Problems in the Analysis of Communal Violence”, *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (1992).

---

*The contents of this Issue Brief are based on the analysis of material accessed from open sources and are the personal views of the author. It may not be quoted as representing the views or policy of the Government of India or Integrated Headquarters of MoD (Army).*



**CENTRE FOR LAND WARFARE STUDIES (CLAWS)**

RPSO Complex, Parade Road, Delhi Cantt, New Delhi 110010

Tel.: +91-11-25691308, Fax: +91-11-25692347, Email: [landwarfare@gmail.com](mailto:landwarfare@gmail.com)

Website: [www.claws.in](http://www.claws.in)