Moral Economy of the Maoist Conflict: A Comparative Case Analysis of the Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in India

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Abstract

The data used in this study is qualitative and secondary in nature. It has been fully referenced in compliance with research standards.

Abstract

Scholarly literature (mis)interpret insurgency ferment by focusing solely on state response, and thus arguably distract from the underlying causes that sustain these movements. The paper attempts to engage with this debate by analysing the respective success and failure of the Maoist insurgency in two different states within India over a span of 17 years, using moral economy and specific state led counter-insurgency strategies as heuristic devices. It posits that endogenous moral estrangement coupled with a counter offensive developmental counter-insurgency strategy has helped mitigate the movement in Andhra Pradesh (AP) state as opposed to vice-versa in Chattisgarh.

Contents

Introduction

Theoretical Framework

2.1 Moral Economy: History and Conceptual Review

2.2 India: The Immoral Paternalist

2.3 CPI (M): The Moral Alternative

2.4 Methodology

3. Case Studies

4. Conclusion

Appendix

Table 1: Comparative Evaluation of Development Indices of ST/SC

Table 2: Percentage/Number of People (in Lakhs) below Poverty Line in Maoist Afflicted States

Table 3: The Three Waves of Maoist Insurgency in Independent India

Table 4: Incidents of Maoist Violence (Number of Fatalities) in AP and Chattisgarh 2001-2017

1. Introduction

The neoliberal development paradigm epithetical of a paradoxical principle ‘inclusion by exclusion’ (Agamben 1998, 12) has a formulaic concomitant today – conflict. The notion that development is symbiotic to the processes of structural violence continues to be feted with revolutionary armed rebellion across the world (Bank 2011). This has led several countries to ‘domesticate terrorism’ (Reddy 2014, 593) in the form of insurgent groups; be it the Palestine Liberation Organisation in Palestine, Irish Republic Army in Northern Ireland, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka or the Communist Party of India Maoist (CPI(M)) in India. Most scholarly literature (mis)interpret insurgency ferment by focusing solely on state response, thus arguably distracting from the underlying causes that sustain these movements. Unlike inter-state wars,
insurgencies are a complex mix of military and political mobilisation (Young Sr & Gray 2011). They require a consensus of support and an inherited pattern of action with its own objectives and constraints (Thompson 1971). It is the persistence of this form of action bracketed with counter-insurgency (COIN) strategies which evokes a stimulating polemic centred on the relative success and failure of these movements.

The paper attempts to engage with this debate by analysing the respective success and failure of the Maoist insurgency in two different states within India across a span of 17 years, employing the concept of moral economy and specific state led COIN strategies as heuristic devices. It thus circumvents the economic reductionism trap (Cramer 2006, 22) by avoiding single cause explanations for the gestation and sustenance of conflict. Outside the Syrian YPG, the Indian Maoists stand as the largest organized communist fighters, with 8,000 to 10,000 regular troops in its guerrilla army and nearly 40,000 cadres in the people’s militia (Roy 2017). As members of the Co-ordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia, they aim to liberate a compact revolutionary zone strategically demarcated as the ‘red corridor’ by the Indian state - a 40,000 sq. km of ‘free zone’ which runs from Nepal’s border to the south of India. Under this corridor, 83 districts receive federal aid for security expenditure and 60 districts accept aid for development programs to counter rebellion (Commission, 2012). The paper utilizes this exogenous incongruity of security vs. development in COIN strategies to decipher the consequential expansion and contraction of the movement in two different parts of the country.

However, there also exist certain connatural contradictions within the movement which account for its sustenance and mitigation. On one end, the Maoists draw their militaristic inspirations from Mao Tse Sung - leader of the successful 1949 Chinese Revolution and aim to overthrow the Indian state through a protracted people’s war. On the other hand, the prudential legitimacy of their actions is based on the moral ideologue of social justice. This is evident in 40% of the 20 to 60 million displaced since independent India who form the backbone of this movement, and live in poverty levels straggling higher than the Indian national average of 27.5% (Choudhary 2010; Commission 2012). Therefore, contrary to its long-term objective of capturing state power, in its everyday manifestation, Maoism’s ideological self-image is one of a vanguardist revolutionary movement for the deprived. This paper endeavours to capture the moral estrangement and unanimity which endogenously fortifies or weakens this movement through the concept of ‘moral economy.’

The concept of moral economy as Didier Fassin (2009, 1246) suggests is a ‘beautiful example of trans-disciplinary migration’ that has become a polysemic category with multiple genealogical strands and contemporary interpretations. Thus, the multidimensionality and expansiveness of the term can be seen as a positive theoretical opportunity rather than a negative conundrum riddled with disagreement. E.P. Thompson viewed rebellions of the poor to protest the violation of their rights as indicators of the existence of a moral economy. He developed the concept in his analysis of small-town food riots in 18th century England, which was extended to Asian contexts by James Scott (1976). In other words, class conflict characterized the inception of moral economy, which came to be used as a ‘tool of resistance’ (Upadhyay 2011, 1226) in academic literature.

This paper thus utilises the theoretical instrument of moral economy along with COIN strategies to delineate the protraction and contraction of a single movement in two different states of a country. The paper is into the following sections: first, a theoretical analysis of moral economy and its contextual implications for understanding the Maoist insurgency, followed by a discussion on methodology. The third section tests the theoretical model against the states of AP and Chattisgarh and contrasts between the two in terms of success and failure of the movement. The concluding section posits that endogenous moral estrangement coupled with a counter offensive developmental COIN strategy has helped mitigate the movement in AP, as opposed to vice-versa in Chattisgarh. It further offers implications for policymakers who seek to lay the groundwork for a peace agreement and must confront themselves with the question: ‘with whom are we dealing?’ (Weinstein 2002, 3).

2. Theoretical Framework

The following section develops a conceptual understanding of ‘moral economy’ by addressing a central ques-
tion - ‘how do rebel groups organize violence?’ (Weinstein 2002, 1) in the context of Maoist insurgency in India.

