

Chapter-5

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

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The Maoist movement is said to be the biggest threat towards Indian society and polity. Originating from the Telangana insurgency in 1940, the movement has now spread over at least 13 states in India. The Maoists have built up its support base particularly among the tribal and other disadvantaged communities who are living across the so-called red corridor region of the country. The region is spanning from Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh to Bihar and beyond up to Nepal. This particular region shows a paradoxical feature. It is paradoxical in the sense that the region is very rich in India's most valuable mineral resources, in the one hand, and on the other, the region is inhabited by the country's poorest of the poor tribal and other disadvantaged communities. The Janglemahal area of West Bengal, comprising of the forested areas of Paschim Medinipur, Jhargram, Purulia and Bankura districts, falls under the red corridor region.

The Janglemahal area has witnessed the Maoist insurgency and counter-insurgency measures adopted by the State and the Union Governments. The area has witnessed its most dangerous phase of violent movement till now during 2007 - 2011. However, the projected beneficiaries and the resultant victims of the movement have

been the poor tribal and their neighboring disadvantaged caste people. It has been found that the movement became weak by the end of 2011. Though the Maoist extremism is under control now by the Joint Forces deployed by the Government, the violent movement in Junglemahal area during the recent past (commonly referred to as the 'Lalgarh movement' or Junglemahal movement) has left far-reaching impacts on the life and culture of the village people.

Dealing with two Santal villages (*viz.*, Shimuldanga and Aushabandhi) in Paschim Medinipur district and one Santal village (*viz.*, Chhotopelia) and one multiethnic village (*viz.*, Kashitoria) in the newly created Jhargram district, I have tried to examine the cultural role on the movement, on one hand, and to assess the impacts of the violent movement and the counter-violence on the social and cultural life of the communities concerned. The four villages were selected purposively on the basis of their variegated ethnic composition, geophysical setting, distance from the district headquarters, etc., in order to understand the nature and extent of the movement and its resultant impact, if any. I have tried to assess the impacts under the demographic and socio-economic contexts of the villages. Chhotopelia, Shimuldanga and Asuhabandhi are uniethnic villages having exclusively inhabited by the Santal group, while Kashitoria is a multiethnic village with the Santal, Hari and Teli communities. Chhotopelia and Aushabandhi have medium populations with 82 families and 73 families respectively. On the other hand, Kashitoria and Shimuldanga have small populations with 33 families and 25 families respectively.

The nuclear family is the most preferred type of family in all the villages. This is 70.73 percent at Chhotopelia and 60.61, 68.00 and 84.93 percent at Kashitoria,

Shimuldanga and Aushabandi respectively. A few families, however, witnessed forced disappearance of husbands during the Maoist movement. Such families are categorized as the broken family. Most of the families (56 to 78 percent) in the villages are medium-sized (with 4 to 6 persons). The population pyramids of Chhotopelia and Aushabandhi reflect high growth rate. The age and sex distribution of the village populations under study indicates a relatively long lifespan of the communities concerned. Sex ratio in the villages is more or less high except at Chhotopelia, though the age-specific sex ratios show great inconsistencies. One of the causal factors for such inconsistency is the early marriage of the girls in particular. Cases of early marriage, especially of the girls, are occurring because the parents are in hurry to provide their girls a safe home outside the movement affected area. Early marriage is very high at Chhotopelia, one of the epicenters of the violence conflict between the Maoists, on the one hand, and the counter-insurgency forces in association with the hired grooms, on the other. In all the villages, percentage of the unmarried females is lower than that of the males. It is also for early marriage of these girls who have left the village after marriage in the one hand. And on the other, cases of newly married girls who are coming into Chhotopelia are relatively less again because of the severe disturbance. The people of the neighboring villages are not willing to let their girls married to the grooms at Chhotopelia. In all villages, except Chhotopelia, the proportion of widows in various age groups is higher compared to that of the widowers. This is because of the higher fatality among the males due to the violence. From the age groups of 50-54 years onwards at Chhotopelia, the proportion of widowers is substantially high. This is reportedly due to ill health of the ages women in the villages. The phenomenon requires further study.

