

Social Exclusion of Ethnic Groups and Extremist Violence: A Study in Junglemahal, West Bengal

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Abstract

Ethnic groups living across the so-called red corridor in India mostly belong to the tribal category. These tribal groups can be distinguished from others by bio-social attributes like extreme poverty and malnutrition, lack of healthcare facilities, marriage at early age and its resultant effects, and a high rate of illiteracy. Since the pre-colonial era, these ethnic groups have been experiencing politico-economic exclusion from mainstream Indian social system. The development inputs of various schemes initiated by the Indian nation-state hardly reach the tribal people in the region. The parliamentary representatives from such region are usually chosen from among the 'outsiders' or from the insiders who can easily be controlled by the 'outsiders'. As a result, the needs and aspirations of the ethnic groups living in the red corridor are practically ignored. This results in their alienation and exclusion from the Indian politico-economic system. Under such a situation, these people become vulnerable to violent extremist activities that are directed against sovereignty of the state. The present paper demonstrates how Maoist activists and other subversive forces are exploiting the situation of social exclusion to their advantage and have fairly been successful in undermining internal security of the country. I argue that the greater the extent of social exclusion of the ethnic groups living in a region, the higher is the degree of their chance of engaging with extremist activities. It also appears that the stronger the ethnic elements of the engaging ethnic groups more will be the possibility of their detachment from the subversive activities as found in the Junglemahal area of West Bengal.

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Introduction

Addressing social exclusion is one of the major goals of a welfare state, as Bask (2005) argues. Yet, social exclusion of the minority and disadvantaged communities in many modern nation-states is very common. It increases inequality between the 'poor' and the 'advantaged'. The success of development initiatives, as Anne Power (2000) observes, depends upon cooperation and integration of the minority and disadvantaged communities with society. This is because social exclusion increases inequality, poverty, unemployment, health problems, experiences of violence, and results in lack of cooperation, mutual respect and trust among the engaging ethnic groups. Success of individuals rather than that of the surroundings are more important in United States. On the other hand, this is usually measured by individual success along with development of the surrounding area in Europe (Power 2000). In India, economic success is celebrated without considering success of tribal and minority ethnic groups who have been experiencing politico-economic exclusion from the mainstream since the pre-colonial era. Given such a context, the issue of 'underdevelopment' becomes a dominant socio-political agenda in Indian politics, more particularly across the region along the red corridor.¹ An ultra-left political context of conflict as well as movement under the leadership of the Maoists (thereby commonly referred to as Left-Wing Extremism) has emerged along much of the entire red corridor region of India.

The concept of social exclusion refers to the societal mechanism of keeping out. According to Anne Power, it is "about the inability of our society to keep all groups and individuals within reach of what we expect as a society. It is about the tendency to push vulnerable and difficult individuals into the least popular places, furthest away from our common aspirations" (Power 2000: 46). The concept is significant particularly in the developing countries for it addresses poverty and deprivation. It

opens up new possibilities for policy interventions for development (Rodgers 1995: 5; Gore 1995:8; de Haan 1998:11; Sen 2000: 45-7; Nevile 2007: 250-3). Sometimes exclusion is used alternatively with poverty, as they are inter-connected. But Halleröd and Heikkilä (1999) argue differently that while poverty refers to problem involving economic resources, social exclusion involves question relating to individuals' integration in society. Social exclusion may, therefore, be defined as the particular state of being resulted out of accumulation of various social disadvantages (Silver 1995; Westin 1999). For Amartya Sen (2000), there are two dimensions of exclusion: first, exclusion which is in itself deprivation, and second, exclusion which is in itself not deprivation, but leads to other deprivation (e.g., landlessness and lack of access to the credit market). He further attempts to make a distinction between active and passive exclusions. The former type, for him, is the result of a deliberate policy to exclude certain people from particular opportunities while the latter type is the unintended result of certain policy decision or social process (Sen 2000:15). However, the concept has various shortcomings as many critics have observed (e.g., Levitas 1998; Atkinson 2000; Geddes 2000; Du Toit 2004; Green and Hulme 2005).