2.1 Moral Economy: History and Conceptual Review

Thompson - an intellectual of the left, characterised the tension between moral expectations on the one hand, and the cruel exigencies of the new capitalist order on the other as the central explanatory principle in his analysis of 18th century working class conflict. His use of moral conflated two interrelated meanings of the word. The first is moral in relation to ‘mores’ or customs, with both understood as historical products thoroughly interwoven in a social fabric. The second meaning of ‘moral’ relates to a principled stance vis a vis society, the world and especially the common good, with the latter defined both in terms of customary rights and utopian aspirations (Fassin 2012, 55). The latter future oriented utopian aspect, based on subjective interpretations of social justice is an insufficiently recognized dimension of Thompson’s conception of the ‘moral’; and thus reasonably utilised in this study to define ‘obligations the state, or landowners or capitalists ought to obey’ (Thompson 1993, 269).

Thompson owed his collation of moral with economy to men, who in thinking of economic phenomenon, refrained from asking whether the mechanism worked for good or for evil (Letwin 1963, 147-8). However, in his attempt to define moral economy as ‘confrontations in the market place’ (Thompson 1971, 135), he condensed the term ‘economy’ to a concrete location – the market. James Scott enormously widened the scope of this concept by focusing on peasants’ access to land and customary usages of life resources. The economic sleight of hand that made institutions and political forces that shaped markets invisible, was accorded only summary treatment by Scott because unlike the more politically salient state, he considered markets to be ‘impersonal processes without any identifiable agency’ (Scott 1976, 58) – a conception retained in this study.

Scott exercised political undertones to develop a ‘phenomenological theory of exploitation’ (1976, 161), characterised by a ‘paternalist tradition of authorities’ (Thompson 1971, 79) which accorded functionaries the obligation to ensure the provision of their subjects. He justified state’s responsibility through an uncharacteristic employment of neoclassical economics in explaining rural labour as being characterised by low opportunity cost and ‘high marginal utility of income for those near the subsistence level’ (Scott 1976, 14-15). Fraught with a dual predicament, the peasant’s rose up in revolt in case of state’s failure to deliver subsistence security. Thus, while the paternalist model sanctioned state obligations towards its citizenry, moral economy sanctioned direct action by the poor (Thompson 1971, 95-98).

Pervasiveness of ‘moral economy’ in academic literature is therefore inevitable owing to different conceptions of subsistence crisis and peasant communities across time and place, compounded with a congruent idea of social justice centred around issues of what is commensurable, what can be turned into a commodity and what natural or commonly held resources can be appropriated for private use and profit. Further, the old moral economy discourses about unfair markets, just prices, access to land, and the greed of the powerful continue to echo in today’s struggles against neoliberal globalization. State and market – the antagonists of the old still threaten rural livelihood today, along with new forms of paternalist governance comprising state led market reforms and constitutional provisions.

2.2 India – The Immoral Paternalist

Despite his description of Maoism as the ‘biggest internal threat to India’s security’ (PTI 2006), India’s former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh confessed that ‘there has been a systematic failure in giving the poor a stake in the modern economic processes that inexorably intrude into their living spaces’ (Chakraborty 2014, 300). The poor here refer to the nation’s most historically disenfranchised communities – Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST), who form the bedrock of the movement. STs refer to indigenous tribals or adivasis, who are listed under the Constitution of India and constitute 8.2% of India’s population. 82% of this tribal population relies on agriculture as a result of their long-term habitation in contiguous hilly, forested regions. The SCs are notified in a separate schedule of the Constitution of India. They form the lowest end of the Hindu social caste hierarchy based on birth and have been disadvantaged for
generations. Roughly 43% of them are either absolute landless or near landless with less than half an acre of land (Choudhary 2010).

The post-colonial Indian state inherited the res nullias principle adopted by the British – segregate the disadvantaged where you can, and assimilate them where you cannot. Faced with a balance of payment crisis in 1991, India liberalized its economy, reducing the role of the state whilst encouraging market forces and the private sector. Contrary to economists’ claim of lifting 200 million out of poverty (Rodrik 2007), recent research suggests that the rate of poverty reduction has remained unaltered (Datt & Ravallion 2009). From Table 2, although the percentage of total population living below poverty line has fallen by half since 1973, absolute number of people below poverty line has fallen only marginally. In absolute terms, poor people in Maoist afflicted states of Orissa, Maharashtra, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh (MP), Jharkhand and Bihar have increased over the past decades.

The three most tribal dominated states - Orissa, Chattisgarh and Jharkhand are the most productive mineral bearing states in India accounting for 70% of India’s coal reserves, 80% of its high-grade iron ore, 60% of its bauxite and almost 100% of its chromite reserves (Paul 2013, 131). The neoliberal agenda remains two-fold - to exploit untapped resources and displace tribal population. The state caters to this agenda through several constitutional provisions. The 1927 Forest Act which put forest land in the hands of the forest department was replaced in theory by the 2006 Forest Rights Act, which continued to recognize the state as the official custodian of adivasis traditional homelands. Moreover, until 2014 the state used the 1894 Land Acquisition Act to expropriate land inhabited by tribals for development projects such as hydroelectric dams, mining and industrial enterprises. In the absence of Right to Property (RTP) as a fundamental right under the constitution since 1978, people depended on government and private industry for compensation and rehabilitation. Between 1950-2001, this resulted in a displaced population of 20-24 million tribals, of whom only 18-20% were rehabilitated (Bakshi 2009, 17). Eventually, the 120 year old law was replaced by the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2014. Initially, the bill fixed minimum compensation of land acquired in rural areas at six times the prevailing market price which was subsequently brought down to four times the market price (Singh 2012). To add to the rising friction, the Mines and Minerals Development and Regulation Amendment Act, 2015 grants licenses to companies with a validity of 50 years (Justice 2015). The historical bigotry of the Indian state thus conceived a one-word contextual response to the socio-economic grievances of the penurious – Maoism.

2.3. CPI(M): The Moral Alternative

Maoism came to be creatively articulated in an agricultural context by a conspicuously centralized rebel group - the CPI(M). The following section sheds light on its unified organizational structure in terms of formation, ideology and economy.

2.3.1 The Genesis

The genealogy of the CPI(M), can be traced to three distinct waves of Maoist insurgent activity, incipient from the closing years of the British rule. The ‘Andhra thesis’ was the first explicit espousal of Maoist principles in India. Third and Second wave insurgents have avowed their observance to the Maoist strategy of a protracted people’s war first proposed as part of a peasant rebellion in Telangana. However, the dominant narrative presents Naxalbari as the originary point for understanding Maoist politics in India.