Literacy rate in the villages is relatively low compared to that in the State of West Bengal and in India. This is only 56.91, 58.70, 60.80 and 43.55 percent at Chhotopelia, Kashitoria, Shimuldanga and Aushabandhi respectively. In this field, the females are lagging behind the males. There hardly a person can be found who has a degree with graduation or technical education. Lack of educational institution and extreme poverty are the main reasons for such disappointing picture in the field educational achievement. Low educational status is also resulted in high dependency ratio (ranging from 46 to 63 percent) in the area of the present study. Since birth certificate is not available for the people under study, I have recorded the child-women ratio as a rough measure of fertility. Aushabandhi shows the highest child-women ratio, followed by Kashitoria (38.71), Shimuldanga (31.03) and Chhotopelia (29.59).

Cultivation is the main economic pursuit of the people concerned. About 33 percent people of Chhotopelia are engaged in agriculture. At Kashitoria, Shimuldanga and Aushabandhi this is about 26, 18 and 24 percent respectively. But this occupation is not sufficient to provide them at least two square meals per day. The villagers are extensively depending upon collecting of forest produces (like *sal* leaves, *kendu* leaves, fire wood, etc.) for their life and livelihood. Yet, for most of the times in a year they have to work as daily wage labourers in and around the villages concerned. Even the Santal women use to do heavy work in connection with road construction and repairing, cultivation, etc. for earning the breads for their families. The number of families with a monthly income of less than Rs. 3000/- (USD 43.20) is alarmingly high. This is 47.56 per cent, 45.46 per cent and 76 per cent at Chhotopelia, Kashitoria and Shimuldanga respectively. At Aushabandhi it is, however, 26 per cent. Here most of the families come

under the income group of Rs. 3000 – Rs.5000 (USD 43.20 – USD 72.01) per month. Their land ownership pattern also proves their economic marginality. About 82 per cent families at Chhotopelia have land ownership of less than 0.5 acres. At Kashitoria, Shimuldanga and Aushabandhi nearly 42 per cent, 76 per cent and 48 per cent families have less than 0.5 acres land in their possession. Though these lands are under their possession as they are claiming, they have no official documents in support of that. Notwithstanding they have been living on this land for generations, the most of these lands have been the property of the forest department after enactment of several forest acts and laws. The tribal people don't have the idea of such legal bindings. Still they think that these lands are their property. Moreover, various forest laws have restricted the tribal rights on forest and the forest produces and have made forest a State property. Thus over years, the Santals and other marginal communities in Junglemahal area have become landless and homeless. Neo-liberal policies in connection with acquiring of land for industrialization and urbanization have made the tribal and forest-dependent people economically more vulnerable. As many as 68.29, 54.55, 56.00 and 63.01 per cent families at Chhotopelia, Kashitoria, Shimuldanga and Aushabandhi respectively are staying in dilapidated mud houses. Only a few families have semi-*pukka* or *pukka* houses. About 34, 42, 16 and 45 per cent families at Chhotopelia, Kashitoria, Shimuldanga and Aushabandhi respectively have to go for open defecation since they don't have any toilets. Even the families who have toilets are not using toilets. About 50 per cent of such families are using toilets for storing fuel woods and leaves. They are also in regular habits of open defecation. Given this situation, there are a number of Central and State Government schemes in implementation. These schemes are basically non-participatory

in nature. Though some families in the study area have become beneficiaries of a few schemes (such as *Swachh Bharat Mission*, *Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Gramin*, *MGNREGA*, etc. of the Central Government and *Geetanjali*, *Amar Thikana*, *Kanyashree*, etc. of the Government of West Bengal), these are not sufficient to bring the communities concerned out of their socio-economic vulnerability.

The Santals and the other two ethnic groups reportedly have been living with social harmony, peace and good intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic relationships over decades in the Junglemahal area, though they have been struggling with extreme poverty. Poverty seems to bring them closer and the situation teaches them to fight together. But the Maoist violence and the counter-violence of the security forces have shattered the pattern of relationships not only among the members of the same ethnic group but among the different ethnic groups also. The members of different ethnic groups were fitted against each other by the Maoist activists as well as by the counter-insurgency forces.

The Santals comprises the major ethnic groups in the study area. They are very honest, kind hearted, brave and trustworthy people. They are very religious minded too. They used to perform certain rituals everyday and have an elaborated cycle of festivals and social ceremonies. The *Jaherthan*, the sacred grove, is the most holy place in their cultural life. Various rituals were performed at *Jaherthan* regularly at the villages under study. But they have been living with extreme poverty and appear to have excluded from the mainstream development agenda under the neo-liberal policy in India. The forests, their traditional habitat, are now the state property. The Santals and other disadvantaged communities of Junglemahal area have strong feeling of deprivation by the Indian Nation- State.

