

Maoists in Orissa

Growing Tentacles and a Dormant State

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“Rifle is the only way to bring revolution or changes.”¹

The growing influence of Left Wing extremists (also known as Naxalites)² belonging to the erstwhile People’s War Group (PWG) and Maoist Communist Center (MCC)³ along the borders of the eastern State of Orissa has, today, after decades of being ignored by the administration, become a cause for considerable alarm. Under pressure in some of its neighbouring States, the

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¹ The statement made by Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) PWG Orissa Secretary, Sabyasachi Panda, in 1996.

² The Naxalite movement takes its name from a peasant uprising, which occurred in May 1967 at Naxalbari in the State of West Bengal. It was led by armed Communist revolutionaries, who two years later were to form a party – the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI-ML), under the leadership of Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal, who declared that they were implementing Mao Tse Tung’s ideas, and defined the objective of the new movement as ‘seizure of power through an agrarian revolution’. The tactics to achieve this were through guerilla warfare by the peasants to eliminate the landlords and build up resistance against the state’s police force which came to help the landlords; and thus gradually set up ‘liberated zones’ in different parts of the country that would eventually coalesce into a territorial unit under Naxalite hegemony. In this paper, the term ‘Naxalite’ has been used synonymously with ‘Maoist’ and ‘rebel’ to denote Left-Wing extremists.

³ The PWG and MCC merged on September 16, 2004, to form the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist). For a profile of the CPI-Maoist, see South Asia Terrorism Portal, www.satp.org.

Naxalites have not only established bases, but are, reportedly, expanding and consolidating their hold in Orissa's southern and north-west districts.⁴

The inaccessible hilly terrain, dense forests, lack of development, grievances of the tribals and poor, and the absence of administration have been conducive to the spread of left-wing extremism in Orissa. The seriousness of the problem was underlined by a co-ordinated Naxalite attack on the District Headquarters and armoury at Koraput in southern Orissa on February 6, 2004.⁵ The District authorities appear to have been caught unawares, as admitted by the then Deputy Inspector General of Police (Southern), Bidhu Bhushan Mishra.

This was not the first Naxalite attack on a police station in Orissa. As early as August 2001, the Naxalites had attacked the Kalimela Police Station in Malkangiri District; then, in 2002, the Golpadar Police Station in Rayagada District had been attacked, while in 2003, Malkangiri District was subjected both to raids on the police station in Manabkonda and to an ambush of a police vehicle, the latter resulting in the death of ten police personnel.⁶ The Naxalite movement, which had suffered some demoralization with growing disaffection among tribal groups, received a shot in the arm with the 'success' of the Koraput incident.

The Naxalite movement in Orissa emerged in the early 1960's as a peasant movement in the Gunpur Subdivision of the then undivided Koraput District, under the banner of the Communist Party of India (CPI). It now has influence over 12 of the State's 30 Districts. And it has been reported that there are plans to expand the area of influence/control to urban centres as well, using college students and other youth as their base. According to a Naxalite sympathiser, "the outfit is certainly

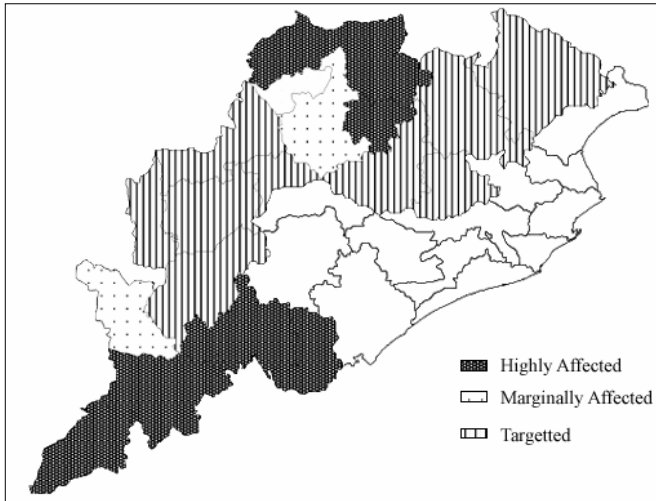
⁴ Sanjay K. Jha, "Naxalite Consolidation in Orissa", *South Asia Intelligence Review*, Vol. 2, No. 3, August 4, 2003, South Asia Terrorism Portal, www.satp.org.

⁵ While four security force personnel died in the attack, the Naxalites reportedly had taken away more than 2000 firearms of the police and also destroyed records related to their activities. They also attacked the district jail and injured the jail superintendent and subsequently attacked the city police station and *Sadar* (country side) police camp, the District Superintendent of Police office, the Treasury and the 3rd Battalion of the Orissa Special Armed Police Centre.

⁶ "Naxal Naxal," *Satabdi*, Cuttack, February 29, 2004, pp. 24-29.

planning to intensify its movement in Orissa and targeting urban areas to get mass support, particularly among the younger generations and students.”⁷

Naxalite-affected areas, 1996-2005



There have clearly been major changes in the Naxalite strategy and even ideology, as their influence spreads to new areas in the State. Simultaneously, they appear to be losing some support in their traditional tribal and peasant base. In the early years, the Naxalites had concentrated on tribals, whom they used as couriers and foot soldiers; while this served the immediate purposes of the rebels, the impact on the lives of the tribals was minimal. They clung faithfully to Mao’s dictum of relying “on the force of the popular masses, for it is only thus that we can have a guarantee of success. The support of the masses offers us great advantages as regards transport, assistance to wounded, intelligence, disruption of the enemy positions, etc.”⁸

⁷ Author’s interview with a lawyer and Naxalite sympathizer at Gunpur in the Rayagada district on March 30, 2004.

⁸ Stuart R. Schram, *Mao Tse-Tung Basic Tactics*, London: Pall Mall Press, 1967, p. 57.

