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Research Article

A TRIUMPH OF PEACE ESTABLISHMENT JANGALMAHAL AREA IN WEST BENGAL

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ABSTRACT

The South-Western part of West Bengal including a major part of West Midnapore, Bankura and Purulia District is now literary marked as 'Jangalmahal'. The name says that the major part of this region is covered by forest or jungle and it is one of the socio-economically backward regions of West Bengal. Ethnical variation of the region is also remarkable. Almost 30-40% of the total population of the aforesaid districts is tribes. Now-a-days the uprising Maoist Movement ('Terrorism' according to the State) creates a new socio-political dimension in West Bengal. Apparently, the reason behind this is the backwardness and historical deprivation of an ethnical group. But it is not the only reason. The various reasons lying behind this also include their demand for cultural identity. So, the movement is now gradually turning to cultural and political movement against the upper caste (the so-called mainstream) who historically and hereditary enjoys all powers of a state. The recent tug-of-war of the political parties in West Bengal has made the situation more critical. The problem may only be mitigated humanistically, not politically. The main aim of this paper is to discuss the cause, consequence and lastly the solution of the problem in the light of Geographical, Ethnological and Philosophical aspect and establishing peace in that region. Besides the theoretical description, some maps and cartograms have also been used to authenticate the analysis.

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INTRODUCTION

Terrorism is a systematic use of terror violence against governments, publics, or individuals to attain a political objective. It has been used by the political organisations with both rightist and leftist objectives, by nationalistic and ethnic groups, by revolutionaries, and by the armies and secret police of governments themselves. The U.S. Code of Federal Regulations defines terrorism in the U.S. as: The unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives. Now-a-days the uprising Maoist Movement [1] creates a new socio-political dimension in West Bengal. Apparently, the reason behind this is the backwardness and historical deprivation of an ethnical group. But it is not the only reason. The various reasons lying behind this also include their demand for cultural identity [2]. So, the movement is now gradually turning to cultural and political movement against the upper caste (the so-called mainstream) who historically enjoys all powers of a state. The recent tug-of-war of the political parties in West Bengal has made the

situation more critical. The problem may only be mitigated humanistically, not politically.

Objectives

The main objectives of this paper are

- To focus on present socio-cultural as well as economic scenario of the Jangalmahal;
- To find out the historical and ethnological background of the deprivation of the tribal community;
- Cause and effect analysis of the unrest situation of the respective region in the light of peace, ethnography and philosophy, keeping aside the traditional political debate;
- Some suggestion on establishing peace to overcome or mitigate the problem.

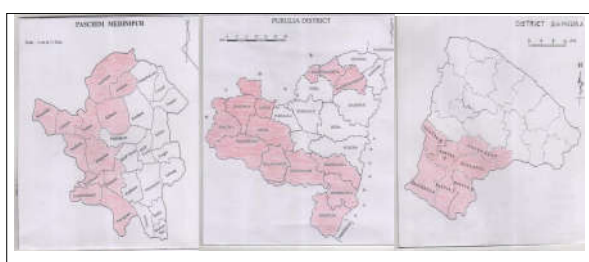
DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY

This is mainly a descriptive or analytical paper. The information have been collected from various books, scholarly articles, newspaper, journals and reliable websites. Some maps, diagrams and graphs have been used to justify the theoretical analysis.

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The Study Area

The western part of South Bengal including a major part of West Midnapore, Bankura and Purulia District is now literary marked as Jangalmahal. The name says that the major part of this region is covered by forest or jungle and now a days the socio-economically backward region is strongly Maoist affected. Among the twenty ten blocks of West Midnapore District twenty five are extremely Maoist influenced (i.e. Jhargram, Jamboni, Lalgarh, Belpahari, Sankrail etc). A major part of Purulia District also exists under Jangalmahl. Among the twenty one blocks twelve are found in increasing Maoist activities (i.e. Manbazar | & ||, Arsha, Ragonathpur, Banduan, Balarampur and Baghmundi etc). Now a days the Maoist activity is gradually increasing at the remote blocks of Bankura District which are mainly located in the Southern part of the district (i.e. Ranibandh, Raipur I & II and Simlapal etc).