Naxalbari is an area of West Bengal where a faction of the CPI (Marxist) incited sharecroppers and agricultural laborers to undertake insurgent activity against rich peasants or ‘kulaks’ in 1967. The movement was crushed in Bengal, but spread beyond the confines of the state. In Bihar, it mobilised SCs on the question of land rights under the banner of Maoist Communist Centre of India instituted in 1969. In the south, it gave fresh impetus to landless peasants in Telangana, which led to the formation of People’s War Group (PWG) in 1980. With ‘annihilation of class enemies’ (Harris 2011, 313) as the battle cry of the movement, the incident came to be recognized as ‘a watershed in the recent history of India’ (Banerjee 2002, 2115).
In accounts that concentrate on the third wave, the first is usually ignored. Moreover, the third wave which began in AP, is seen as a direct continuation of what began in Naxalbari which is why contemporary Maoist insurgents are still commonly referred to as ‘Naxalites.’ The merger between PWG (AP) and Maoist Communist Centre (Bihar) on September 21st, 2004 marked the advent of the biggest Left Wing Extremism (LWE) organisation CPI(M) in India (Kennedy & Purushotham, 2012). Of the 23 active LWE groups in India, CPI (M) is the most specialized as an insurgent organisation responsible for 3,509 deaths between 2010-2017 alone (Affairs 2017). Their malevolent armed rebellion is tenable under an ideological prescription of providing the weak with an equipoising weapon.

2.3.2 The Ideology

The Maoist movement is based on a mixture of three ideologies – Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, which in turn is based on the theory of contradiction, or the law of the unity of opposites (Dubey 2013). The Maoists aim to introduce a new democratic republic through a sequential process whereby theory guides programme; programme guides strategy; and strategy guides tactics. According to theory, contradictions are universal and arise by means of concrete analysis of conditions on grounds. India suffers from four major contradictions: that of imperialism and citizens, feudalism and broad masses, capital and labour and the internal contradiction among the ruling classes. Maoists claim the first contradiction to be fundamental, and the second to be principal. Although the fundamental contradiction has the potentiality to turn into principle contradiction, it is the principle contradiction which develops into class struggle through antagonism (CPIM 2004).

Following theory, the Party Programme (2004) sets up guiding principles for the formation of strategy. In order to overthrow the Indian state, Maoists rely on an agrarian revolution-based party of the proletariat - the CPI(M) people’s army called the People’s Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) and a revolutionary united front. For the hindmost, they distinguish between the motive forces of Indian revolution as peasants, proletariat and some section of petty bourgeoisie in opposition to imperialism, feudalism, and comprador bureaucratic capitalism.

Further, the people’s protracted war would undergo three strategic stages - strategic defence where the aim is survival and consolidation through selected terrorist actions against the state; followed by strategic stalemate involving use of space to extend war and finally strategic counter-offensive where the PLGA delivers a final coup de grace (CPIM 2004). Lastly, tactics guided by strategy allow the war to be waged or prolonged. These tactics form the contours of their economy which upholds their organisational structure.

2.3.3 The Economy

Cradled in resource rich areas, Maoists annually extort 2,000 crore Indian rupees from private businesses and public development projects (TOI 2011). Apart from extortion, other means to feed the economy include membership fees, an annual levy of 1,500 crore (Ramana 2011), donations, taxes, penalties and the wealth confiscated from enemies. Levies are extorted mainly from road contractors in south India, business houses with mining or industrial projects in central India alongside bus and truck owners, petrol pumps and shop keepers. However, a politburo member Kishenji claimed that

‘there are no extortions. Taxes are collected from corporates but it’s not any different from the corporate sector funding the political parties. There is a half yearly audit. Not a single paisa is wasted(Mittal 2009).’

He also added that villagers fund the party by voluntarily donating two days’ earnings each year. Bamboo cutting in Maharashatra and ‘tendu’ leaf collection in Chattisgarh account for 25 and 35 lakh of total earnings each year (Dubey 2013, 17). In eastern states, farmers donate paddy. The Indian government suspects that Maoists cultivate poppy to finance their movement in their strongholds of areas - Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa and Bihar. One kg of opium seeds account for Rupees 35,000 to 50,000 (Ramashankar 2011). Analysts who contend that it is Maoist greed which is the driving force condemn the insurgency as an extortion-centric-criminal economy devoid of any ideology (Mahadevan 2012).

Maoists on the other hand, maintain that the finance helps to maintain their exceptionally coordinated and
centralized organisational structure headed by the Central Military Commission to expedite research and development, which currently runs three centres for the in-house development of arms and ammunitions. This is corroborated by the fact that by 2012, Maoists had already stockpiled 6000 rocket launchers (Dubey 2013, 10). Finance is also used to maintain People’s Security Service, in order to collate and analyse information regarding the planning and operation of the security forces (Bakshi 2009).

Unequivocally, the bone of contention here is not greed vs. grievance, but Maoists’ long-term militaristic inspirations as opposed to their ideologue of social justice. Analysing this dichotomy safeguards us against romanticizing valorising humanistic visions of popular justice unto ‘traditional heroic peoples’ (Karandinos 2014, 2). It also provides us with the opportunity to unpack local ethics of guerrilla warfare in their relationship to external fields of power such as state’s response. However, when analysing dynamics of protracted internal conflict, one is confronted with idiosyncratic rebel motivations and state’s response across intra-national borders. The next section discusses the methodology to unpack this inland mutability alongside disparate state directed counter insurgency strategies.

2.4 Methodology

A distinguishing means of empirical enquiry, Yin (2003) describes case study methodology principally suitable for exploring the why and how of contemporary phenomena within a real-life context. Likewise, case study techniques are recognised as providing a means to examine a multiplicity of perspectives to illustrate a social entity or pattern and to test ideas and processes (Hakim 2012). This research methodology therefore permitted me to employ intrinsic and extrinsic conceptions of moral economy and COIN strategies to confront a question with profound policy implications - ‘how did a centrally-led internal rebellion with a focalized ideology have variegated outcomes across its territorial jurisdiction?’