The objective of this paper is to understand the support base and area of operations of the Naxalite movement in Orissa, as also the state response to this growing phenomenon. The paper discusses two broad aspects of the movement in Orissa: It examines how the absence of civic administration and the exploitation of tribals and peasants by petty businessmen and landlords have catalyzed political violence, and also focuses on the ideological and strategic changes as well as the criminalisation of the Naxalite groups over the last decade.

The continuity of the Naxalite threat has often been explained in terms of the persistence and exacerbation of the ‘basic causes’ that led to its birth – feudal exploitation and oppression of the rural poor, who constitute the majority of the people in Orissa, by the wealthy few. Among the poor were the tribal peoples,

...who are deprived of their right to earn a livelihood by selling minor forest produce, are exploited by landlords, contractors and moneylenders. The reduction in public spending in order to bring down the fiscal deficit has also compounded the woes of the people.⁹

There is no doubt that the Naxalites are taking advantage of the prevailing socio-economic problems of the tribals in southern Orissa, particularly those living in the forest areas.

People in backward regions lack economic opportunities. They are deprived of fruits of developmental efforts. People in socio-economically depressed regions often carry a deep sense of frustration and discrimination against their better off neighbours. Poor and disaffected people are often easily manipulated by anti-social elements and powerful vested interests. These pockets of poverty breed serious socio-economic problems. There is corroborating evidence that the problems of terrorism, Naxalism, increased incidence of crime, law and order and social strife in many pockets are attributed to social and economic depression of such regions.¹⁰

⁹ Santosh Das, “Deaths and Denials,” *Frontline*, Chennai, Vol. 18, Issue 21, October 13-26, 2001.

¹⁰ Speech of Naveen Patnaik, Chief Minister of Orissa, at the 50th National Development Council Meeting on December 21, 2002, in New Delhi.

Orissa is one of the poorest provinces in India, with 47.15 per cent of its people below the poverty line, as against a national figure of 26.10 per cent. Worse,

The incidence and persistence of poverty is even higher in Southern Orissa, which comprises Kandhamal, Gajapati and Koraput, Balangir, and Kalahandi (KBK) districts. The State Per Capita Income is way below the national average. The gap between the State Per Capita Income and the corresponding National Per Capita Income is alarmingly increasing from Rs.2,901/- during 1993-94 to Rs.5,067/- during 2000-01 as per quick estimates.¹¹

Compared to the coastal region, the incidence of poverty is greater in the southern and western regions of the State. Furthermore, the percentage of rural families living below the poverty line is substantially higher in the State (66.37 per cent, as per estimate made by the Panchayati Raj Department, Government of Orissa, in 1997) as compared to the rest of the country (34 per cent).

The southern districts have remained underdeveloped largely because of a lack of political involvement and bureaucratic apathy. "Past government policies made these people's lives harder. Harvesters were forced to sell to the Government or private companies the Government signed contracts with, which gave them a monopoly."¹²

At the other end, Naxalite attacks on Government officials and a forcible levy of taxes on construction contractors have affected development-related projects in the various blocks of Naxalite-affected districts. Across the entire country, it is estimated that nearly 10.03 million hectares (mha) of forests are under the control of Naxalites.¹³ These are "primarily tribal dominated areas, (and) the presence of the armed cadres and the police have affected people's lives. Government officials hardly

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² N. C. Saxena, "From Monopoly to De-Regulation of NTFPs: Policy Shifts in Orissa (India)," *International Forestry Review*, Vol. 5 No. 2, 2003, pp. 168-76.

¹³ "Forest War," *Down to Earth*, New Delhi, December 31, 2001, p. 33.

venture into villages inside the forests. The result: little signs of governance... Whenever governance fails, Naxalites step in.”¹⁴

Background

The peasant and tribal protests in Orissa began in the 1960s on the ‘land to the tiller’ issue, with the support of the Communist Party of India in the Koraput and Ganjam districts in the south of the State.¹⁵ According to the 1961 Census, 83 per cent of the population of (undivided) Koraput district and 85 per cent of the population of the Ganjam district lived in rural areas.¹⁶ These areas are characterised by low levels of literacy, few roads and little by way of other infrastructure. Ownership of land was restricted to a few landlords and the rest were landless, marginal or tenant farmers. In Koraput, according to the 1991 Census figures, small and marginal landowners, constituting 69 per cent of all landowners, owned only 34 per cent of the land, while 31 per cent of big farmers owned 66 per cent of the land. At Ganjam, in 1961, small and marginal farmers, constituting 87 per cent of landholders, owned only 54.84 per cent of the land, while the larger landlords, comprising only 13 per cent of the landholders had 45.16 per cent of the land in their possession. These socio-economic conditions led to the beginnings of an agrarian revolution. The producer of food had no food, while the non-producing landlords had surpluses of paddy and other food grains; the tillers of land had little or no land, and non-tillers owned large tracts.

Subsequently, the movement spread to tribal pockets in these districts, resulting in protests against discrimination in access to non-timber forest produce and alienation of tribal land. By 1962, the Communists had succeeded in mobilizing the tribals into forming their own associations and a project called ‘food liberation’ was launched in the Gunpur sub-division of Koraput

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 36.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 35.

¹⁶ On October 2, 1992, the Janata Dal Government divided Koraput district into three districts: Rayagada, Malkangiri and Koraput. At the same time, another seven districts, including Ganjam, were also divided.

district. Initially, the movement was confined to Gunpur and the Paralakhimundi area of Ganjam district.¹⁷

The movement suffered a setback in 1962 when large numbers of Communist leaders were arrested under the Defence of India Rules during the Sino-India War. The CPI split in 1964, with the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) emerging as a breakaway faction. The Communists of Koraput and Gajapati regions joined the CPI-M. In 1967, the CPI-M itself split and the All India Coordination Committee of the Communist Revolutionaries, which later became the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) or CPI-ML, came into being. The Communists of Orissa joined the latter and formed the Orissa State Coordination Committee (OSCC) on March 14, 1968 with D.B.M. Patnaik as convener. The others in the Committee were Jaladhar Nanda, Rabi Das, Kundan Ram, Nagabhushan Patnaik, Dinabandhu Samal and Jagannath Tripathy.

