

MARGINALIZATION WITHIN OWN 'REGION': A STUDY ON LWE AND COUNTER-VIOLENCE AND THEIR IMPACT ON TRIBAL LIFE

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Abstract: As we are pushed into the global village, the very concept of community seems to lack its 'form' and rather to becoming 'substance'. Geographical, ecological, ethnic or cultural characteristics that may create a community in the natural world now become redundant in the era of globalization. We can try now to recognize a community not with reference to its own 'region' but to a symbolic dimension of it. We have tried in this study to address the issue of marginalization of the tribal groups and the contradictions within tribal life across the red corridor region of India. This situation makes livelihood strategy, identity and culture of tribal and other disadvantaged communities at stake across the entire corridor. The Left Wing Extremist groups have been fighting for the 'causes' of the tribal and other disadvantaged communities since 1940s along the red corridor and are said to posing great challenge towards internal security of the Indian State. The latter has eventually come up with deployment of the counter-insurgency forces in the affected states in order 'to clear and hold' the region. Within these two embattling forces, life and culture of the tribal communities - third and the most important entity - face immeasurable impoverishment risk. This study further aims at assessing the impact of the LWE violence and counter-violence upon the tribal life and culture with special reference to a case study of Junglemahal area of West Bengal, and suggesting some urgent policy interventions in this regard.

Keywords: Marginalization, region, tribal life, LWE, red corridor, Junglemahal.

INTRODUCTION

The term community has earned, like the term culture or ethnicity, massive disagreement over its definition that varies widely across disciplines. The term is generally used to denote the aggregated physical spaces - such as rural, urban, suburban - and for our symbolic subdivisions based on identity or character - such as, for examples, religious, philosophical or virtual. For Jan Fernback, a prolific writer on utopianism and new media technologies, the essence of community is commonality, i.e., shared interests or physical location; but it is difficult to observe always a community empirically as its boundaries are continually renegotiated (Fernback, 1999).

As we are pushed into the 'global village', the very concept of community seems, as Cohen (1985) observes, to lack its 'form' and rather to becoming 'substance'. Material, geographical or ecological characteristics that may create a community in the natural world become now redundant in the era of globalization. Now, a community is not just a bounded locale or a population within defined

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boundary. It relates further to the quality of having something in common, as in community of interests, community of goods or a sense of common identity and characteristics, as Raymond Williams argues (Williams, 1983). We can, therefore, try to recognize a community not with reference to its own 'region' but to a symbolic dimension of it (Geertz, 1973; Cohen, 1985). So, the issue is now, as Cohen puts, not to see whether structural limits of a community have withstood the onslaught of global change, but to whether its members are able to infuse its culture with vitality within the domain of its symbolic attachment with regard to the 'region'. Thus, the term has both functional as well as symbolic conceptualizations.

The red corridor region of India is not only marked with huge deposit of precious mineral resources but has been the abode of the poorest of the poor tribal communities, including many particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTG), of the country. The 'region' with its primary natural resources (i.e., land, forest and water) once occupied by the tribals has, for the most part, been the State and/or MNC property and the tribals have been pushed to be marginalized in their own 'region'. The issue of rights over the natural resources gave birth to the Left Wing Extremism led initially by the Naxalites, later turned into the Maoists. The Naxalites and/or Maoists has built up a violent resistance on behalf of landless labourers and tribals against the landlords and others in order to fight against the alleged oppression and exploitation and to create a 'classless' society. In retaliation to such resistance, the union and the state governments concerned have adopted the strategy of deployment of joint armed forces across the region to finish the Naxalites/Maoists. This situation makes eventually the livelihood strategy, identity and culture of tribal and other disadvantaged communities at stake across the entire corridor.

With this theoretical background, we have tried in this study to address the issues of marginalization of the tribal groups and the contradictions within tribal life across the so-called red corridor region of India. The study was dealt with two-dimensional approach. Firstly, we have tried to examine whether the socio-economic condition of the ethnic groups across the red corridor region was really 'underdeveloped'. This has been examined with particular reference to a village in the Junglemahal area of West Bengal. And, secondly, we have tried to assess the effects of the Maoist violence and the counter-violence of the Joint Forces (aided sometimes by the hired goons) on the life and culture of the tribal and other disadvantaged people of the area. Based on secondary data already available and the primary data obtained through intensive fieldwork for a period mainly from March, 2016 to May, 2018 and through short visits thereafter, the ground level socio-economic data were used to testify the marginalization of the communities concerned.