2.4.1 Justification of Heuristic Devices

Moral economy and COIN strategy serve as theoretical instruments to answer the aforementioned question. As heuristic devices, they not only enable to comprehend the real world in a more systematic way, but also facilitate the identification of commonalities and differences in the phenomena of conflict (Weber 1949, 90-110).

Theoretical Model

Hosted file


Own Compilation

Moral Estrangement and Compliance

As discussed in previous sections, it was the “immorality” of the Indian state and ensuing micro grievances that set the stage for the Maoist insurgency. This is corroborated by a general consensus amongst scholars that in all three waves, the insurgents’ mass support came from various sections of the rural lower classes, predominantly SCs and STs (Bhatia 2005; Guha 2007; Banerjee 2008).

In accordance with the above-stated, Bhatia astutely notes that ‘the naxalite movement will thrive only to the extent that its vision resonates with the deprived’ (2005, 1547). Therefore, ideological or moral commitment of the Maoists to the poor is a salient contributing feature to the success of the insurgency. While moral estrangement owing to autonomy of insurgents’ actions from micro-level grievances weakens the movement’s support base; compliance to its ideological cause of social justice for the poor has a reinforcing effect on the insurgency.
The trope of grievance is not exclusionary when using the concept of moral economy to elucidate the insurgency’s inherent ideological contradictions and their disparate contributions to the conflict. It is in fact augmented by the Planning Commission’s Report (2008), which postulates a walking on two legs COIN strategy - combining the stick of proactive and sustained military assault with the carrot of development and governance. Despite India’s emphatic proclamation of a two pronged strategy, the situation across state boundaries remains incongruent.

Since India is the only country in the world where a protracted internal conflict is being tackled by the police forces, the development-security schism finds particular relevance in the nation’s policy agendas. With law and order listed as state subjects under the Indian constitution, security forces and CPF do not have a common COIN doctrine to guide operations against insurgencies. The Indian Doctrine for Sub-Conventional Operations published in 2006 (Choudhary 2010), which makes no reference to the Maoist insurgency remains the only documented COIN doctrine among India’s security forces (Ganguly, Fidler 2009, 2). In the absence of a common strategy against a common enemy, different states adopted perverted interpretations of the central government’s COIN policy and thus contributed unevenly to curb the movement.

2.4.3 Limitations

A probable weakness of case analysis methodology has been recognized in terms of vulnerability and the objectivity of this method to being shaped by the researcher’s own interests and perspectives. Disinformation is inevitable as the study suffers from limitations that the German academic Klaus Schlichte identifies in the scholarship on armed groups, with most literature being explicitly sympathetic to state forces. Thus, this paper attempts to account for both sides of the story through intrinsic ideological contradictions and extrinsic state effects. Unfortunately, space limitations preclude me to discuss cases wherein both theoretical instruments work in collision.

3. Case Studies

3.1 Andhra Pradesh

AP is the lesser accredited birthplace of two early offshoots of an organically disconnected, Nehruvian socialistic model of economic development – democracy and dissent. Hosting 7.6% and 15.53% of India’s total ST and SC population respectively (Census of India 2011), the seed of grievance led conflict was sowed in this state with the advent of India’s passive revolution to independence. Having conceived the oldest and most protracted Maoist insurgency, discerning AP’s successful mitigation of the same proves indispensable to the nation’s peace mediators.

The following section posits that Maoist’s eventual moral estrangement from the rural poor’s predicaments, compounded by a two-pronged state COIN strategy which involved setting up of a special police force along with socio-economic establishments for ST/SCs, resulted in intensive repression of the movement. Section 1 traces the origin of the movement since the first wave. Section 2 sheds light on Maoist’s infidelity with the cause of the rural poor. The last section discusses the state’s successful COIN strategy.

3.1.1 Historical Failacies

During the first wave (1946-51), the Nizam 11 in Hyderabad ruled through a small elite comprising jagirdars and deshmukhs (large landlords) who economically and politically dominated rural Telangana - a region riddled with privation. There was significant landlessness, with nearly 57% of the region’s total area concentrated in the hands of a few deshmukhs (Kennedy & Purushotham 2012). Throughout AP, 95% of cultivators owned less than five acres of land, whereas 73% owned less than 2.5 acres (Hanstad 2005, 13-16). Pandemic indebtedness with landlords led to vetti (unpaid labor) and bhagela (bonded labour) being tremendously quotidian. Vetti almost solely included ST/SCs and comprised 14% of the total workforce. As for bhagela, 98% were bonded due to indebtedness and 2% due to customary social obligations (Mondal 2018).

Imposition of grain levy further piqued agrarian discontent which required cultivators to pay more than half of their harvest to the state. A strong nationalist dimension was given to this prevailing rural discontent when the Nizam refused to accede to the Indian state post Britain’s 1947 exit (Roosa 2001).
Capitalizing on the situation, communist cadres set up roughly two to three thousand village sanghams (committees) to resolve the rural poor’s grievances and declared themselves as the premier nationalist organisation in Telangana (Sundarayya 1972). These committees made the peasants stand erect by enacting radical reforms, including land distribution which came in the form of abolishing rent payments and gaining free access to common grazing grounds, water and forest resources. The CPI cadres earned the loyalty of the rural populace due to their willingness to kill and be killed in defence of the popular sovereignty invested in local sanghams (Gour 1973, 100-124). In spite of the euphoria, the movement was crushed by the Indian army in September 1948.

The accession of Hyderabad was followed by the arrest of over 12,000 people between 1948-49 along with no state effort at incorporating sanghams. Instead, the new regime pursued a return to status quo by implementing the 1950 Hyderabad Tenancy and Agricultural Land Act, which remained strong in theory but weak in practice. Not only did tenants continue to pay high rents, their rate of evictions increased three-fold as landlords sought to prevent them from gaining legal rights over their lands. Even an increase in cultivator’s share of harvest which was set at two-thirds of the produce, remained one-third on ground (Kennedy & Purushotham 2012). Consequently, rural cultivators and Maoist cadres escaped to zones of refuge – areas where the relatively inaccessible terrain allowed them to avoid incorporation into state-making projects (Remme 2011). Here they encountered the simmering angst of a peripheral population – the STs and set the stage for the return of the insurgent movement from 1967 until 1971.