Soon after, members of the OSCC were involved in violent incidents as well as propagandist activities. Nagabhushan Patnaik, as head of the Chitrakonda Labour Movement, led, with the support of Purushottam Pali, Hassanar and others, some 5,000 labourers in an attack on the Chitrakonda Police Station and looted all the arms and ammunition. In Berhampur, leaders like Ramesh Sahu and Santosh Mohapatra indoctrinated college students. The movement was also started in Cuttack, Balugaon and Paralakhimundi. During a secret meeting on January 23-28, 1969, in Kapilpur near Gunpur, it was decided that classical Naxalbari methods would be adopted in the movement's activities. These efforts were, however, seen as sporadic and ineffective. The visit to Andhra Pradesh by Charu Mazumdar, the Naxalite leader from West Bengal, in 1969 had far-reaching implications for the movement in Orissa. On March 29, Mazumdar effectively dissolved the Orissa State Committee when he proposed the formation of guerilla squads and the launching of

¹⁷ "The movement was not like West Bengal. In Orissa, especially in Southern Orissa, it was confined only to some negligible pockets like Berhampur, Chhatrapur, some places in Phulbani district as well as in Koraput district." Author's interview with D. Bhuban Mohan Patnaik on March 29, 2004, at Gunpur. Patnaik was an active member of the CPI – Marxist-Leninist and in 1968 was the Convener of the Orissa State Coordination Committee.

a farmer's revolution along the Andhra-Orissa border. He also organised the merger of the Orissa State Committee with those of sister organisations in the neighbouring States. This led to the 'revolutionary' regions of Koraput and Ganjam in southern Orissa merging with the Srikakulam Regional Committee; the Mayurbhanj and Balasore Districts' groups were linked to the Coordination Committee of West Bengal in the north; and the Sambalpur and Sundergarh groups in north-west Orissa were attached to the South Bihar Committee. This spelt the end of the Orissa Committee and, presumably, its independence and particularity of approach. Interestingly, there were no adverse reactions from the Oriya activists, presumably because links across the border had already been established earlier. D.B.M. Patnaik, who was an active member of the CPI-ML and convenor of the OSCC, speaking of the origins of the 'movement' in Orissa, said

...(our) Andhra Pradesh counterpart (State Committee) was very active in almost all the districts of Andhra Pradesh. Vempatapu Satyanarayana and Adibhatla Kailasam led the movement in Srikakulam District. We were inspired by Satyanarayana and Kailasam as they had started the 'land to tiller' movement in Andhra Pradesh. In that way, the movement started in South Orissa not North Orissa. Northern Orissa was influenced by the Naxalbari movement of West Bengal.¹⁸

The 'movement', which had initially started with poor peasants and tribals spread quickly to the disadvantaged classes, college students, intellectuals and landless people.

The newly formed Committees started organised indoctrination of the tribals, through classes, leaflets and, importantly, arms training.¹⁹ The emergence of armed action became evident as the border areas became more violent. In the Northern part, the first violent incident occurred on February 26, 1971, when the extremists killed a schoolteacher and a Gram Rakshi, a low-level police functionary.²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Prakash Singh, *The Naxalite Movement in India*, New Delhi: Rupa, 1999.

²⁰ Ibid.

The State Government reacted sharply to the escalation of violence. The then Chief Minister of Orissa, Rajendra Narayana Singh Deo, disclosed in the Legislative Assembly on February 28, 1969, that there were 32 guerrilla squads operating in the Gunpur area and the State Government was seeking help of both the Union Government and Andhra Pradesh to eliminate them. Between 1969 and 1971, the Orissa Government, with the help of Andhra Pradesh Police, attempted to suppress the Naxalite movement. In the Chitrakonda conspiracy case, leaders like Nagabhushan Patnaik, Purna Gomango, Purushottam Pali, Yudhistir Gaoud, Shivram Panda, Jagannath Tripathy, D.B.M. Patnaik and many more revolutionaries were tried and sentenced to five years of jail in 1969. Similarly, in the Gunpur conspiracy case in 1969, cases were registered against 71 Naxalites, including Manmotan Mishra and his associates. Further in 1969, Bidyadhar Patra and Nabin Bauri, along with 87 tribals, were given a two-year jail sentence in the Paralakhimundi conspiracy case. From 1967 to 1972, approximately 300 revolutionaries were detained on various charges, including attempt to murder, destruction of public property, forceful acquisition of private and public land, illegal land distribution, illegal carrying of arms and anti-national activities. The revolutionary movement in Orissa faltered due to frequent police raids and arrests. It suffered a major blow, however, when the CPI-ML split after Charu Mazumdar's death in 1972 and many of the activists joined the CPI-Marxist.

The movement remained inactive during the Emergency,²¹ and only after it was lifted in 1977, and following a large-scale protest movement organized by various human rights groups, were the Naxalites released from prison. However, on release, the movement splintered, as different factions found an opportunity to form their own groups and to chart their own course of action. Consequently, between 1972 and 1996, the CPI-ML was virtually eliminated in Orissa. It was involved in only a few 'land liberation' actions in the chaotic southern part of the State.

²¹ "Naxalism in Andhra-Orissa border," Pamphlet published by the CPI-ML, undated, pp. 20-21.