SITUATION IN THE RED CORRIDOR AND TRIBAL LIFE

The *red corridor* is a wide region spanning across the Indian territory from South to North through the states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Chattisgarh,

Odisha, West Bengal, Jharkhand and Bihar. It stretches up to Nepal. This is a forested area which is not only very rich in mineral resources but also in cultural diversities in connection with the way of life of various tribal groups living across the region. India's poorest and the most hunger stricken people are living in the region. The question of 'underdevelopment' has been the most pulsating political issue across the region. Throughout the region the Maoists and/or Naxalites have built up strong arms conflicts in order to 'overthrow the State power' and to 'bring about communism by continuing the revolution under the leadership of the proletariat' as declared under the Article 5 of the Constitution of the CPI (Maoist). In 2011, their influence was in about 200 out of 640 districts of the country. The conflict was, therefore, referred to as the greatest challenge toward economic development. This is also viewed as the 'greatest threat' toward integrity and internal security of the country since as many as 90 districts in 11 States are considered now as affected by Left Wing Extremism Led by the Maoists, as per the data released on 5 February, 2019 by the Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

To counter the situation, the Union Government and the Governments of the concerned States have deployed the Joint Forces whose central principle is 'to clear and hold' the area. This has resulted in massive arms conflicts between the two forces specifically during the last three decades. For instance, this was intensified specifically during 2007-2011 in the Janglemahal area of West Bengal. The conflict has posed a great challenge before the issue of human development and security particularly for the tribal people across the region. J. F. Gomes (2012), in order to find out why such region is prone to 'insurgency' violence, observes that the Maoist conflict in India appears to be the outcome of grievances arising out of feeling of exclusion of various forms. However, the projected beneficiaries and, surprisingly, the resultant 'victims' of the conflict are the poor 'tribals and peasants'. Thousands of marginal people, mostly tribals, have lost their lives in the ongoing conflict in India so far (*Fatalities in Leftwing Extremism: 2005-2019*, www.satp.org) and their cultural life has been shattered significantly. Within the two embattling forces operating across the region for decades, the cultural uniqueness of the tribal people has been seriously affected. The issue is of great importance to the anthropologists, policy makers, and social scientists.

The Maoist extremism in India seems to have its root in the Telengana insurgency of the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh. The Telengana insurgency occurred during 1946 and onwards (Kennedy and Purushotham, 2012). It was an agrarian conflict between Telengana's rural population, on the one hand, and the *jagirdars* (landlords) and *deshmukhs* (large landlords), on the other, over the issue of landlessness and indebtedness against the latter who were politically and economically powerful groups in the region (Sundarayya, 1972; Roosa, 2001; Thirumali, 2003). With a history of more than seven decades, the conflict intensified particularly since 2004 when a new organization named the CPI (Maoists) was formed through the

unification of the People's War Group (PWG) and the Maoist Communists Centre (MCC). From its very inception as Naxalites, the Maoist insurgency intends to win support from the landless poor and marginalized tribals and peasants (Ghosh, 1974; Banerjee, 1980; Sinha, 1989). Researchers have identified various reasons for that: the Maoists achieved *Dalit* support by backing the latter's struggle against higher castes for better wages (Singh, 2005); exclusion of the STs from the growth of the mainstream India (Guha, 2007); conflict aiming at having land redistribution (Iyer, 2009); and lack of economic opportunities (Do and Iyer (2009). For Gautam Navlakha, the Maoist insurgency is a people's rebellion for protecting their traditional natural resources from the onslaught of the neo-liberal state (Navlakha, 2010). The tribal people in the vast areas of Chhatisgarh, for example, have come under the Maoist influence in order to have some food and to protect their 'land' from being grabbed by the state power or private agencies for extracting the minerals which are heavily deposited under the 'region'. Similarly, the tribals in Odisha, particularly in Khandadhar District, are in the grip of threat of displacement from their own territory to make the way for industrial development of the 'region'. In West Bengal and in some other states too, the issue of land (i.e., displacement from their own region) triggered the Maoist conflict. The Junglemahal area of West Bengal witnessed a phase of extreme Maoist violence, massive counter-violence of the security forces and violent tribal movement, commonly referred to as the Junglemahal or Lalgah movement, which reached its peak during 2007-2011 (Midya, 2014a; Midya *et al.*, 2012). The tribal and other marginal communities in other parts of the country also came out to support the Maoists in order to fight against the alleged age-long deprivation and oppression by the higher castes, State or the party in power.