Maoist dominated Blocks of Paschim Midnapore, Purulia and Bankura District, W.B

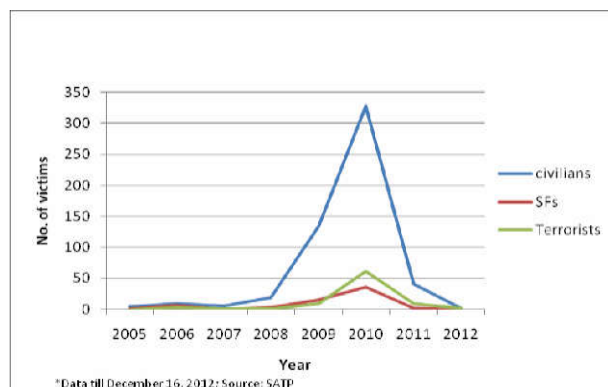
Recent Maoist Movement

In late May, 2009 In Lalgarh, West Midnapore the Naxalites briefly threw out the local police and staged attacks against the ruling communist government. The state government initiated a successful operation, with central paramilitary forces and state armed police, to retake Lalgarh in early June. Maoist leader Kishenji claimed in an interview that the mass Naxalite movement in Lalgarh in 2009 was aimed at creating a "liberated zone" against "oppression of the establishment Left and its police". He stated this had given the Naxalites a major base in West Bengal for the first time since the Naxalite uprising in the mid-1970s and that "We will have an armed movement going in Kolkata by 2011".

Recent Violence In Jangalmahal

In fact, West Bengal has witnessed a dramatic spurt in Maoist-related fatalities in 2010. According to available data, 427 people, including 329 civilians, 37 security forces personnel and 66 Maoists, including cadre of the Maoist-backed People's Committee Against Police Atrocities, were killed in West Bengal in 2010 till December 27, as against 159 people, including 124 civilians, 18 security forces personnel and nine Maoists killed in the State in 2009. With this, West Bengal has now earned the dubious distinction of recording the highest Maoist-related fatalities in 2010, dislodging Chhattisgarh which had topped the list since 2006. The intervening years have seen an extraordinary rise in Maoist-related fatalities in West Bengal, from just six in 2005, through 24 in 2008, and up to 159 and 415 people, respectively, in 2009 and 2010. Security forces fatalities have also risen to 36 in 2010, from 15 in 2009, even as 61 Maoists were killed, as against nine in 2009, reflecting increasing direct confrontation between the forces

and the Maoists. The State witnessed 19 major incidents (involving three or more casualties) through 2010. The Maoists were also involved in at least 29 cases of landmine explosions, 18 incidents of arson, and two incidents of abduction (an overwhelming majority of abduction cases go unreported because of fear of the Maoists). The Maoists also executed seven „swarming attacks“ involving a large number of their armed cadre in 2010, as against eight such attacks in 2009. The State has not recorded any major incident (involving three or more fatalities) in 2012, as against three such incidents in 2011.



Fatalities in Left-wing Extremist Violence in West Bengal: 2005-2012

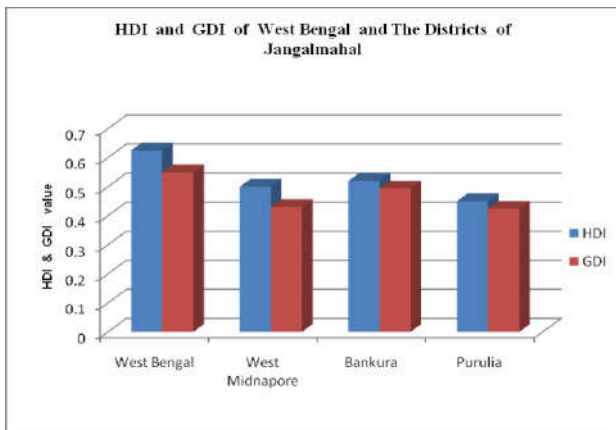
Causes of Dissatisfaction

Economic Deprivation

The districts that comprise the Red Corridor are among the poorest in the country. Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa are among the poorest states in the country. Other areas encompassed by the Red Corridor, such as Chattisgarh state and the Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh, are also either impoverished or have significant economic inequality, or both. The picture of jangalmahal in West Bengal is not exceptional. The region is backward in respect of income, literacy and health. According to the Human Development Report, HDI of West Bengal is 0.626 where in Bankura and Purulia it is 0.56 and 0.49 respectively which possess 11th and 16th rank among the nineteen districts of West Bengal. But in extremely Maoist influenced almost forty blocks (really Jangalmahal) in Bankura, Purulia and West Midnapore District the scenario is really miserable.