The 'red corridor' of India is also known as the 'prime natural resource corridor' of the country since the area contains a high deposit of natural resources such as diamond, iron ore, coal, bauxite, limestone, chromite, copper, etc. Interestingly, the region has been at the same time the abode of several tribal and other ethnic groups who have been suffering from extreme poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and various other socio-economic constraints. Many groups are living even on the brink of starvation. The development inputs of various schemes initiated by our nation-state hardly reach these areas. Along the entire corridor the Maoists and/or Naxalites have built up a strong movement 'under the leadership of the proletariat'² with the purpose of seizing State power and of creating liberated zones through 'annihilation of class enemies'. The movement has a strong belief in Mao T'se-tung's political philosophy that voices 'political power grows out of the barrel of gun'. In more than one-third districts out of 634 districts in India, the Maoists had a strong influence (Chundari and Singh 2012). Nearly twenty-three Indian states have witnessed the violent movement. However, the movement is very strong particularly along the loosely contagious mineral-rich territory of red corridor (Chopra 2012). The movement was so strong that it was described as, in the words of former Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohon Singh, 'the single biggest security threat' to the country. Presently ninety districts in eleven Indian states are affected as reported

by the *Times of India* on April 16, 2018. The extremist movement has got a strong support base particularly among the tribal and other marginalized people across the red corridor. However, one must not necessarily conclude that these tribal and other disadvantaged people are supporters of extremist activities. They are, in the words of Shah and Pettigrew (2009:228), not the 'natural vessels of a revolutionary consciousness.' On the contrary, they are living in the territory that is difficult to access by the state, on the one hand, and is well suited for guerrilla warfare, on the other. This may be one reason. But, there are other reasons too. The Maoists have taken up the causes of the disadvantaged people as their political agenda. The origin of the conflict may be traced back to the Telengana insurgency of the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh during 1940s (Kennedy and Purushotham 2012; Pavier 1981; Sundarayya 1972). Dispossession of land has been the most prominent socio-political issue across the red corridor in general and in Telengana region in the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh and Naxalbari in West Bengal in particular (Kennedy and Purushotham 2012; Kujur 2008). Though the Maoist conflict has a long history of over seven decades, it intensified post 2004 after the formation of *CPI (Maoist)* through unification of the *People's War Group (PWG)* and the *Maoist Communists Centre (MCC)*.

The forested terrain of Paschim Medinipur, Jhargram, Bankura and Purulia districts of West Bengal in India, commonly called together as the 'Junglemahalarea', represents such an exemplar and falls under the red corridor. Police atrocities on the tribals and the issue of underdevelopment have been the principal causes of supporting the extremism in Junglemahal in West Bengal (Midya *et al.* 2012; Midya 2014a). This paper concerns the ethnic groups of Junglemahal area of the newly created Jhargram (part of the erstwhile PaschimMedinipur) district in West Bengal.

The tribal and other disadvantaged ethnic groups in Junglemahal have been historically left out of development initiatives. They have been witnessing extreme poverty, landlessness, malnutrition, health issues, early marriage and the resultant consequences (Midya 2014a). Keeping this historical background in mind, I have tried to examine whether social exclusion is abetting the tribal groups into getting involved with subversive activities. The study dealt with four village communities of Amlatora, Sangram, Bhimarjun and Bhumij Dhansola in Jhargram district of West Bengal during 2014-2016. It involved several ethnic groups³ belonging to Scheduled Tribal (*viz.*, the Santal, Bhumij and Sabar) and non-tribal groups.