The Maoists have been developing their support base over a long period of time. It witnesses a well-thought-out strategy. One of my earlier studies with others shows the Maoist mechanism of building up their support base at Junglemahal in West Bengal (Midya *et al.*, 2012). It is also observed that stronger the ethnic identity of each tribal group living in the Maoist-affected zone, lesser the possibility of involving with the insurgency violence (Midya, 2014a, 2014b). The movement, led sometimes by the 'middle-class intellectuals' (Harris, 2010; Semion, 2010), focuses on the strategy of 'annihilation of class enemies'. However, most of the people who lost their lives in the armed struggle with the State power across the Red Corridor are the poor tribals (Nigam, 2010). The movement is, therefore, thought by many (e.g., Simeon, 2010) as means of fulfilling the 'revolutionary fantasies' of the leadership at the cost of lives of the tribals. John Harris observes the Maoist politics as the tragedy of armed struggle in response to the 'appalling structural violence perpetrated historically by elites', supported by the state, against landless and poor peasants, *Dalits* and *adivasis* (Harris, 2010:2).

In fact, insurgency violence occurs under certain conditions. There are two

principal discontent theories to interpret the insurgency and extremist violence. For some researchers, inequality in distribution of land and/or ownership of land is the fundamental economic precondition for insurgency and revolutionary violence (Paige, 1975; Nagel, 1976; Midlarsky, 1981, 1982; Midlarsky and Roberts, 1985). For others, insurgency is primarily caused by inequality in the distribution of economic resources (Muller, 1985, 1986; Muller and Seligson, 1987). But insurgency and extremist violence seem to grow out of various factors like the level of repression, state action of coercion, intensity of separatism, level of economic underdevelopment, deprivation of democratic rights, suppression of human rights, etc. The geo-physical setting of the territory sometimes appears to have a supportive role towards the growth of extremism as found across the red corridor. Now the questions which are imperative in Indian situation may be (i) what are the causal factors behind occurrence of insurgency and extremist violence? And, (ii) how do the extremism and counter-violence affect the life and culture of the tribal people?

Identity with reference to one's own 'region' is very much related to the identity of a social actor in terms of how he/she construes about himself/herself in relation to his/her past, present and future. Ethnic identity is basically a collective identity. It implies certain quality or affiliation with respect to cultural and hereditary consideration of an ethnic group (Van den Berghe, 1981; Schermerhorn, 1996). An ethnic group refers, in the words of Schermerhorn, to a collectivity within a larger society having a real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood (Schermerhorn, 1996: 17). Collective identity is indeed concerned with the meaning conveyed to the social actors. This is made of certain primordial (Geertz, 1973; Shils, 1975; Giesen, 1998), traditional (Edler *et al.*, 2002) and/or universal elements of culture (Polanyi, 1962). So, collective identity involves certain categorization made by social actors, which are either acknowledged or rejected by others. This categorization determines the topography of inclusiveness of social phenomena, i.e., the social boundary, which should be understood, for Barth, in terms of people's cognitive proclivities which are reinforced by and are expressed through their social practices (Barth, 2000: 34). The tribal and other marginalized communities in the red corridor region traditionally identify themselves in association with the region which they have been exploiting since the pre-colonial period as their own. Thus, they have an identity that has a historical attachment with the land as well as the region. Their social and cultural identity seems to bring in line with the physical boundary of the red corridor region. This notion of 'region' most often does not corroborate with the legal rights over a land or territory earmarked by the modern state system.

The districts across the *Red Corridor* are inhabited by the disadvantaged people belonging particularly to the tribal groups, *viz.*, the Godabas, Savara, Khonds, Koyas and Chenchus in Andhra Pradesh; the Gond, Baiga, Korba, Bison Hill, Maria and

Muria in Chhattisgarh; the Bhuyans, Juang, Khond, Savara, Hill-Kharia and Birhor in Odisha; the Munda, Santal, Ho, Birhor, Kharia, Asur and Korwa in Bihar; the Santal, Munda, Ho and Birhor in Jharkhand; and the Santal, Bhumij, Lodha and Munda in West Bengal. These tribal groups have been living on a subsistence economy based on forest collection, hunting, rope-making, *penda* (i.e., shifting-hill cultivation) and/or minor menial works. They are found to living 'on the brink of starvation' with a high rate of illiteracy, high rate of early marriage, alarming poverty, severe malnutrition and miserable health condition (Midya, 2014a, 2014b). They are also subjected to administrative negligence as they are seen sometimes as 'primitive', *Jungli* or 'uncivilized'. But, these groups deserve worth mention by virtue of having distinct cultural traditions and value system, which reflect the inherent strength and diversity of Indian culture and heritage. In 2008 an Expert Group set up by the Planning Commission of Government of India observes that the affected districts suffer from lack of proper governance and appropriate implementation of poverty alleviation programmes (Government of India, 2008). This results in discontent among the poor and marginalized, and the situation is utilized by the Maoists. The situation has become so serious that some liberated zones have come up within the State of India, where Indian state hardly has any administrative and political control.