Earlier, it has been touched upon that the Maoist dominated blocks are situated in remote areas. There is lack of fertile agricultural land and most of the poor local tribes are landless. Most of them suffer from acute poverty. As a result they maintain their life as agricultural labour. The only means of livelihood of the tribal people in the forest cover areas like Banspahari, Belpahari, Bhulavada and Kankrajhor of West Midnapore is to collect the forest resource. From the forest the women have to gather wood, Kendu leaves, Sal leaves and Dudhi Lata (a kind of vine which is used for binding). They have to sell these at such a cheap rate that by this the can't be able to maintain their daily life. A report says that one hundred Dudhi Lata is sold only at Rupees seven and a bundle of wood at rupees five only. Daily income of the people of the very areas is less than rupees thirty to thirty five. Considered from this point of view they can be included in the list of BPL as declared by Planning Commission. Again, the Joint Security Force has

created another problem for the women who collect forest resource from the jungle. Allegations have been raised against the security force that they are doing misconduct with the tribal women.



Source: West Bengal Human Development Report

Social injustice

Earlier it has been mentioned that in remote blocks dominated by the Maoist, of total population 40-51% is tribal population. For several thousand years, they are found persecuted and deprived by the exterior rulers. This type of deprivation and persecution reached the highest point in the British period. Indeed, the movement of the tribes e.g. the Santal (1855 A.D), the movement of Koles (1832 A.D), the movement of Mundas (1895-1901 A.D) sowed its seed. The famous Santal Movement (1855 A.D) or Hul [8] was flourished on the basis of major two demands:

Land and language hul (hasa ar bhasa hul)

Land is sacred to the Adivasis as they have a spiritual relationship with the same; it is indispensable for the life and livelihood of the Adivasis. Similarly, language is a vital instrument for the empowerment of a community. It upholds the socio-cultural identity of a community. Hence a community without land and language is destined to be extinct one day. Santals/Adivasis are being continuously dispossessed from their land, forests and other natural resources.

Hul for self-governance (strengthen manjhi-pargana system)

Manjhi Pargana System - the traditional institutions of self-governance has to be empowered socio-politically and economically to fulfil the main objectives of Santal Hul i.e. empowerment of self-governance. But this movement against the British ruler could not be unified due to various reasons. Even after independence (1947) they lacked in leadership by virtue of which they could raise their voice and start movement as to their social demand, status and identity. Even in the reign of Left Front in West Bengal (1977-2010) no effort on the part of government was made to bring them to mainstream. The establishment of Adibasi Bikas Porisad (a committee for tribal development) was not conducive to the development of their social identity. Even to preserve their Social Space they have realised that the so-called political parties of mainstream will never fulfil their justly demands. What we mean by Maoist movement is partly political, and most of it is social and cultural in nature[9].

Political Hypocrisy

After independence, caste-based politics started in full swing in India. The national and regional political parties, in order to satisfy their narrow political interest they always use the minorities, tribes and other downtrodden class. But after the election is over they totally forget their loud sounding promises. Regarding social and economic development of the tribes they did nothing so far. In West Bengal Paschimanchal Unnon Mantrak (Western Region Development Ministry) was formed by the former Left-Front Govt. to study the problems and development of the Jangalmahal. A cabinet minister is also there to supervise the concerned affairs. In as much as the aforesaid ministry is administered by the existing ruling party, the tribes have no genuine representative presenting the burning problems of the poverty-stricken tribes. Thus, for last several years their discontent on the Left front rulers increased beyond measure. It is reported that during that period many party workers of Left Front were killed by the Maoist. Under this situation, in the recent Assembly Election (2011) the Jangalmahal along with the rest of West Bengal was longing for a radical change.