Locale and research methodology

The present study was conducted on two categories of village communities in Junglemahal: (i) tribal and other communities inhabiting the same village; and (ii) village inhabited exclusively by the Scheduled Tribal group(s). The study was based upon primary data obtained through fieldwork during 2014-2016 and the secondary sources already available (Midya *et al.* 2012; Midya 2014a, 2014b). The first category comprised two villages, *viz.*, Amlatora and Sangram. Both the villages are located under Jamboni Police Station in Jhargram Development Block in the erstwhile PaschimMedinipur (presently Jhargram) district. The Santal and the Mahata communities constitute Amlatora population. The former is a Scheduled Tribe and the latter is an Other Backward Class (OBC) group (Table 1). Population of Sangram comprises the Sabar (another Scheduled Tribe group who is recognized as an 'ex-criminal tribe'), two families of Santal and only a few families of caste people, *viz.*, Napit, Kulu, Kamar, Tanti, Baisnab and Dhopa. Except the Baishnab, all the other caste groups are categorized as Scheduled Castes.

The second category also included two villages—Bhimarjun and Bhumij Dhansola. These villages were purposively selected since these were located in isolation. Bhimarjun is located under Binpur-II Development Block of the same district. It is located about 45 km away from the district headquarters at Jhargram. This village is exclusively inhabited by the Bhumij, which are regarded a scheduled tribal group. Bhumij Dhansola is located in an isolated and forested area under the Binpur-I Development Block of Jhargarm district. It is included in Lalgargh Gram Panchayat No. 7. On the other hand,

Amlatora and Sangram are located beside the Lodhasuli-Belpahari (*via* Parihati) State Highway, just opposite to each other. So, these two villages are well-connected to Jhargram town which is the district headquarter of the newly created Jhargram district. But Bhimarjun is located furthest away from the district headquarter at Jhargram town. The village is within the fringe of forest at Banspahari. Population structure of the villages (Table 1) showed that everywhere, except among the Bhumij of Bhumij Dhansola, males out-numbered females, which was quite unexpected in a tribal society where birth of female child was normally welcomed. Population distribution by age and sex in the villages indicated two important characteristics in particular: (i) all the populations exhibited a growing trend; and (ii) they had relatively long life-span.

In any population child-women ratio, dependency ratio, literacy rate, and rate of early marriage are essential demographic indicators. The socio-economic status of the tribal groups living in different villages are given in Table 2. For the present study, child-women ratio was used as a rough measure of fertility since there was hardly any birth registration system available in these villages. Child-women ratio was moderately low for all the three ethnic groups (Table 2). This indirectly indicated high mortality rate for the infant and children. This might be the compound outcome of poor awareness of healthcare as well as of poor healthcare facility available for the communities. The Santal, Sabar and the Bhumij groups further exhibited high dependency ratio among them. This suggested their economic marginality. For all ethnic groups, excepting the Santals in Amlatora, literacy rate was unusually low. This was much lower (ranging from 3.92 per cent to 38.88 per cent) than that in erstwhile

Table 1: Distribution of population

Village	Ethnic group	Families No. (per cent)	Population			Sex ratio
			Male No. (per cent)	Female No. (per cent)	Total No. (per cent)	
AMLATORA	<i>Santal</i>	54 (80.60)	167 (42.07)	151(38.03)	318 (80.10)	904
	<i>Mahata</i>	13 (19.40)	38 (09.57)	41(10.33)	79(19.90)	1079
	Total	67 (100.0)	205 (51.64)	192(48.36)	397 (100.0)	937
SANGRAM	<i>Sabar</i>	59 (66.29)	127 (33.25)	114 (29.84)	241 (63.09)	898
	<i>Others</i>	30 (33.71)	77 (20.15)	64 (17.22)	141 (36.91)	831
	Total	89 (100.0)	204 (53.40)	178 (47.06)	382 (100.0)	873
BHIMARJUN	<i>Bhumij</i>	114 (100.0)	300 (54.25)	253 (45.75)	553 (100.0)	843
BHUMIJ	<i>Sabar</i>	106 (65.03)	221 (30.36)	213 (29.26)	434 (59.62)	964
DHANSOLA	<i>Bhumij</i>	57 (34.97)	145 (19.91)	149 (20.47)	249 (40.38)	1028
	Total	163 (100.0)	366 (50.27)	362 (49.73)	728 (100.0)	989

Source: Midya *et al.* 2012; Midya 2014a.