In 1996, the dormant movement was revived by Sabyasachi Panda, and returned to violence. He was an active member of the CPI-ML Liberation party, one of the various groups that had emerged in the post-1977 era. Advocating armed struggle and non-participation in elections, Panda also formed an organization called the *Kui Labanga Sangha* (Kui Youth Association), which later became a front organisation for the Andhra Pradesh-based People's War Group (PWG). Violence increased after the PWG formed the Andhra-Orissa Border Special Zonal Committee (AOBSZC) in 2001. The AOBSZC covers the four north coastal Districts of Andhra Pradesh – East Godavari, Visakhapatnam, Vijayanagaram and Srikakulam – and the five Districts of southern Orissa-Malkangiri, Koraput, Rayagada, Gajapati and Ganjam.²²

Since then, there has been evidence of the growth of Naxalite power and a continuous increase in the resort to violence. Between 1982 and 1991, seventeen Naxalite-related incidents occurred in which two persons were killed. In 2001 alone, the number increased to 21 incidents, with 10 persons killed, the majority of whom were police personnel. In 2002, the number of incidents rose to 39 with 11 deaths. In 2003, there were 41 incidents with 20 fatalities, and some 208 persons were arrested in Naxalite-related cases from nine districts. While the number of incident decreased to 20 with six deaths in the year 2004, the Koraput incident demonstrates the potency of the Naxalite outfits in southern Orissa.²³

It is clear that, over the last decade, the Naxalites have strengthened their base in the southern districts of Orissa. Not only has the geographical area of their operations expanded, the number of groups targeted has also increased. In the 1960's, the Naxalites had targeted only landlords. Now, they also target police personnel, contractors, forest officers and any person who, according to them, 'exploited the people'.

²² Sanjay K. Jha, "Naxalite Consolidation in Orissa", *South Asia Intelligence Review*, Vol. 2, No. 3, August 4, 2003, South Asia Terrorism Portal, www.satp.org.

²³ Source: Orissa Police Naxalite report 2001- 2004 and data compiled from the English and Oriya media.

Naxalite groups and areas of operation

Naxalite activity in Orissa has particularly affected the Koraput, Rayagada, Malkangiri, Gajapati and Ganjam Districts on the Andhra border and Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh, Sambalpur, Deogarh and Keonjhar Districts on the Jharkhand border. Further, the Naxalites are reportedly targeting the Nawarangpur, Jajpur, Kalahandi, Balangir, Phulbani, Bauda and Jharsuguda Districts to expand their operational area. According to Prakash Singh,

The peculiar feature of the Naxalite movement in Orissa is that it is confined to the tribal areas while the coastal districts which are politically more conscious remained comparatively free and that the State leaders generally played second fiddle to the Naxalite leaders of either Andhra Pradesh or West Bengal.²⁴

Both the PWG and MCC were active in Orissa.²⁵ While the MCC had influence over the Sundargarh, Keonjhar, Sambalpur, Mayurbhanj, Deogarh and Jajpur Districts, the PWG had a substantial presence in the Malkangiri, Koraput, Rayagada, Gajapati, Ganjam and Nawarangpur Districts. In addition, the Communist Party of India (CPI) Red Flag and CPI-ML had a minimal presence in the Gajapati and Rayagada Districts. The Naxalites formed a 'common war zone' from the Dandakaranya area to the Nepal border and Orissa is part of this zone. Media reports indicate that the PWG used Devagiri and Mahendragad Hills in the Rayagada District as its training ground. They also maintained training camps at Katinguda and night shelters at Ramguda in the Malkangiri district (See Map IV). At present, 14 *dalams* (squads) of the PWG are operating in Orissa. In the past few years, the Nagavali, Kondavaridi and Basadhara squads of the PWG have been spreading a reign of terror in the Gudari, Gunpur, Chandrapur, Bissamcuttack and Rayagada blocks affecting almost 80 per cent of the development work in

²⁴ Singh, *The Naxalite Movement in India*, p. 62.

²⁵ Even after their merger, both outfits maintain their respective organisational structure, particularly at the ground level.

Rayagada district. Furthermore, the *Jan Adalat*²⁶ ('People's Court) held by the Naxalites in southern Orissa has helped them enhance their sway.

The PWG's 'East Regional Committee', with its headquarters at Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh, controls the activities of Malkangiri District in Orissa. Its eastern division in the Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh deals with the affairs of the Gajapati and Rayagada Districts in Orissa. The Jhanjavati, Nagavali and Korkonda *dalams* of the PWG operate in Malkangiri, while the Uddanam *dalam* is active in the Gajapati District. The Vasadhara *dalam* operates in the Rayagada District. These *dalams* recruit locals and send them to the various training centres in Andhra Pradesh. They also concentrate on developing their front organisations, which deal with propaganda work, including pasting of posters, distributing leaflets and conducting meetings.

The MCC has a presence in the three northern districts of Orissa: Sundargarh, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj. While the Gorumahisani, Jharpokharia, Bangiriposi, Bisoi and Chirang Police Stations of Mayurbhanj District have been affected by Naxalite activity, such activity has also been noticed in the Ghantasila Hills of Jharkhand, close to Mayurbhanj. Further, five police stations – Birsa, Bolang, Banki, Podia, Gurundia and Sikayatpalli – in the Sundargarh District are also affected by Naxalite activity. The Naxalites operate through the Local Regular Guerilla (LRG) squads, which consist of 15-armed cadres each. Above the LRG is the Special Regular Guerilla (SRG) squad with 15 to 30 armed cadres each. Above these are 'military platoons' with 30-armed cadres each. Currently, three LRG

²⁶ The *Jan Adalat* system was first introduced in Bihar. It dispenses 'ready and quick justice' according to the Naxalites. Such dispensation of instant justice has a strong impact on the common people. This is also a means to terrorize people and show its might before the common people that the police and civil administration have failed to provide justice to them. Usually, during these 'speedy trials', the accused are encouraged to confess their misdeeds before a sentence is pronounced. This was also the pattern of Stalinist trials. As a matter of fact, any person in the village can approach it in quest of justice. It largely deals with corruption, family disputes, matrimonial conflict, property disputes, dowry harassment, drunkenness, rape and molestation of women.

squads are operating in the Sambalpur and Deogarh border areas. The Naxalites in this part of Orissa use liquid explosives, self-loading rifles, AK-47 rifles, light machine guns, grenades and mortars.