The modern nation-states have their own hegemony and are hardly ready to admit the underdeveloped economy of some sections of their people. India is by no means an exception. Policy makers always try to see the underdeveloped state of economy or poverty of the tribal groups from an administrative or political point of views. On the other hand, the Maoists come up with the issue of tribal peoples' rights over land and forest in particular. Ironically, the governments of the Maoist-affected States and the Union Government in India hardly acknowledge the issues of underdevelopment in and around the affected districts. On the contrary, they have adopted counter-insurgency measures to control the Maoists. Some state governments are found, in addition, to adopt special measures in order to finish the Maoists or others who are supposed to be Maoist supporters. For instance, the Government of Chhattisgarh was promoting to build up the *Salwa Judum* from amongst the local people and recruiting Special Police Officers (SPO) in its bid to finish the Maoists (Sundar, 2006, 2012). In West Bengal too, a political move was initiated at the time of Lalgarh incidence by the then Left Front Government wherein the local and/or youth goons were hired to kill the Maoists. Such measures were taken in the pretext of an administrative position that the latter could not undertake development programmes meant for the affected areas due to the Maoist resistance. However, such measures back-fired as observed in Chhattisgarh where the *Salwa Judum* was reportedly helping the politicians and mining companies to obtain the state's mineral resources (Miklian, 2009). In West Bengal the hired goons were utilized to finish the political rivals and were found to engage themselves in extortion

of money from common people in the name of the Maoist activists or in the pretext of giving protection from the activists. The first author personally experienced the second type of activity of the goons. Even after the new government came into power, the situation has not radically changed.

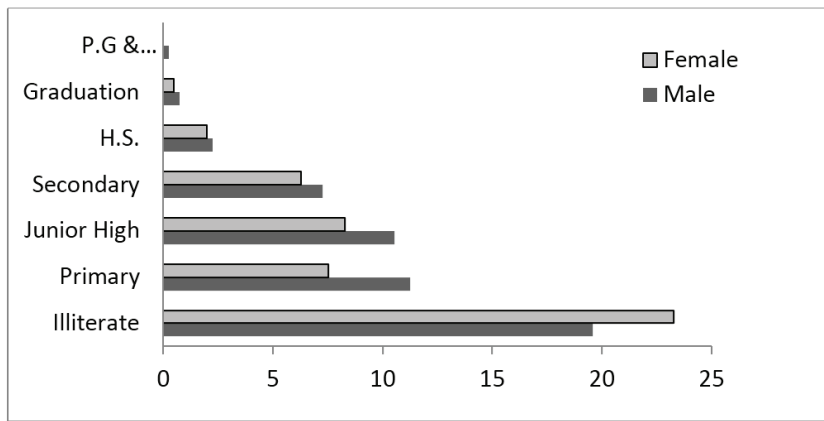
THE JUNGLEMAHAL CASE

We have tried to understand the Maoist activism and the counter-activism and their impact on the life and culture of the tribal people with special reference to a particular village in the Junglemahal area in West Bengal. The study was conducted at Chhotopelia, an affected village in the Junglemahal area of West Bengal. The village was the epicenter of LWE in recent past. This is located under Binpur-I block of the erstwhile Paschim Medinipur (now in the newly created Jhargram) district in the state. The village is exclusively inhabited by the Santals, the third largest tribe in India (Census of India, 2011). The fieldwork data collected during 2016-2018 show some significant socio-economic characteristics of the population. The most preferred type of family among the study group was found to be the nuclear one (70.73 percent), followed by the joint type (18.29 percent) [Table 1]. Majority of the families were of medium size, i.e., with 4-6 members (64.63 percent) [Table 1]. The age-sex composition of the population suggested for moderately growing population with longer life span (Table 2). Literacy rate of the population was 56.91 percent, which was much lower than those of the State and the national level rates (76.26 and 74.0 percent respectively as per census report, 2011) [Fig. 1]. The population witnessed a high rate of drop-outs. Poverty and extremist violence were reportedly the prominent causes of drop-outs (Fig. 2). The rate of early marriage was also alarmingly high (35.02 per cent) among the people. This was 10.21 per cent and 24.89 per cent for the boys and girls respectively (Fig. 3). Early marriage was reported at the age of 10 years for girls and at 14 years for boys. There were also frequent cases of late marriage, even at the age of 40 years. These were basically due to severe poverty of the people concerned, who could not afford for the wedding feast to be offered to the co-villagers. The people were engaged as wage labourers and in other marginal activities to eke out their living. They were heavily dependent upon forest collection for decades. But now, the Santals observed, the *dikus* (meaning outsiders) came out with imposition of various restrictions over collection of forest products they were traditionally practising. They had a strong view that they were deprived of the forest products, which caused economic uncertainty in their life. About half of the families (46.57 percent) showed a monthly income of less than INR 3000/- only (Fig. 4), with a dependency ratio of 47.62.