Table 2: A few demographic features among the ethnic groups under study

<i>Some socio-economic indicators</i>	<i>Ethnic Groups</i>				
	<i>Santal (Amlatora)</i>	<i>Sabar (Sangram)</i>	<i>Bhumij (Bhimarjun)</i>	<i>Sabar (Bhumij Dhansola)</i>	<i>Bhumij(Bhumij Dhansola)</i>
Literacy rate	57.22	34.14	38.88	03.92	24.49
Percentage of persons having no educational qualification (15-44 yrs.)	22.36	76.70	63.05	86.66	60.41
Child-Women ratio	40.82	41.10	41.40	35.02	37.06
Dependency ratio	43.75	51.72	57.00	47.03	46.08
Early marriage (out of total married persons)	58.27	73.86	74.35	74.21 ¹	63.08 ²
Percentage of widow (among the total number of married women)	11.36	11.61	21.07	14.06 ³	25.00 ⁴
Annual family income (≤ Rs. 50,000)	58.67	66.00	86.33	81.13	87.72
Percentage of persons engaged in exclusive forest collection	43.21	44.23	68.23	64.90	52.04
Percentage of family using water from dug-wells	62.96	85.89	98.61	99.06	85.96
Percentage of family using water from tube-wells	37.04	14.11	01.39	00.94	14.04

¹N= 252, ²N= 149, ³N= 128, ⁴N= 84

Source: Midya 2016: 230.

Paschim Medinipur district (79.04 per cent) and in West Bengal(77.08) as per 2011 Census reports. However, the literacy rate among the Santals at Amlatora was above 50 per cent (57.29 per cent). Illiteracy rate among the females was alarmingly high. This was 78.66 per cent among the Bhumij of Bhimarjun, for instance. Majority of literates fell under the lower age groups (upto 14 years). High rate of illiteracy resulted unquestionably in high rate of unemployment. Interestingly, there were high schools in the vicinity of Amlatora, Sangram, and Bhimarjun. Poverty, lack of educational motivation and unemployment were presumably contributing to educational backwardness of the groups. It was found that the groups did not have facility of safe drinking water or any toilet in their houses. There was no primary health center or healthcare facility at Bhimarjun and Bhumij Dhansola or in the surrounding area. Amlatora and Sangramdo had a primary health center nearby, but did not have any regular doctor. In case of any illness the traditional healer in the village or of nearby villages was consulted. Prenatal and postnatal care was regulated as per the traditional customs and habits. Cases of marriage at an early age were surprisingly high among all the ethnic groups (ranging from about 58 per cent to 74 per cent). Thus, in every aspect all these ethnic groups were

neglected. They were deprived of basic requirements of life and human rights. They were in fact excluded from the mainstream socio-economic development facilities and programs. Considering the basic socio-economic parameters, it was found that social exclusion prevailed more for the people of Bhimarjun and Bhumij Dhansola. Such exclusion led no doubt to active deprivation.