The MCC spread its movement through front organisations like the *Jan Pratirodh Sangharsh Manch* (People's Revolution Association), *Krantikari Sanskrutik Sangh* (Revolutionary Cultural Association), *Nari Mukti Sangh* (Women's Liberation Association) and *Krantikari Chhatra League* (Revolutionary Students League). Residents of the villages surrounding Saranda Forests say that the movement of armed people has increased over the past couple of years.²⁷ A resident of Morangaponga Village in Manoharpur Block, located 3 to 4 kilometers from the western border of the Forest, said "The month of October seems to be the season for infiltration."²⁸ The West Singhbhum district police chief, Parvin Kumar, said the Naxalites had created a "safe passage" in the western region, taking advantage of the rough and undulating terrain. Once they reach Manoharpur in the West Singhbhum District of Jharkhand, the Naxalites fan out into various regions. Naxalites from Andhra Pradesh cross over to Jharkhand through the Dandakaranya forest in Chhattisgarh, which has a direct corridor to Jharkhand through Orissa following the elephant-migration trail.²⁹

The PWG, too, has a string of front organisations of tribal, women and cultural artists. These include the *Kui Labanga Sangh* (Kui Youth Association), *Lok Shakti Manch* (People's Power Association), *Nari Shakti Bahini* (Women Power Squad), *Jana Natya Mandali* (People's Drama Club), *Kui Sanskrutika Sangathan* (Kui Cultural Association), *Chasi Mulia Royat Samiti* (Farmers and Labourers Association), and the Radical Student Organisation.

The PWG and its front organisations like the *Kui Labanga Sangh* and *Lok Shakti Manch* hold induction camps at regular

²⁷ Author's interview with villagers.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ "Saranda rebel rush before bash," *The Telegraph*, Kolkata, November 3, 2003.

intervals in the various interior pockets of Naxalite-affected districts. In Orissa, according to Ranjit Gupta,

...the Maoists find it easy to strike roots among the tribesmen from many districts like Kalahandi, Bolangir and Baudh. In the three districts, *Adivasi Mahila Sangathans* (Tribal Women Organisation) have been created, and the local youth have been organized to widen the base of information and observation and courier support.³⁰

The PWG has also been holding meetings and visiting tribal hamlets on recruitment drives to induct more women into its cadre in order to launch a new wing of women Naxalites called the *Nari Shakti Bahini*, which is to be pressed into service during 'special operations'.³¹ The Naxalite groups mobilize local tribals against the Police, Forest Department officials and elected representatives through their front organizations in areas bordering Jharkhand as well.³²

In the cultural field, the pro-Naxalite organisations successfully exploit the medium of drama and poetry to propagate the left-wing extremist ideology. For example, the Revolutionary Writers Association, *Jana Natya Mandali* and *Kui Sanskrutika Sangathan*, among others, play a major role in cadre building.

Sources of Manpower /Arms Available/Funding

The Orissa Naxalites have undergone constant mutation since the 1960s. There have been major changes in their strategy, training and firepower, with the result that they now have more and better arms and ammunition, advanced forms of training in using sophisticated weapons, and are capable of launching surprise attacks. According to Ranjit Kumar Gupta,

...the modern day Maoists have studied Mao's thoughts carefully. They have also studied the actions of Ernesto

³⁰ Ranjit Kumar Gupta, *The Crimson Agenda: Maoist Protest and Terror*, Delhi: Wordsmiths, 2004, p. 52.

³¹ "Naxalite outfits launches fresh recruitment drive in Orissa," *Deccan Herald*, Bangalore, July 30, 2003.

³² Sanjay Jha, "Naxalite Consolidation in Orissa," *South Asia Intelligence Review*.

‘Che’ Guevara, who has left behind very practical and detailed instructions for launching a guerilla war.³³

The changes in Orissa became more pronounced in 1996 when Sabyasachi Panda joined the PWG. Since then, all major attacks have been carried out under his leadership.

In Orissa, the squads recruit locals or tribals and send them to the training centres in Andhra Pradesh. The Naxalites today recruit children, between 12 and 16 years old, as couriers. This is the first stage of recruiting cadres. After that, they indoctrinate them in regular classes, held in secret places by specialized senior cadres, on books of Maoist philosophy. The third stage is physical exercise and armed training, especially given to those who perform well in earlier two stages.

The activities of various Maoist groups have undergone some changes in the due course of time. Now they also resort to extortion for ransom from farmers, teachers, contractors, businessman and whosoever comes handy in their area of operation. The presence of Naxalites in the tribal areas has created problems for the District administration in the implementation of various development projects. It has been reported that the Naxalites do not allow contractors and engineers to construct roads and bridges to avoid police access to the regions. According to Ashok Mahallick, a contractor,

...the Naxalites do not allow to construct a bridge in Malkangiri district to avoid police raids. They also charged 10 per cent of the total project. The Naxalites also sometimes ask the contractors to pay by kind.³⁴

Other sources of fund raising include the operation of illegal mines, sale of *Tendu* leaves, and illegal sale of various forest products and narcotics. For instance, opium cultivation has become a chief source of income for the Naxalites at Chitrakonda in the Malkangiri District and this is primarily due to a nexus between them and the political leaders. Furthermore, while the Naxalites of the region cultivate more than 100 acres of land with the help of local people, opium worth approximately Rupees 60 million is being supplied to neighbouring States like Chhattisgarh,

³³ Gupta, *The Crimson Agenda*, p. 30.

³⁴ Author's interview, March 28, 2004.