We have also tried to assess the family-wise health care proximity in terms of the availability of a few basic amenities: (i) whether the family was enjoying access to the health care facilities supposed to be available in the nearest health care centre, (ii) whether safe drinking water was available, (iii) whether the family had

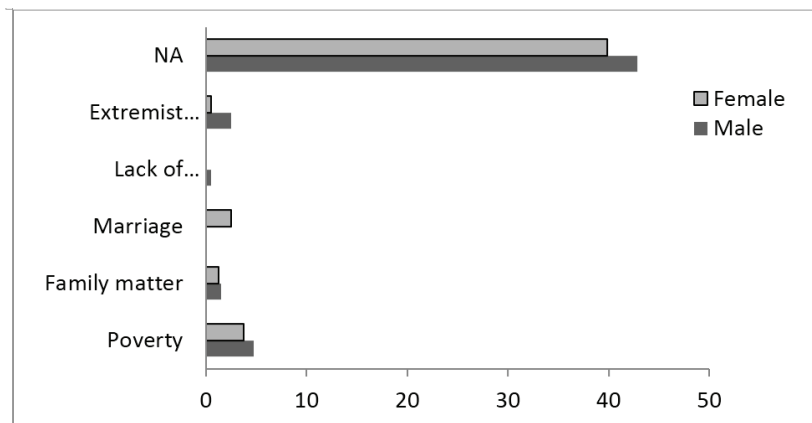
a toilet, (iv) whether the toilet, if any, was in use, (v) type of the disease occurred in the last one year, and (vi) whether the family was dependent upon collection of fuel wood from forest. It was reported that about 60 per cent families had habit of visiting the nearest health care centre, though quite irregularly, and the others did not (Table 3). Most of the families (89 percent) were availing safe drinking water that had been provided after the Junglemahal movement. It was also reported that though 97.58 per cent families had toilets, only 32.50 per cent of them used to use toilets. The rest of the families preferred to go for open defecation (Table 3).

Fig.1: Educational status of the Santals in Chhotopelia.



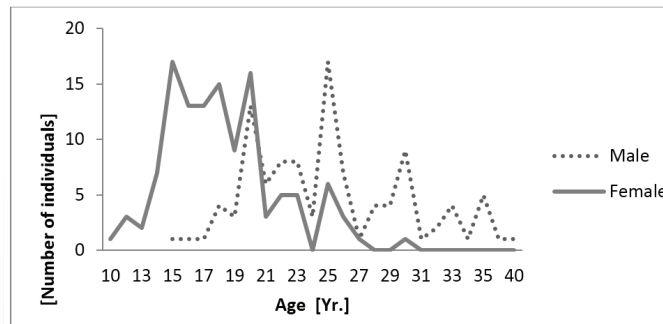
Source: Fieldwork data, 2016-18.

Fig.2: Drop-out reasons in Chhotopelia [NA: not able to identify a specific cause].



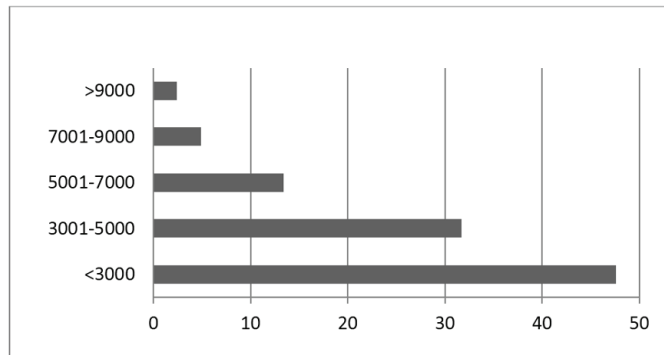
Source: Fieldwork data, 2016-18.

Fig. 3: Age at 1st marriage of the people under study.



Source: Fieldwork data, 2016-18.