Economic and political access

According to Anne Power, exclusion and deprivation result in concentrated poverty, rejection and isolation, deteriorating conditions, negative behaviour, and withdrawal (Power, 2000: 47). Most of these social phenomena, if not all, were found among the Sabar, Bhumij and Santal groups under study. In my earlier studies it was observed that more than 80 percent families of the ethnic groups, except the Santals in Amlatora (where it is 58.67 per cent), did not have an annual family income of more than Rs. 50,000/- (cf. Midya 2012, 2014a). But, the then government did not admit abundance of poverty among these ethnic groups. These groups were provided with rice in a subsidized rate through the Public Distribution System of the State Government. Most of the people of the area did not have any idea about the

developmental schemes, which were being implemented for their welfare. So the people of the area were in fact excluded from the national agenda of development, except few schemes. The degree of exclusion was more for the ethnic groups living at Bhumarjun and Bhumij Dhansola, as these villages were located in isolated jungle fringe. Developmental inputs hardly reached in these areas. On the contrary, the ethnic groups at Amlatora and Sangram were relatively better economically since these villages were well connected with the State Highway and with the Block Development Office. The ethnic groups were getting some benefits of few schemes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY). Their dependency upon forest collection was notably low compared to that of the other groups under the present study. Taking into account the various socio-economic indicators as mentioned in Table 2, it was found that the groups settled at Bhimarjun and Bhumij Dhansola were facing marginalization to a greater extent compared to those at Amlatora or at Sangram. The ethnic groups in the former villages were facing social exclusion to a greater extent. Although everywhere the feeling of alienation, rejection, isolation and deprivation, and the state of poverty was quite high. The ethnic groups were also found not to have good access to the political process in the area. They were represented in the Legislative and Parliamentary seats by the outsiders. So, this did not make any difference to the ethnic groups in question. Herein, came the issues of equitable distribution of resources, the role of governance by the nation-state, and the provision of basic needs as rights. Good governance must have a system of protection of democratic and human rights for the marginalized groups. The principle of democratic freedom could enable development of the institution of grievance redressal mechanisms, which were completely lacking in the region. These issues were taken up by the extremist groups under the leadership of the Maoist activists who were operating in these regions since 1990s. The Maoists were successful in building up a strong movement, often very violent in nature though, in Junglemahal area involving tribal and other disadvantaged people. To counter this movement, the then State administration adopted 'counter-insurgency' measures with active support from the Union Government. This resulted in increasing arms conflict between the two embattling forces, which took away lives of hundreds of tribal and other disadvantaged people across the Junglemahal area.

The extremist groups' mode of operation in building up a support base has several phases⁴ as observed in Junglemahal area: (i) formative (1996 – 2000), (ii) organizational (demonstrative phase, 2001 - 2007), (iii)

arms struggle (2008 - 2009), and (iv) terror operation (2009 – 2010). During the formative phase, the Maoists prepared the ground work for the movement by establishing social network and rationale for the movement. Their activism centered round various pro-people agenda such as raising questions on people's poverty and misery under the neo-liberal policy of the state, achieving higher price for *babui* rope and *kendu* leaves from the middlemen/agents, fighting for the causes of the tribal and other disadvantaged people, resisting political interference in the social life of the tribals and other disadvantaged people, encouraging women to resist violence from their drunken husbands, and eliminating gambling in rural fair or other social events. These activities were appreciated by the tribal and other rural people of Junglemahal. The second phase, i.e., the organizational phase was demonstrative in nature. During this phase, the Maoists were trying to take control of the area having political leaders and administrative staff under pressure. Their dominant agenda included elimination of strongholds of big landholders and contractors who were mostly shadow-actors of political leaders in power, protection of locals from harassment of police and forest officials, and attempt to eliminate political patronage. During this phase, the Maoists got popular support from the disadvantaged people. The third phase was marked by arms struggle. This phase witnessed the Maoists in authority with appreciable absence of the state administration. The leaders of the ruling and other major political parties abandoned the area. The activism emphasized upon mass mobilization programmes including rallies at night, attempt to confiscate and redistribute land of big landholders particularly political leaders, targeting ration-shops and owners appointed for public distribution system of food grains, who were accused of siphoning off food grains for sale in black market, and demolishing CPI (M) party offices and their leaders' houses, who were in power at that time. During this phase too, the Maoists received popular support. The fourth and final phase involved direct arms conflict with state forces, i.e., the counter-insurgency forces deployed to regain control over the area. This phase exhibited activities like setting up of *ganaadaalat* (people's court) to deliver instant justice, organizing night rallies, compelling each and every family to take part in rallies, extortion of money by the/in the name of Maoists, kidnapping, increasing cases of forced disappearance, killing spree usually of poor men (including the tribals), and discrediting independent tribal movement which originated at Chhotapelia in Jhargram (the erstwhile PaschimMedinipur) district in protest against police atrocities on tribal women in particular. The Maoist activists were found taking decisions on behalf of the