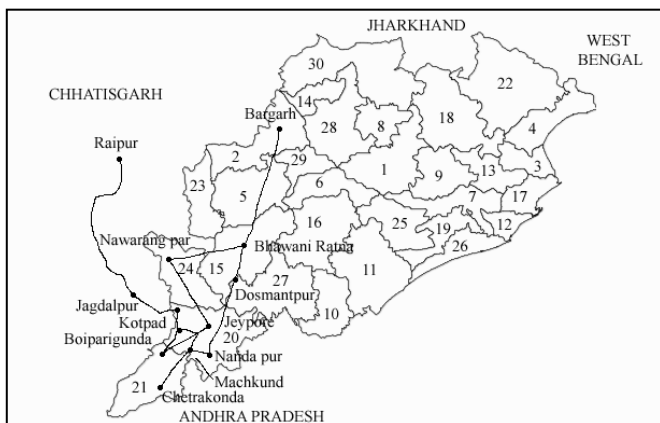
Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh every year.³⁵ The Naxalites use Koraput as a transit passage, moving from Andhra Pradesh to Chhattisgarh, in exchange for trade in *Tendu* leaves and bamboo produce.

According to a Malkangiri Police report, every year over 10,000 quintals of *ganja* (marijuana) are produced in the hilly terrain of Orissa-Andhra Pradesh under the Kalimela and Chitrakonda Police limits in the District. In fact, cultivation is done round the year in the worst Naxalite-affected tribal pockets of Janvai, Pepermetla, Gopagunda, Maliguda, Podia and Manbakonda. The consignments are smuggled out by tribal conduits to markets across State borders via jungle routes. Generally, *ganja* is packed in small quantities and the couriers evade the police by road travel and later transport it to other areas, according to Deputy Inspector General of Police, B.B. Mishra. The common routes are Malkangiri – Boipariguda – Kotpad – Jagdalpur – Raipur (Chhattisgarh), Chitrakunda – Machkund – Nandapur – Dasmantpur – Indravati – Bhawanipatna – Bargarh; Malkangiri – Jeypore – Nabarangpur – Bhawanipatna – Bargarh. Official sources informed that as most of the operations are carried out from inaccessible Naxalite-infested areas neither the police nor the excise department is able to effectively monitor these activities. The Naxalites derive substantial benefits from these activities.³⁶

³⁵ *Prajanatra Weekly*, Cuttack, March 14-20, 2004.

³⁶ “Drug trafficking rising on the sly in district”, *New Indian Express*, July 31, 2004. Also see *Prajanatra Weekly*, March 14-20, 2004.

Naxalites' Narcotics Route



Source: Koraput Police report published in *Prajatantra*

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Anugul | 16. Kandhamal |
| 2. Bargarh | 17. KendraPara |
| 3. Bhadrak | 18. Keonjhar |
| 4. Balasore | 19. Khordha |
| 5. Balangir | 20. Koraput |
| 6. Boudh | 21. Malkangiri |
| 7. Cuttack | 22. Mayurbhanj |
| 8. Deogarh | 23. Nawapada |
| 9. Dhenkanal | 24. Nabarangpur |
| 10. Gajapati | 25. Nayagarh |
| 11. Ganjam | 26. Puri |
| 12. Jagatsinghpur | 27. Rayagada |
| 13. Jajpur | 28. Sambalpur |
| 14. Jharsuguda | 29. Sonepur |
| 15. Kalahandi | 30. Sundergarh |

The Naxalite outfits operating in Orissa are in constant touch with their counterparts in the neighbouring States. They procure arms and ammunition from the illegal arms markets of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and insurgent groups operating in India's Northeast. While they procure explosives from the mining areas of Jharkhand, a significant proportion of their weaponry is a consequence of looting the state armory and Police Stations. The Naxalites have also reportedly set up their own arms manufacturing factories in the Dandakaranya area. According to

intelligence reports, after security forces stepped up vigil in Tripura and north Bengal, Pakistan's Inter-State Intelligence (ISI) agents are using the southern riverine belt on the fringes of the Sunderbans to smuggle narcotics and arms to Bengal and Orissa. The ISI also supplies weapons, which are purchased through agents linked with insurgents in the Northeast, to the PWG and MCC, which are active in pockets of West Midnapore, Bankura and Purulia in West Bengal and parts of Jharkhand, Bihar, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh.³⁷ The Orissa Naxalites use weapons of the AK series, light machine guns, self-loading rifles, landmines, revolvers and pistols.

Popular reaction

Since its inception in Orissa, the Naxalite movement has been getting support from tribals, small peasants, daily labourers and backward communities. The objective is to bring the landless and poor peasants into the forefront of the struggle, while also trying to win over the middle peasantry and a section of the rich peasantry to its side. Today, the Naxalite cadres in Orissa are drawn primarily from tribals, agricultural labourers, mining workers and also anti-social elements in rural areas. In the urban expanse, support is secured from college students, trade unions and intellectuals. Interestingly, the People's Guerilla Army (PGA), armed wing of the PWG, which is operating in southern Orissa, is dominated by Telugu and Bengali speaking cadres, followed by a few local tribals and criminals from within Orissa.

Maoist insurgents derive strength from all sorts of unholy alliances with all sorts of anti-national, anti-social forces. A former PWG activist took part in an attack on a temple in Andhra Pradesh. Another such cadre is running a secessionist activity in Tamil Nadu.³⁸

In Orissa, wanted criminals have joined the Naxalite ranks to evade arrest. For instance, two criminals, Congress Das and Ravindra Das, who had escaped from the Chatrapur Jail on August 9, 2003, were arrested by the Rayagada Police from a

³⁷ "Report Sounds ISI alarm", *Telegraph*, Kolkata, September 21, 2004.

³⁸ B. B. Kumar, "Maoist Insurgency in India: An Overview," *Dialogue*, Vol. 4. No.2, p. 69.