Fig.4: Monthly family income (INR) of the Santals.



Source: Fieldwork data, 2016-18.

Reproductive health status of the community reveals some significant characteristics (Table 4). For obtaining such data, one adult woman, preferably a mother, from each family was purposively selected. The data were recorded as reported by the informants and were not verifiable from hospital or other government records. More than 86 per cent women of the study group reported that they did not experience white discharge. Low frequency of such cases seemed to have association with rigorous physical activity and food habit of the women. This assumption requires further study. Among the women who were experiencing white discharge, 63.64 per cent did not receive any kind of treatment. They were found to be careless about this serious health problem. Use of napkin was also very rare. Only 13.41 per cent women use both cloth and napkin while 86.59 per cent of them exclusively use old cloths. The mean age of 1st marriage of the women was only 17 years and the mean age of having the 1st child birth was only 20 years. Thus, the reproductive health status of women at the study area reflected extreme vulnerability to poor health not only of themselves but also of the next generation.

TABLE 1: FAMILY TYPES [$N_F=82$]

Sl. No.	Family types		Family size	
	Category	N (%)	Category	N (%)
1	Nuclear	58 (70.73)	Small (1-3 membered)	17 (20.73)
2	Joint	15 (18.29)	Medium (4-6 membered)	53 (64.63)
3	Extended	07 (08.54)	Large (≥ 7 membered)	12 (14.63)
4	Broken	02 (02.44)	All types	82 (100.0)
5	All types	82 (100.0)		

Source: Fieldwork data, 2016-18

TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF THE SANTAL POPULATION BY AGE AND SEX AT CHHOTOPELIA ($N_p=399$)

Age group (in yr.)	M		F		T	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<5	19	4.76	10	2.51	29	7.27
5-9	25	6.27	15	3.76	40	10.03
10-14	18	4.51	17	4.26	35	8.77
15-19	24	6.02	15	3.76	39	9.77
20-24	16	4.01	18	4.51	34	8.52
25-29	14	3.51	20	5.01	34	8.52
30-34	12	3.01	18	4.51	30	7.52
35-39	17	4.26	09	2.26	26	6.52
40-44	10	2.51	18	4.51	28	7.02
45-49	20	5.01	13	3.26	33	8.27
50-54	07	1.75	11	2.76	18	4.51
55-59	07	1.75	05	1.25	12	3.01
60-64	10	2.51	10	2.51	20	5.01
65-69	04	1.00	04	1.00	08	2.01
70-74	02	0.50	05	1.25	07	1.75
≥ 75	03	0.75	03	0.75	06	1.50
All groups	208	52.13	191	47.87	399	100.00

Source: Fieldwork data, 2016-18

TABLE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF FAMILY BY HEALTH CARE AND OTHER SOCIAL PROXIMITY AT CHHOTOPELIA ($N_F = 82$)

Sl.No.	Proximity		Yes	No
1	Enjoying access to the nearest health care centre		50 (60.98)	32 (39.02)
2	Access to safe drinking water ¹		73 (89.02)	09 (10.98)
3	Sanitation facility	Having toilet	80 (97.58)	02 (02.44)
		Using toilet (out of the family having toilets)	26 (32.50)	54 (67.50)
4	Disease(s) occurred in 1 year (No. of cases reported)		Malaria (9), Typhoid (2), Kidney problem (3).	
5	Cooking fuel	Source	Wood	51 (62.20)
			Gas	31 (37.80)
		Average distance to cover for collection of fuel wood		1 km.

¹Safe drinking water was available from tube wells and supply water (installed only during the Junglemahal movement). Others were using water from dug wells.

Source: Fieldwork data, 2016-18.

TABLE 4: FAMILY WISE STATUS OF REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH OF WOMEN AT CHHOTOPELIA ($N_W = 82$)

Sl. No.	Criteria	No (%)	
1	Experienced white discharge	Yes	11(13.41)
		No	71(86.59)
2	Whether sought treatment for white discharge	At hospital	03(27.27)
		other	01(09.09)
		None	07(63.64)
3	Hygienic health practices	Cloth	71(86.59)
		Napkin	-
		Cloth & napkin	11 (13.41)
4	Mean age at	1 st marriage	17
		1 st conception	18
		1 st child birth	20
		Menopause	43
5	No. of conception/ live or still birth, etc.(for the last 1 year)	Conception	05
		Live birth	04
		Still birth	-
		Abortion	-
		Miscarriage, if any	1
6	Antenatal care (Last 1 year)	No. of immunized birth	02
		No. of non-immunized birth	02
		No. of check up during pregnancy	02 – 03 times

7	Baby's birth place (Last 1 year)	Home	03 (75.00)
		PHC	-
		Hospital/NH	01 (25.00)
8	Mean birth spacing		2 year
9	Whether any family planning method adopted	Yes	17 (41.46)
		No	24 (58.54)
10	No. of child birth in last 1 year		04

Source: Fieldwork data, 2016-18.