tribals. The people who were helping them hitherto became traumatized on finding out their own men being killed in the conflict and tried to keep themselves out of the activism. The joint forces deployed in the area came with all-out attack on the Maoists in this phase and, at the same time, offered protection to the local tribal and other disadvantaged groups. The operation was termed the *Operation Green Haunt*. The (new) State Government simultaneously came forward by 2011 with rehabilitation package to the Maoist activists on condition of surrender with arms. It was reported that a number of activists were killed by the counter-insurgency forces and many of them surrendered themselves before the security forces. As a result, the Maoist movement became gradually weaker in Junglemahal area of West Bengal.

The Maoist extremism achieved rapid success in some areas along the red corridor or tasted bitterness of failure in other areas. There were varied reasons behind their success or failure in different areas along the red corridor as substantiated in a number of studies by others and by me earlier (Ghosh 1974; Banerjee 1980; Sinha 1989, S.B. Singh 2005; Gomes 2012; Midya *et al.* 2012; Midya 2012, 2014a, 2015a). The objective of the counter-insurgency measures was 'to clear, hold and build'. In addition to deploying the central forces, the concerned states were also found engage hired goons to finish the Maoists without giving due attention to the issue of social exclusion of the disadvantaged ethnic groups and underdevelopment of the concerned area. For instance, Chhattisgarh government promoted *SalwaJudum* (meaning purification haunt) and recruited Special Police Officers (SPO) from amongst the local people. In Junglemahal of West Bengal youth assailants were hired to kill the Maoists. Such retaliatory activities only increased the rivalry and the resultant death of disadvantaged people in majority. Sometimes these retaliatory measures were misused. For example, in Chhattisgarh, the Salwa Judum helped the mining companies and politicians to take away the mineral resources of the state (Miklian 2009). The hired assailants in West Bengal were utilized to kill the political rivals and also engage in extortion of money from common people in the name of Maoists or in pretention of giving protection from the Maoists.

There are various factors behind growth of extremism. The most prominent factor that has been highlighted by many scholars is the socio-economic disparity or inequality (Paige 1975; Nagel 1976; Midlarsky 1981, 1982; Midlarsky and Roberts 1985; Muller 1985, 1986; Muller and Seligson 1987). In Kondeamodal in East Godavari, indebtedness of the tribals and their exploitation by the money lenders was the vibrant issue (Sinha 1989). Poverty and land alienation among the tribals had been the major issue of the Naxalite movement in Srikakulum district of

Andhra Pradesh (Banerji 2010). For Ramchandra Guha (2007), the Scheduled Tribes in India are in fact one of the worst economically performing groups and hence exclusion of the Scheduled Tribes from the growth of mainstream India is one of the key driving forces behind the Maoist movement. In Bihar the, Maoists achieved support of the *Dalits* by backing the latter's struggle against higher castes for better wages and dignity (S.B. Singh 2005; Kunnath 2006). The tribals in Khandadhar district of Odisha came forward to support Maoists in order to save their territory from being grabbed by the POSCO, a South Korean company. In Chhattisgarh, the Maoists achieved strong support from the tribal and other marginalised people who were struggling to protect their land and mineral resources of the region from the mining agencies. That is why Gautam Navlakha argues that the Maoist movement is a people's rebellion for protecting their traditional natural resources from the onslaught of the neo-liberal policy (Navlakha 2010). Maoist extremism is also seen by many as 'intellectually driven' since the middle class elites are motivated to fulfill their 'revolutionary fantasies' (Shah 2006; Shah and Pettigrew 2009; Nigam 2010; Simeon 2010). In an empirical study, Gomes (2012) demonstrates that the Maoist conflict in India is the outcome of grievances arising out of the feeling of exclusion of various forms.