Naxalite camp. A rapist of Padmapur village in the Rayagada district is presently taking shelter in the Vasadhara committee group, according to a local television reporter.³⁹

The Naxalite outfits are also taking advantage of the lingering tension between the *Panas* (Scheduled Castes) and tribals in the Gajapati District, as well as of land disputes between tribals and Bangladeshi refugees in the Malkangiri district. The PWG, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI-ML) Liberation and the Red Flag are gauging the people's response in Gajapati through such conflicts, before they launch full-scale activities in districts like Koraput and Phulbani. According to a former Additional Director General of Police, John Nayak,

...they are taking advantage of the existing land disputes to further their own cause. While land settlement records show that *Panas* are the possessors of land, the tribals maintain that the *Panas* have fraudulently grabbed their land.⁴⁰

In the last couple of years, however, the Naxalites are losing support among their traditional bases, particularly with the tribals. This is primarily due to the lumpenisation of the movement. In 2003, hundreds of tribals in the Rayagada District, who once protected the PWG, virtually declared war against them. Having decided to rid their area of the Naxalite presence, they have formed the *Kui Shanti Sena* (Kui Peace Army). "We are against the Naxalites who are exploiting and looting the tribals. They are not revolutionaries. We can have peace only if we drive them away," declared Dakoo Majhi, Chairman of the *Kui Shanti Sena*.⁴¹ In response, the Vashadhara Regional Committee of the PWG accuses the *Sena* of being a Police front and has threatened to kill Majhi.

The fear of Naxalites had long prevented people from entering the paddy fields in Rayagada district, which affected the tribal economy, as about 90 per cent Kondh and Soura tribals depend on agriculture for their livelihood. The PWG operatives,

³⁹ Author's interview with a TV reporter.

⁴⁰ "Officials ignore trouble brewing in Orissa dist," *Indian Express*, January 12, 2000.

⁴¹ Author's interview with Majhi.

who until recently swore by the ideology of Mao and Marx and went out of the way to protect the interests of the tribals, gradually began extorting money from them and also exploiting them in other ways. Once the tribals realised that the Naxalites had not only failed to deliver on their promises but were actually using them as pawns in their war against the state, they reacted sharply. The extortion and violence against tribal men and women by the PWG cadres added fuel to the fire. Naxalite activity was checked to a large extent by the Kondh tribals in September-November 2003 resulting in the arrest of 10 and surrender of 30. This tribal reaction has now turned into a relatively large-scale revolt, which can be gauged from the fact that approximately 5,000 tribals of Chandrapur and Gudari Blocks, under the banner of *Kui Kondh Santi Sangh*, have been generating awareness among the people of the problems faced by them due to the Naxalites. In the months of August-October 2003, the tribals organised 40 meetings and attacked Naxalite hideouts 10 times. Around 118 Naxalites were arrested and about 50 surrendered, with the help of tribals, till August 2004. Further, about 5,000 Kondh tribals gathered in the Nandi and Dhaniput villages of Chandrapur Block on October 28, 2003, and vowed to spread the anti-Naxalite movement in the district. On October 15, 2003, a thousand villagers of Siriguda, Balipanga, Resam and Rengulguda raided Naxalite hideouts in Chandrapur and Gudari, caught seven Naxalites and handed them over to Police. The Kondhs have also captured 22 Naxalites in the Rayagada district.

These are only a few incidents, which indicate that the tribals, who were counted among their most ardent supporters and protectors, have decidedly turned against the Naxalites. The Police Chiefs of Malkangiri and Rayagada have stated that, with the help of tribals, the Left Wing extremist problem in the two districts had been brought under control to a large extent in the year 2004, as compared to previous years. The Police are now trying to cultivate the tribals as their allies in countering extremism in the southern districts of Orissa. The state is thus using a judicious mixture of force and other efforts to bring back the tribals into the mainstream of socio-economic development.

State reaction

The State response towards the issue has been largely incoherent. The Congress party, which ruled the State for approximately 35 years, adopted a *laissez faire* policy towards Left Wing extremism. It was only during the Janata party Government in 1990-1995, that the state recognized the problem as a socio-economic one. In a measure aimed at checking the Naxalite movement and make the administration more people friendly, in 1992, Biju Patnaik, the then Chief Minister, divided large districts into small ones. However, despite this administrative restructuring, there was no visible impact on Naxalite activities. On the other hand, they expanded their geographical area of operation and target groups. The Maoists have also benefited significantly by the ambivalence of the political leadership on the nature of their movement. Speaking in the State Legislative Assembly in 1995, Patnaik had stated, "Naxalite movement is a spontaneous people's resentment against administration (*sic*).” His controversial statement in the Assembly asking that his name be put first in the list of 'Naxalites' not only confused the administration, but also encouraged the Naxalites consolidate their hold in the forests of southern Orissa.

Neither have successive regimes in Orissa evolved any clear policy on the issue, either in an effort to wean the people away from the Naxalites, nor to use Force to suppress the rebels. As one commentator notes:

There is a pattern here. Each new incumbent, be it in North Block or in the State Governments, sets about reinventing the wheel with little concern for what history points out. The cycle is almost invariable: 'peaceful' and 'political' resolutions passionately advocated in the early days of incumbency, yield gradually to an eventual return to the use of 'force' as Naxalite depredations mount... The interregnums of 'sympathy and

understanding' have, however, been the periods of the most rapid consolidation for the Naxalites.⁴²

While the political leadership in Orissa shows little interest in understanding the problem, bureaucrats still quibble over definitions and the 'nature' of the problem, and, while "the Secretaries sitting in Bhubaneswar call Naxalism a socio-economic problem, the police point it out as a law and order problem."⁴³ Though the Naxalite problem in Orissa is widely perceived as a governance problem, the Government has tended to treat it as a law and order problem.