EFFECT OF VIOLENCE AND COUNTER-VIOLENCE

Maoist violence and the counter-violence of the Joint Forces, and sometimes aided by the hired goons as already been discussed, in and around the village under study in particular and in the Junglemahal area in general resulted in untimely loss of several lives (Table 5). The latter sometimes led to the breaking up of families. The people faced severe atrocities from the part of the Maoist activists, Joint Forces and the hired goons. Even the women were not spared. In the study area women faced such atrocity for about 10-15 times during 2007–2011. It was found that the number of atrocities perpetrated by the Joint Forces was higher than that by the Maoists (Tables 5).

TABLE 5: EFFECT OF INSURGENCY VIOLENCE AND COUNTER-VIOLENCE ON HUMAN LIFE AT CHHOTOPELIA

Sl. No.	Variable	M	F	
01	Number of untimely loss of life during 2007-2011.	05	01	
02	Mean number of times atrocity occurred on the families	22	13	
03	Mean number of times atrocity occurred from	Maoist activist	9	4.5
		Police (with others)	13.5	9.5

Source: Fieldwork data, 2016-18.

TABLE 6: IMPACT OF VIOLENCE ON FAMILY AND SOCIO-CULTURAL LIFE AT CHHOTOPELIA

Sl. No.	Criteria	frequency
1	Incidence of family breaking	1
2	Mean number of times relative(s) visited the family in the last 5 years	7
3	Mean number of times the family members visited their relatives' house	22.5
4	Incidence of marital and other social ceremony held in last 5 years (mean at family level)	3
5	Incidence of cultural ceremony held in last 5 years	10
6	Number of days family members remained out of home (including forced disappearance) in last 5 years	>100

Source: Fieldwork data, 2016-18.

It was interesting to note that the relatives from outside rarely visited the families (mean number of visit 7) in the study area in order to avoid the extremist violence and counter-violence. On the contrary, members of the village visited their relatives' homes several times, with a mean number of 22.5 (Table 6). This was basically for taking shelter outside the village. Though the Santal life, as of other tribals, was normally full of ritual events, festivals and frenzy, during the Junglemahal movement (from 2007-2011 in particular) they could hardly observe their social and ritual events in the village. During the phase of extreme violence, majority of the families witnessed that their one or other member had to remain out of home for as much as about 100 days for the sake of their life (Table 6).

The Maoist extremism has grounded its roots among the tribal and other disadvantaged people centering upon the issue of loss of rights over natural resources or of 'under development' as found in the affected states in India. Across the entire red corridor region, these issues have been the most important socio-political agenda for the Maoists. In the study area, the main issue of the Maoist violence was 'underdevelopment'. Looking back to the socioeconomic and demographic features of the population under study, it was found that they were really vulnerable to extreme poverty and poor health conditions, of the women in particular. Most of the families (about 70.73 per cent) were of nuclear type. The number of joint families or extended families was insignificant. Furthermore, there were a considerable number of broken families. Such cases were reportedly resulting due to untimely loss of life or forced disappearance of any of the partners in wedlock. In terms of family size, the most prevalent type of family was the medium ones (about 64 per cent). Large families (with 7 or more members) were relatively rare. It appeared that the economic condition in the study area could hardly support joint or large families. Age-sex composition of the population indicated moderately growing populations with a longer life-span (up to the age of 74 years and above). The population had alarmingly low literacy rate (about 57 per cent). This was much lower than the district or State literacy rate. The educational status of the population appeared further disappointing with the illiterate females excessively outnumbering the illiterate males. There was high rate of drop-outs for which the most influencing factor was poverty, added by the factor like extremist violence and counter-violence. Majority of the families in the study area had a monthly income of less than Rs. 3000/-. Only a very few family had an income about Rs 5001 to Rs. 9000/- per month. They were, thus, definitely struggling with daunting poverty. A high dependency ratio in the study area proved the economic marginality of the communities. The condition became further aggravated with shockingly high rate of early marriage starting from as early as 10 years. Early marriage was as high as 26.21 per cent at Chhotopelia, for instance. Furthermore, the tribal people were so poor that in many cases the partners were living together without marriage upto their late age since they were unable to meet the wedding expanses. The parents were provoked towards early

marriage, particularly of their girls, in order to provide the latter a safe home within a conflicting socio-political situation.