Two-thirds of the 2351 tribal habitations across the state faced problems similar to those of the rural cultivators (Gough 1968-69; Ravinder 2014). The new legal regime continued to restrict their access to forests and attempted to force them to take up settled agriculture. As a credulous populace who lacked patta (legal) ownership over their lands, the state effortlessly took over their means of subsistence (Guha & Gadgil 1989). This compelled them to undertake wage labour for landowners, akin to the lower castes. Almost immediately, adivasis were reduced from ‘free hill men’ to the ‘wretched position of landless laborers’ (Kennedy & Purushotham 2012, 841).

In 1959, the communists set up the Girijan Sangham, affiliated with the CPI(Marxist). Initially the committee sought to work within the confines of the law. After moneylenders murdered two adivasis in 1967, the sangham began to organize dalams (guerrilla bases). They decided to follow the Naxalbari model in October 1968 at a meeting with members of the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR). By the end of 1969, insurgents claimed control of nearly 300 villages spanning 700-800 miles. At the same time, in a separate attack in Telangana, the Revolutionary Communist Committee of Andhra Pradesh claimed to have ‘liberated’ an area of 7,000 and 8,000 square miles (Banerjee 2008).

In response to this second wave, COIN was carried out by 10,000 Central Reserve Police Forces who encircled and burnt villages (Rangaswami 1974), forcibly relocating adivasis to camps called ‘tribal development projects’ – projects that killed 9,000 adivasis due to violence and disease (Sundarayya 1972, 253). By the start of 1972, the movement’s support base was crushed and almost all top leaders were either dead, such as Charu Mazumdar (leader of AICCCR) or in prison. After the Indian emergency (1975-77), most insurgents were released from jail and some tried to revive the armed struggle. On April 22, 1980, Koudapalli Seetharamaih - a veteran of the Telangana movement in the first wave and a follower of Mazumdar during the second wave founded the PWG in AP. The PWG discarded the annihilation line and instead stressed the importance of organizational consolidation and provision of collective benefits to all classes – an ignorant mistake in light of rural poor who were seething with unrest (Kennedy & Purushotham 2012).

3.1.2 Maoist’s Moral Infidelity

PWG’s establishment reflected irreducible contradictions between the moral claims of the movement’s commitment to the rural poor and their continued struggle to overthrow the Indian state. PWG’s espousal of the latter conceived a Maoist-aligned intelligentsia which vicariously played out their revolutionary fantasies through the lives of adivasis and themazdoor vary (Nigam 2010). This led to several changes in the Maoists’ leadership strategy.
Firstly, the leading ideologues of the third wave in AP, such as Koteswara Rao and Cherukuri Rajkumar belonged to upper or middle caste backgrounds (Chandra, 2014). The implicit argument behind this was that the indigent were incapable of correctly representing their needs. Secondly, the Maoists’ armed squads (dastas) increasingly included middle-class/caste members (Kennedy & Purushotham 2012) because PWG sought to build a wider cross-class movement. Invariably, leaders became hesitant to raise the issues of land and wages. From 1980-2000, wages remained the same – three kilos of paddy for a day’s work evincing that the mazdoor varg clearly ceased to be a priority (Balagopal 2006). Veering away from a mass-supported rural insurgency, the movement instead became a top-heavy urban one.

The urban middle class, in particular students, played an important role throughout the third wave. Many students joined the movement in remote areas and became the primary support base of the insurgents. Adivasis faced the brunt of this punctured social base, as insurgents who had previously encouraged tribals to cut down reserve forests for cultivation in the first and second wave, now imposed quite a successful ban on cutting of forests (Balagopal 2006). Undeniably, the organization became unbalanced and overly reliant on ‘middle class romantics’ (Ray 2002, 4). While the insurgents indefinitely postponed their moralistic revolutionary agenda in their ‘battle of supremacy with the state’ (Balagopal 2006, 3185), the AP government altered the exogenous conditions in which it had been thriving.

3.1.3 Double Pronged Coin Strategy

In 1989, a police special forces unit ‘Greyhounds’ was raised by an Indian Police Service officer K.S. Vyas that specialized in offensive COIN operations against the Maoists and was ‘bound by no law, including the Constitution of India’ (Harris 2011, 315).

Since then, every year 2000 men of the AP police are recruited to serve for three years on secondment to the Greyhounds and then revert to normal police duties. This has yielded a pool of trained manpower reserve for insurgent operations which are usually conducted in small bands of 15-25 commandos (Bakshi 2009). Between 1995 and 2016 over 1,780 Maoists were killed. In the period between 2008 and 2017, police killed 700 insurgents, losing three officers in the line of duty. The highest death toll for the force remains 35 in an attack at the Balimela Reservoir (Bhattacharjee 2017). In their most recent operation carried out in March 2018 near the Telangana-Chattisgarh border, the special forces successfully gunned down ten Maoists, including six female insurgents (Dwary, Chatterjee 2018). It is imperative to highlight that these operations are also heavily assisted by ex-insurgents’ ground intelligence.

The central government’s surrender and rehabilitation (S&R) policy sought to wean away misguided youth by co-opting with promises of protection from police and the state government. The policy is implemented at three levels wherein non-committed students are encouraged to join ruling parties, criminal elements are given immediate grants alongside monthly stipends, and committed revolutionaries are either shot or held indefinitely in custody. A higher ranked LWE cadre received an immediate grant of Rupees 25 lakh and monthly stipend of Rupees 4,000 whereas a middle/lower ranked cadre received a grant of Rupees 1.5 lakh and a monthly stipend of Rupees 4,000 (Affairs 2010). Monthly stipends provided incentives for Maoist cadres to assist security forces in identifying their ‘comrades.’

The amalgam of S&R and a COIN elite security force proved remarkably successful as reflected in the reduced number of LWE incidents and casualties in the state. However, the state’s achievement against the insurgency did not emerge exclusively from an offensive militant assault. Adoption of ameliorate development measures were a vital component of the insurgency mitigation strategy.