Under this background, the Maoists have been trying to build up their political base particularly among the tribals across the Junglemahal area. They have highlighted the issues of deprivation, unemployment and underdevelopment in the area. By the time in 2007, Government of West Bengal acquired tribal land at Salboni for establishing a steel plant. The Maoists took the issue of displacement to their political agenda and were the masterminds behind a mine explosion in Paschim Medinipur district. The Government came out with strong retaliation including torture and arrest of innocent students across about 35 village in Junglemahal area. This led to a spontaneous tribal movement across the entire area. Initially the movement was of the tribals and in the latter phase it became a movement of the Maoists supported by the tribals and other disadvantaged people. The movement resorted to various violent activities. The situation became out of control by state government. To counter the situation, the State Government with the assistance from the Union Government deployed Joint forces in the Junglemahal area. The central objective of the Joint Force was to 'clear and hold' the area. It resulted into massive violence throughout the Junglemahal area particularly during 2007 - 2011.

The Santals and other disadvantaged people of the area under study strongly supported the Maoist activities. They strongly opposed the government on the issue of atrocity of the police over the poor tribals, including the women and children. Section CrPC 144 was declared for prolonged period in the study area. Security forces came out heavily on the tribal people. Many people, majorly the males, had to flee their village. Even the *Majhi* of Shimuldanga had to stay out of his village. The tribal people could not enter into the forest or organize their regular rituals at *Jaherthan*. However, all these

prohibitory measures made the tribal people united. The traditional political organization of the Santals also backed the movement. At one time, it also announced the *Sarjam Gira* to make participation of every tribal people compulsory in the resistance movement. The non-tribal marginal people also followed the Santals since they also became victims of police oppression in various ways. Their culture and traditional political organization played a vital role to make the people consolidated against the Joint Forces and Government. The office-bearers took initiative to find out ways to resist counter-violence. The situation became more complicated by the anti-people acts of the *harmads*, the hired grooms, employed by the then ruling political party to assist the forces and finish the Maoist activists.

The Maoists have undertaken a number of pro-people agenda to win over the minds of tribal people. They became successful as the entire area came under their control. To regain their authority the state government resorted to retaliatory violence only to increase the number of fatalities. The cultural life of the Santals, the mutual trust of the ethnic groups living together, the inter-village community dependency, etc. were deeply shattered. The family life was destroyed, since the male members had to stay out of their homes. Many even left the village. The numbers of widows and widowers had increased due to the fatalities in the arms conflict. People became jobless and homeless. Drop-out ratio became high in all the villages.

The extremist movement led by the Maoist activists and the state sponsored counter-violence made the Santals and other villagers extremely helpless. This phase witnessed rampant police torture over the common people, including school-going children and women, forced disappearance, killing of tribal people, sexual assault of

women, extortion of money and the like. The people became scared of the security forces. The Maoists also resorted to extreme violence and killing of the poor people. The tribal and other ethnic groups of the area became scared of the police and the Maoist activists. Their anxiety and helplessness have been expressed through various case studies obtained in the present study.

But the worst impact of the so-called Maoist movement in Junglemahal has been on the family, traditional political organization and the socio-cultural life of the Santals and Hari and Teli ethnic groups under study. The family life of the concerned groups has been seriously shattered with fleeing of males, no source of income, trust deficit among the members, loss of the near ones, etc. The *Majhi*, *Jogmajhi* and other officials of the *Soloaana*, who normally used to take great responsibilities toward well-being and welfare of the entire village community, became the target of the counter-insurgency forces. They have also witnessed forced disappearance and homelessness, and were subjected to mistrust. Thus, the very base of the political system has become weak. The religious life of the Santals has been destroyed. The people are now suffering from depression, trust deficit, despair and hopelessness. Thus, in spite of the so-called Maoist Movement at Junglemahal have become weak as many activists have been killed and many have been forced to surrender, the movement have left with severe impacts particularly on the socio-cultural life of the people concerned.

Under the above circumstances, it may be suggested that urgent government intervention with a soothing approach is essential in order to heal the wounds in the people's mind. Urgent initiative is required for restoration of family life and culture of the effected ethnic groups. A comprehensive plan is urgently needed for the socio-

economic development of the communities at Junglemahal. Initiative should be taken to reduce the drop-out rates of the children and to stop early marriage. Suitable health awareness programme may be arranged specially for the girls who have already married off at their early age. Participatory developmental schemes are to be initiated across the region so that new supporter of the extremist activities may not be created.