In this backdrop, the current Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's latest move seems to have given the State Government some direction. The Chief Minister has maintained that he has an open mind about talks with the Naxalites. In September 2004, the Government had a dialogue with the leaders of front organisations of the PWG and even allowed a rally in the capital. However, Patnaik, who has taken the initiative of sorting out land-related cases of tribals expeditiously, expects the Naxalites to come to the negotiating table without any preconditions.

According to the Panchayat Raj Minister, Damodar Rout, the State Government is planning to empower the tribals in remote areas through developmental programmes in order to counter the rising influence of Naxalites. He opined that local self-governing bodies could be utilised in this regard and stated that the Centre has agreed to provide Rupees 8.54 billion for tribal empowerment projects in Orissa.⁴⁴

This by itself, even if accomplished, would not be enough. Apart from developmental activities, the State Government will need to upgrade its Police Force to effectively tackle the problem. While the Naxalites possess modern weapons, including AK series rifles, the light machine gun and self-loading rifles, police stations in the affected districts like Koraput and Malkangiri, for instance, have no access to modern weaponry. The number of

⁴² Ajai Sahni, "Bad Medicine for a Red Epidemic", *South Asia Intelligence Review*, Vol. 3, No. 12, October 4, 2004, South Asia Terrorism Portal, www.satp.org.

⁴³ Author's interview with a journalist of *Prajatantra*, Cuttack, March 22, 2004.

⁴⁴ "Naxalism: Govt bid to win over tribals," *New Indian Express*, October 26, 2004.

personnel trained in anti-guerilla warfare remains small. Most of the Police Stations do not have vehicles, or even sufficient staff. According to the former Director General of Police, N. C. Padhi, “Many proposals to enhance security, especially in the Naxalite-prone pockets of the State had been submitted to the Chief Minister. But in vain.”⁴⁵ Another senior police officer stated, “More than 30 police personnel had been killed in last three years by the Naxalites. We do not (even) have .303 rifles, when the ultras have SLRs and AK-47s. Our intelligence people were busy collecting information on the Chief Minister’s political rivals (rather) than the ultras.”⁴⁶ At the same time, the civil administration remains weak, as absenteeism among local officials is high due to frequent threats issued by the Naxalites. Officials reportedly do not stay more than 20 days in a month in their assigned posts because of a lack of civic facilities. Interestingly, in case of transfers, Police Officers are reluctant to join their posts in southwestern Orissa.

Of late, the State Government has submitted a Rupees 200 million proposal to the Centre to tackle Left Wing extremism. According to an action plan, the Orissa Police will be trained in ‘jungle warfare’ by its counterpart in Andhra Pradesh. Given the challenges thrown up by the increase in Naxalite activity, two battalions – Indian Reserve Battalion and Eighth Battalion – of the Armed Police are being raised. While Orissa will bear the cost of raising the Eighth Battalion, the Union and State Governments will share the cost of the Indian Reserve Battalion. Since Orissa is a part of the ‘common war zone’, the State Government has also devised an inter-state co-ordination mechanism to deal with the problem.

In a parallel resolve to tread the ‘path of peace’ with the Naxalites and win the confidence of the neglected tribals at the same time, the Naveen Patnaik Government in Orissa has decided not to press charges against 156 suspected rebels in 34 cases and to drop 1,513 minor cases against over 2,000 tribals. The Chief Minister also decided to drop 1,513 minor cases against villagers

⁴⁵ Manjushree Reddy, “Naxal Mayhem,” *Sahara Times*, New Delhi, February 21, 2004.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

of the tribal-dominated districts and to review cases relating to extremist activities.

There is no doubt that lack of governance has been responsible for underdevelopment, increased exploitation and inequality in the rural areas. However, the presence of Naxalites and the terror created by them has worsened the plight of the common man. Caught between the Government and Naxalites, the common people are the worst affected. Suspected ‘informers’ are targeted by both the Police and by the Naxalites. Worse, around 80 per cent of developmental projects remain unimplemented in the Naxalite-affected areas. In this context, the former Telangana revolutionary Dasarathi Rangacharya notes:

Maoists are suffering from the dogma that armed struggle is superior. They are under such an illusion that they are not ready to buy the fact that people’s support is more important, which alone forced the Government to invite them for talks. The Maoists are, rather sadly, not aware of their strength in the form of public support, but are looking to guns for safety. Violence is not an end in itself, it is only a means of achieving the ultimate goal.⁴⁷

The Maoists, however, appear to be ignoring the fact that even Mao never claimed that Guerilla action alone could be decisive in a struggle for political control of the state, though he insisted that it is a possible, natural and necessary development in an agrarian-based revolutionary war.⁴⁸ Criticizing the present CPI-Maoist contention that ‘armed struggle’ is non-negotiable, Prakash Singh notes that “armed struggle is the means to an end – it is not the end in itself. If the objectives are achieved by peaceful negotiations, any talk of ‘armed struggle’ becomes meaningless and irrelevant.”⁴⁹

It is ironic that what began as a communist-led peasant movement in the Koraput and Ganjam districts of Orissa in the 1960’s is now perceived as a huge law and order problem in as

⁴⁷ “Maoists ruled by armed struggle dogma,” *The Hindu*, Chennai, November 20, 2004.

⁴⁸ Liddell Hart, “Guerilla Warfare by Mao Tse-Tung and by Che Guevara,” London: Cassell, 1969, p. 18.

⁴⁹ Prakash Singh, “How to combat red terror,” *The Pioneer*, New Delhi, October 30, 2004.

many as 13 districts in the State. Though the State has been suffering from the menace for the last 40 years, there appears to be no coherent strategy of response in place. While a sensitive administration and proper understanding of the tribal problems could help counter left-wing extremism in Orissa, a systematic approach, which is both long-term and result-oriented, is now an urgent imperative.