During the first wave, the AP government established 268 civil centres to be used as centres of rural uplift, which in reality served as armed police outposts (Kennedy & Purushotham 2012). Acknowledging this operational inefficiency, the state government established the Department of Tribal Welfare in 1966. In 1974-75, the department received an impetus from the central government’s Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) approach which came into operation from India’s fifth five-year plan. TSP fell under the ambit of state policy and called for rapid socio-economic development of scheduled areas with a tribal population of over 50% (Ravinder 2014).
Until 2014, TSP covered 18 districts across AP state comprising 938 scheduled villages and 809 non-scheduled villages (Ravinder 2014; Rao, Redd, Chathukulam 2012). For the purpose of effective implementation, the department of tribal welfare categorized TSP into 10 Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDAs), 41 Modified Area Development Approach (MADA) pockets, 17 Clusters and 12 Micro Projects for Primitive Tribal Groups (PTDPs). Tribal population not covered under these projects fall under the Dispersed Tribal Development Programmes (DTDPs). Under MADA, after removal of area restriction as per the provisions of SCs and STs Orders (Amendment) Act 1976, the department extended developmental activities to plain areas, incorporating 475 villages. Under PTDPs, primitive tribes are allowed to avail 100% subsidy under individual benefit schemes. Further, under DTDP the AP government has provisioned to cover dispersed population by providing financial assistance of Rupees 1 lakh (Ravinder 2014).

The state established Andhra Pradesh Tribes Co-operative Finance Corporation Limited in 1976 as TSP’s financial wing. In response to Maoist sanghams, Girijan 11 Co-operative Corporation Ltd (GCC) was also established in 1956 which works as a public sector undertaking in close coordination with ITDAs. By eliminating middlemen and private traders, GCC has successfully ensured payment of remunerative prices for minor forest products (MFP) collected by tribals. MFP prices increased three-fold from its inception up until 2000 (Rao, Redd, Chathukulam 2012). The state also gave a new dimension to neo-liberal reforms through companies such as the Andhra Pradesh Tribal Power Company that set up 13 hydro-power projects in scheduled areas by utilizing natural streams and waterfalls. Moreover, the management of these projects are solely entrusted with tribal women and the profit is accrued by local tribals (Ravinder 2014).

Analogous to the tribal welfare department, the AP Scheduled Castes Co-operative Finance Corporation Ltd (SCCFC) established in 1974 aimed to uplift SC families across the state. Under bank linked economic support schemes, the corporation has benefitted 12,424 SCs with individual grants of Rupees 1 to 2 lakh under self-employment schemes. Under the irrigation sector, 5,848 persons have profited from bore wells, shallow tube wells, and submersible pump-sets. Under non-bank linked schemes, land purchase scheme has successfully granted 75% subsidy to 8,388 people. In addition, SCCFC also runs 10,000 skill development programmes across the state. The total beneficiaries for 2015-16 bank and non-bank projects stood at 38,054 and 38,372 respectively (APSCCFC 2015-16). This had positive spillover effects for state activities by maintaining the risk to developmental outcomes ‘negligible to low’ (Bank 2015, 36-38).

In summation, the endogenous moral estrangement of Maoists from the grievances of the marginalized, coupled with a developmental COIN approach enormously reduced the number of LWE incidents and casualties in the state from 461 incidents and 80 deaths in 2001 (Affairs 2010) to 26 incidents and 7 deaths in 2017 (Affairs 2018) – a significant achievement.

3.2 Chattisgarh

In 2010, while Chattisgarh exalted a growth rate of 11.5%, the highest among Indian states, 76 men from India’s paramilitary force awoke to their death in the state’s Maoist heartland (Kazmin 2010). What this violent struggle put at stake – the state’s unparalleled economic development, was diminutive compared to STs (32.5%) and SCs (12.2%) who had been renounced in the state’s pursuit of neoliberal greed (IISS 2010). Since 85% of this peripheral population live in forested regions, Maoist conflict in Chattisgarh is a mobilization against imperialism rather than an anti-feudal struggle against landlordism. Abode to the richest forests in mainland India containing deposits of coal, iron ore, bauxite, dolomite, limestone, gold and diamond along with an inordinate amount of tribal groups – 553, the state is infamous as the insurgency’s cradle and deserves scrutiny (Bakshi 2009).

The following section postulates that Maoist’s strong moral compliance with STs grievances synthesized with the state’s necropolitical COIN approach aggravated the conflict further. Section 1 highlights the marginalization of tribal communities as a result of a market driven state economy. Section 2 deliberates on how the Maoists successfully managed to turn the poor’s cause as their own. The last section discusses the state’s oppressive COIN approach.
3.2.1 Developmental Faultlines

Although resource conflict is the mechanism through which armed conflict is sustained in Chattisgarh, the underlying cause of the former lies in state government’s deviation from its stated position of ensuring tribal self-governance as prescribed in the Indian constitution. Non-recognition of these rights has resulted in ‘disorganisation, displacement, and destitution of the adivasis’ (Subramanium K. 2010, 25). Since 2000, the state has failed to submit annual reports on the administration of tribal areas to the President. Further, state constitutional machinery of a tribal advisory council has become extinct. Thus, habitants of forested regions where industrial projects are underway live under ‘the constant shadow of a draconian state’ (Chakraborty 2014, 295).

The state government scripted the ‘biggest land grab since Columbus’ (Misra 2009) through its policy on special economic zones, which followed a ‘simplified’ business environment based on fiscal concessions involving exemption from state and local taxes as well as levies and duties. With three industrial SEZs underway in 2010 (Industries 2011) the state, ignorant of adivasis who were the first to lose their farmland to industry at abysmal rates - evidently joined hands with capital. The government justified tribals’ marginalization on their inability to produce agricultural surplus that could yield taxable revenues for the state. As a result, coal and iron ore which were extracted from forested regions in the north and south of the state respectively, collectively displaced 40% of the total state tribal population (Subramanium K. 2010).