Proximity to the basic amenities like availability of safe drinking water, having a toilet and if it was in regular use, having a smoke-free kitchen or depending upon fuel wood, availing access to the primary health care centre, etc. were assessed in this study. There were toilets in some households, but the people did not have the habit of using toilets regularly. Majority of the villagers used to go for open defecation. Socio-economic status of a community might also be assessed through their reproductive health behaviour. It was reported that the number of women experiencing white discharge was as low as 13 per cent in the village. This was, according to the women respondents, due to their habit of drinking *handia*. However, there were many women and their male partners who did not think white discharge a health problem at all. Therefore, they did not seek any treatment for the most cases. And if sought treatment, they preferred to seek advice from the neighbouring women or traditional medicine men. The women hardly used to use napkin. Use of old cloths was the regular practice. A few women thought that napkin was better, but they could not afford this due to their extreme poverty. The mean age at first marriage was 17 years. This resulted in the mean age at first conception and the mean age at first child birth as low as 18 years and 20 years respectively. There were many cases of miscarriage or still birth during the violent movement. It was also found that in last one year as many as 75 per cent children took birth at their respective homes (not in hospital).

The tribal people under study were, thus, pushed to a situation of socioeconomic marginality. A feeling of deprivation of economic resources, health care facility, employment opportunity, rights over natural resources and administrative care had been developed among the people concerned. At the same time, they were losing their traditional rights over forests day-by-day with the successive forest policies. Under this circumstance, the people came out to support the Maoist activists who were fighting for the poor people's rights. Maoist extremism and the counter-violence of the Joint Forces in and around the villages under study resulted in untimely loss of life in many cases, which led sometimes to family breaking. The people faced severe atrocities from the part of the Maoist activists, Joint Forces and the hired goons. Even the women were not spared.

CONCLUSION

Thus, it was found that the tribal people living in the region were characterized by daunting poverty, high rate of illiteracy, little or no access to health care facility, alarmingly high rate of early marriage and its severe consequences like early pregnancy, miscarriage, still birth, etc. The medical facility was insufficient or completely lacking in some areas and the people were also found to be unaware about importance of treatment at hospital. Babies were given birth at homes. Most

of the families did not have toilets and those having toilets did not use it. Thus, the people under study were really marginalized. They become easily susceptible to the Maoists who had taken up poverty and underdevelopment of the area as their political agenda. This was, therefore, not surprising that the Maoists had been able to develop a strong support base among the poor tribal and other disadvantaged people in the Junglemahal area. And, this was happening under similar situation across the entire red corridor region of India. The Maoist violence, on the one hand, and the counter-violence to control the former, on the other, resulted in far-reaching consequences on the life and culture of the tribal and other marginal people concerned. They witnessed, as presented in the form of various tables, untimely loss of life of their near ones, family breaking, forced disappearance of the family members, early marriage of the children, atrocities by the Maoist activists and security forces, shattering of mutual trust, disrupted social interaction with the relatives, and irregular performance of ritual and social ceremonies. All these phenomena seemed to shatter the very base of the socio-cultural life of the people concerned. The people witnessed a culture shock as they were not able to perform their traditional cultural as well as ritual practices.

Though most of the scholars on identity formation or ethnicity have stressed upon cultural and geographic elements of the mechanism of boundary maintenance, the latter have become almost redundant as seen in the Junglemahal case under this cyber era. Cultural element is usually viewed as a social construction of mutually acknowledging group differences (between the insiders and outsiders) in cultural beliefs and practices (Giesen, 1998; Edler *et al.*, 2002). The ways in which the insiders set out themselves as a group by positioning its members in the larger social context, within which intra-group interaction takes place, gives rise to its ethnic identity. Such identity is basically fluid in nature and its boundaries are better understood as a social medium through which the association transpires rather than as territorial demarcation. Similar phenomenon was also found by Sanders (2002: 327). Such phenomenon has arisen throughout the entire red corridor region where the notion of 'region' does not imply the physical space at all but the cultural association that the tribal and other disadvantaged people across the corridor adhere to since pre-colonial period. The tribal people across the red corridor think that their own region and natural resources have been occupied by the outsiders and they are being deprived of their basic rights. Appropriate development programmes are, therefore, urgently needed to boost the economic condition of the poor people of the region. At the same time, some socio-political measures are equally essential for soothing the wounds in the minds of the affected people in order to wipe out the feelings of torture and deprivation.

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