Demand for cultural identity

The tribal communities are very conscious as to the preservation and reservation of their cultural identity. It is nothing but a conspiracy against their culture and heritage in the name of bringing them to the mainstream. It is a matter of wonder that the tribal language had no written form. Decades of struggle by Santals/Adivasi have brought Santali language within the 8th Schedule of the Constitution of India on the 22nd of December 2003. However, till today Santali language has not received its due respect as is given to other languages (like Bengali, Oriya, Assamese etc.) in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution. After a long discussion on it Alchiki script has been selected as the written form of Santali Language. But Santali Language has not yet been introduced in the maximum schools of Jangalmahal. Few years ago teacher appointment for Santali Language by West Bengal School Service Commission has began in West Bengal. But it is a matter of despair that the recruitment is practically meagre. Thus they are bound to sit for competitive examination in State or National level in selecting either Hindi or Bengali or English. Keeping the language problem aside, it is reasonable to say that their dance, song and art are also neglected. For example, the Chou artists are about to be extingui.

In quest of peace

Rectification of the traditional concept of 'mainstream'

Mainstream is a confusing term and firstly it must be modified. The government and the intellectual groups are of the opinion that the Maoist [10] have to be turned back to the mainstream. In this connection the vital question to be arisen: Which stream is main? Is it the only urban culture of upper caste? Being inspired by this wrong notion the upper caste all along neglected the thought and culture of the ancient race. It should not be forgotten that Indian Culture as a whole is the result of synthesis i.e reconciliation of all races e.g. Aryan, Non-Aryan (Adibasi or Tribe), Sak-Hun-Pathan-Mughal and the British. Vincent Smith, the famous British historian called

India Ethnological Museum and the Epitome of the World. So to preserve Indian culture and heritage, unity in diversity must be preserved impartially. This means that both Aryan and non-Aryan Culture should be respected equally because every race has a sentimental tendency to his Cultural Space. The tribes are not exceptional to this. When the people of Jangalmahal will find out their Cultural Space their inferior complexity will be vanished. Up to now, the tribes acquired no confidence in the government. To start the developmental works in the tribal areas it is necessary for the government to acquire their confidence. Until the process is started the government can never expect for any co-operation from the tribes.

On the part of the government the following steps have to be taken

- Efforts to develop their mother tongue and culture and to create scope for competitive examination in Santali Language. Governments (Central and State) should promote the language to be used for Radio & T. V. broadcasts, Newspapers, Magazines production and dissemination and its use in legal procedures in courts.
- To ensure their traditional right to forest resource. In lieu of taking heavy industrial project it is necessary to develop their economy consistent with their mentality (i.e. development of animal husbandry and agro-based as well as forest resource based industry)
- In case of govt. employment the local people should have preference in the vacancy of Police,
- B.D.O etc. As a result the communication with local people will be easy.
- The govt. has to discharge their full responsibility for the education and health of families included in the BPL list in Jangalmahal. Govt. should also facilitate the formation of Santali academies for literary and cultural development and also institute Award and Rewards for outstanding Santal writers, scholars, dramatists etc.
- Not to politicise the problems of the Jangalmahal.

Opinion of the non-political scholars

The political and administrative measures hitherto taken in order to solve the problems of the Jangalmahal are not successful. Recently, some intellectuals from Kolkata are playing the role of intermediary in this regard. As the very personalities are now directly involved in politics and their influence to the local people is not up to the mark, so acceptable formula in connection with this cannot be expected from them.

For going deep into the problems and their solution the opinion of the non-political personalities is urgent now. Behind Maoist problem lie geographical, social, ethnological and political causes. So to solve the problems, the distinct outlooks of the geographer, sociologist, anthropologist and the political philosophers are of course considerable. Thus the scientific and permanent solution of the so-called problems may be possible.

CONCLUSION

It has already been said that only political and administrative efforts are not sufficient for solving the problems. What is now urgent for this is scientific and realistic approach and it is not possible by magic, but by logic. The Govt. should take a definite policy (either extremist or moderate) to face the Maoist challenge in future so that "Peace" can be established in that area.

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