In the north, Korba and Raigarh districts are rich in coal. By 2010, the state had signed 115 agreements with private companies for coal-based projects in cement, steel and power sectors. Including existing and proposed projects until 2016, this number adds to a staggering 745 projects. Further, much of this coal rich area falls under a thick forest Hasdeo Arand which was declared a no-go-zone for mining in accord of 305,125 STs depended on it for survival (Hindu, 2011; Census of India 2011). Despite repeated protests, the forest was opened up for mining in 2011 when Jindal Steel & Power Ltd aligned with the state. This increased Raigarh’s non-working class to 1,561,231 (Census of India 2011) as heavily mechanized industries failed to create alternate employment for tribals.

Chattisgarh’s iron ore deposits are found in Dantewada, another SEZ where National Mineral Development Corporation - a government company, has been mining high grade ore from an ox-shaped hill called Bailadila. Of the profit generated, very little is accrued to tribal community projects. In fact, the share of profits accrued to the 150 adivasi villages under its ambit reduced from 2.36% in 2010 (Sharma 2012) to 2.17% in 2016 (Network 2017). Another big company, Essar Steel Ltd., a private steel manufacturer runs a 267 km pipeline from Bailadila to Vishakhaptnam, passing through scores of adivasi villages with no drinking water pipes (Subramanian A. 2010). Similarly, Tata Steel occupied seven villages in Dantewada where villagers repeatedly accused the company of cordonning off their land in the absence of any formal acquisition (Chakraborty 2014).

Setting up industrial projects in forested areas also led to commercialisation of forest produce, which invariably resulted in exploitation of adivasis by forest officials and traders. While forest officials curtail adivasis’s access to forests, traders are infamous for paying them meagre returns for collecting and selling produce such as mahua flower, sal seeds, and tendu leaves.

Palpably, this conspicuous lack of state apathy against local conditions set the stage for Maoists who stepped in to share the poor’s sense of justice and fight against a common resource hungry ‘exploiter and enemy’ (Affairs 2006, 15).

3.2.2 Maoist’s Moral Compliance

The presence of non-adivasi insurgents became widespread due to the iniquitous relationship produced by the processes of state and market expansion. Besides, with its forested terrain and the desperation of industrialists to buy peace (Mint 2011), Chattisgarh proved ideal for guerrilla warfare. Roughly 30% of government approved infrastructure investments found its way to Maoists (Choudhary 2010). With an angry tribal populace as its support base and a continuous supply of funds, Maoists in addition to dastas
, developed\textit{janathan sarkars}(people’s government) and\textit{jan adalats}(people’s court) across the central belt, providing essential services and dispensing swift justice (Bakshi 2009).

The insurgents initiated justice by chasing away forest guards who restricted tribals’ access to forests. They secured a fifty fold increase in\textit{tendu patta} - a major source of cash for\textit{adivasis} in Central India (Kennedy & Purushotham 2012); forced contractors to pay higher wages to agricultural laborers and distributed surplus land to landless and marginal cultivators. In Dandakarany\textit{adasta} involving 60 lakh people, Maoists established\textit{sanghams} and successfully set up 135 clinics, educational facilities and irrigation works. They also took up women issues and ‘Gondi’ literature11, offering the tribals a sense of identity (Sundar 2006). In areas of industrial projects where forest economy had been commercialised, traders were threatened to pay twice the earlier price for forest produce (Sharma 2012). Control over the forest economy offered a double advantage: it won the Maoists’\textit{adivasi} support and as traders could be taxed, it provided a source of income to fund the movement. They also cultivated local trust by disrupting private infrastructure projects, such as the Essar pipeline, 80 km of which stands under Maoist control (Subramanian A. 2010).

In areas where industrial projects take over entire tracts of land such as in ‘Bastar’ where 30,000 hectares of land is being sought by more than 30 power plants, the Maoist movement follows an organic pattern (Sharma 2012). First, the villagers form village level associations and petition state governments which mostly go unheard. Agitated, they sit for demonstrations and take out rallies, to which the government responds with violence. This strengthens the Maoist’s intellectual critique of armed struggle and popular mass movements are handed over to the Maoists.

In retaliation to power plants in Bastar,\textit{Bastar Sambhag Kisan Sangharsh Samiti} was formed and rallied in 2009 as a means of organised resistance to oppose displacement of tribals for the creation of Bodh Ghat dam, privatization of mines and river water resources. The government resorted with imprisonment and violence which led the\textit{adivasis} to turn to Maoists, who successfully led a militant attack and established control over 600 hectares of the land. From a bustling hub of 75 mini steel plants producing 2 lakh tonnes of steel a bath, Bastar became a Maoist\textit{dasta} for organising\textit{dalams}(Sharma 2012).

In another part of the state in January 2011, nearly 500 farmers gathered outside the gates of a new power project being built on their farmland in Akaltara village in the district of Janjgir Champa. The project of KSK Energy Ventures aimed to generate 3600 Mega Watts of power, making it one of the largest in India. In response to the protest, baton wielding policemen arrested 78 tribals and injured several others. Once again, capitalizing on the intense ferment Maoists stepped in, turning the movement militant, acquiring stronghold in the village, and disrupting the project (Wertsch 2012).

Frequent and indefinite disruption of industrial projects frustrated state functionaries, who in their bid to continue serving the needs of private capitalism, branded all populace in areas that came under the sway of insurgents as Maoists. This perverted perception of marginalized communities’ grievances led them to misconstrue their rebellion as a ‘security issue’ – a gory error of mistaking consequence for the cause.

3.2.3 Isolationist COIN Strategy

Predictably, the Chattisgarh government’s COIN strategy did not seek to address grievances. Established in 2005, state sponsored vigilante militia\textit{Salwa Judum} or ‘purification hunt’ was nothing but a sweeping assertion of the state’s sovereignty – its self-serving right to protect certain populations at the expense of others. This inherent right for self-preservation is contained fundamentally in the exercise of power outside the law, based on the binary – ‘if you are not with us, you are with the Maoists’ (Roy A. 2010). Viewing conflict from the lens of state security proved necropolitical and thus fatal. However, this solecism wasn’t exclusive, as COIN’s trajectory can be traced to two previous phases of terror campaigns in the state.

In 1991, the first phase of the campaign was launched in Dandakaranya region under the rubric of\textit{Jan Jagaran Abhiyan} (Public Awareness Campaign) followed by a second phase in 1997. The campaign was led by the local political elite with the backup of local tribal chiefs who lost their primacy in the region (Myrdal 2012). Their way of awakening involved forming a hunting party of 300 men to comb the forest, kill people,
burn houses and molest women with police backup. By June 2005, the two phases of the campaign evolved into Salwa Judum, backstaged by the local legislator Mahendra Karma in Bastar region. This hunt lasted four years supported by several brigades of civilian army comprising 18,000 to 20,000 men. The funding for the campaign came from Tata Steel and Essar whose investments were heavily threatened by the Maoist presence (Reddy 2014).

The militia for Salwa Judum came from the local adivasis themselves, who were provided with rifles, a monthly salary of Rs. 1500 (Reddy 2014) – which was less than one-third the salary of a police constable and the designation of Special Police Officers (SPOs) (Sharma 2012). At its height, 5,000 tribals served as SPOs (Balagopal 2006). With the paramilitary forces by their side, SPOs resorted to brutal means to terrorize villagers. An eyewitness account graphically illustrated:

“Salwa Judum attack and rob villagers. They burn down crops and kill cattle. They forcibly took away young men and women from the villages, made them SPO and told them to fight us. Fearing them many committed suicide, Salwa Judum men raped village women, murdering several afterward. They cut off their breasts. They slashed the bellies of pregnant women (Sahi 2009, 12-13).”

This account is corroborated by the Indian Supreme Court’s judgement in 2009 which stated that Salwa Judum members and SPOs are responsible for 500 murders, 99 rapes and 103 acts of arson and nearly 300 burnt homes and granaries (Sethi 2012). Further, during the offensive, 644 adivasi villages ceased to exist, displacing 150,000 and creating 300,000 tribal refugees of which 50,000 (Kennedy & Purushotham 2012) were forced to join relief camps which served as ‘internment camps’ that allowed ‘the security forces to forcibly detain and monitor adivasis who were Maoists’ primary support base’ (Sundar 2008, 287). Systematic killing of suspected insurgents in false “encounters” was also a key pillar of the COIN strategy.

Rampant human rights abuses along with unconstitutional appointments of SPOs using adivasi youth as cannon fodder led the Supreme Court to ban the COIN in July 2011. The court insisted that the government should instead create employment under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, and provide infrastructure plus education in the area (Chakraborty 2014). On the other hand, the Chattisgarh government imposed a developmental blockade in Maoist areas whilst continuing to dispossess and impoverish adivasis in other areas through its collusion with industrial powers.

With the government firmly on the side of the industry, multiple cases of legal loopholes and corruption were once again brought to the forefront. For instance, in the Churikala village in Korba district, the village council voted against selling land to a private power company but the district administration acquired the land in ‘public interest.’ The villagers argued in vain that the project only served the interests of the company (Sharma 2012). Similarly, when Premnagar village voted against parting with land for an industrial project, overnight the government elevated the village to the status of a town. By doing so, it made its veto redundant since the law that protects adivasi land only extends to village councils (Sethi 2011).

The state government’s consensus in favour of mining and industry for pure economic gains involved huge gains to local political elites as well. In 2011 Sandeep Kanwar, son of Chattisgarh’s ex Home Minister, was alleged using his father’s political clout to buy adivasi land illegally in Jangjur-Champa district. Travelling in a government car, he intimidated impoverished tribals into selling their land for one third the rate set by the government for land acquisition of industrial projects. He then sold it to the company Videocon for a profit. The arrangement allowed the company to side step legal obligations of providing jobs and benefits to the villagers (Sharma 2011). The state’s brutal COIN strategy and its failure to provide inclusive development further fuelled the insurgency.

Invariably, towards the end of Salwa Judum, Chattisgarh hosted 140 of the total 500 LWE attacks across the country. In May 2013, Mahendra Kumar was brutally killed in an ambush attack by the Maoists, avenging the murder of thousands. Five years later there still seems to be no peace in sight for Chattisgarh, where over a two decade trajectory LWE incidents and casualties have increased from 105 in 2001 (Affairs 2010) to 373 in 2017 - the highest among any Indian state (Affairs 2018). It is thus safe to surmise that unmitigated negligence of state authorities to resolve matters of local empowerment and command over resources for
ST/SCs, along with a strong Maoist moral compliance to deliver justice greatly rendered to this state’s unpropitious fate.

4. Conclusion

The case studies reflect how endogenous and exogenous deviations can produce successful and unsuccessful variants of the same ideological revolutionary battle. In AP, Maoist’s weakening moral threshold and state’s developmental COIN strategy choked the Maoists’ support base. On the contrary, in Chattisgarh, a shared sense of justice between the Maoists alongside a delusional state fixated on the idea of running an exploitative neoliberal regime greatly strengthened the movement.

Although a comprehensive set of policy recommendations lies beyond the scope of this paper, the following points represent important steps to make the recalcitrant Maoist citizenry integral to nation’s development:

First, **decriminalise the movement**. The Maoists cannot be identified and condemned as ‘terrorists’. Evidence presented has shown that marginalized communities and their grievances underpin the movement and its ideological objectives. By decriminalising the movement, a space can be created for the grievances of marginalized communities to be heard and assessed for legitimacy, on both local and national fronts.

Second, **adopt a broader approach to conflict management**. Interpreting conflict as a law and order problem or a security concern can bear heavy cost for state functionaries wherein oppressive militant COIN strategies aggravate conflict rather than mitigating it. More flexible and comprehensive responses need to be developed to reflect the complex dynamics of violence.

Third, **increase state presence in remote areas**. Shared sovereignty in scheduled areas has become the norm, with Maoists running parallel governments and administrations. Strengthening village councils and self-governance mechanisms as prescribed in the Indian constitution, instead of overriding them will build legitimacy amongst traditionally marginalised communities. Investment should be re-balanced to focus on human development, in particular to design alternative sustainable livelihood programmes for ST/SCs.

And lastly, **reconcile peace with justice**. This means avoiding disciplinary developmentalism where the penurious are required to contextually adapt their livelihoods to dominant development paradigms. If the end of conflict is to become a reality, a space for negotiation must be created. It is important to acknowledge that there is no ‘quick fix’ to the Maoist insurgency. A country where democracy and conflict birthed together, the transition to a state of guaranteed security and freedom to its citizens will take time.

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