For Chomsky, the issue of arms struggle is entirely contextual and must "meet the minimum moral standards" (Chomsky 2010). The growth of extremist movement appears to be the result of compound effect of various factors such as favourable geophysical setting along the red corridor, poverty, inequality in distribution of resources, illiteracy, lack of communication, poor or absence of governance, and the resultant overall condition of social exclusion. The social exclusion generated the feeling of deprivation and alienation from the broader framework of welfare agenda. Such sentiments have been successfully utilized by the subversive activists operating along the Red Corridor in India. Though the Naxalites and/or Maoists have been active across the Red Corridor since 1940s, but in the West Bengal segment of the corridor their presence was noticed during the 1990s. They were undertaking various pro-people programmes in order to achieve support of the tribal and disadvantaged people of the region and trying to unite the disadvantaged groups on the issue of deprivation and economic marginalization by the Indian State. Their nature of activities and the growth of the movement had already been reported in our earlier studies (Midya *et al.* 2012; Midya, 2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2015a). Out of the four villages studied, Bhimarjun and Bhumij Dhansola were more affected in comparison to Amlatora and Sangram. The ethnic groups of Bhimarjun and Bhumij Dhansola were inspired more by the Maoist

activists. There was more involvement with extremist activities, with the nature of violence being more severe. The number of local activists who took part in the violent activities was higher. Incidences of *ganaadalat* held were very frequent in these two villages. It became easier for the extremist groups to interact and involve the people of these villages since these villages were in isolation and excluded from the larger socio-economic network. So it appeared that the more social exclusion the ethnic groups witnessed, they were likely to be vulnerable to extremist activities.

The tribal groups in Junglemahal showed a unique social phenomenon with regard to maintenance of their ethnic boundary. The tribal groups witnessed extreme violence perpetrated upon them both by the Maoists and the counter-insurgency forces. They became traumatized witnessing the killings of their own men in the violent conflict. A survival strategy was found to generate amongst them within their social process. It involved efforts to consolidate their ethnic identity in the region and resist extremist influences. The collective identities always involved certain categorization made by social actors that were, according to Fredrik Barth, either acknowledged or rejected by others (Barth 2000: 34). This categorization determined the scheme of inclusiveness of social phenomena, which were reinforced by and were expressed through their social or religious practices. For instance, there was a renewed emphasis upon ritual actions associated with different phases of life or those attached to the sacred groves in the area (e.g., the Santals' *Jaher* or the Bhumij' *Sarna*). The social practices had positive reinforcement in favour of regenerating identity consolidation of the respective ethnic groups, which was appreciable at that time. This social phenomenon acted toward dissemination of the larger boundary that was encompassing a number of ethnic groups (e.g., the Santals, Bhumij or others including non-tribal groups) during the peak moments of the violent movement at Junglemahal. It was in turn qualifying for weakening the movement led by the extremist activists in the region.

Conclusion

Various ethnic groups in India have always been treated differentially by the nation-state. This approach has its own drawback and consequences. Though it aims at fulfilling differential needs and aspirations of diverse ethnic groups in the country, it had at the same time inherent potential to generate ethnic conflict amongst the engaging groups. The latter might be exploited by the extremist forces in India as found in the North-East region, the Red Corridor, Jammu & Kashmir.

In the Junglemahal region, as also across the Red Corridor, the political extremism has been posing great threat to the internal security of the Indian nation-state. The extremists under the leadership of the Maoists have been fighting in order to seize the State power and to create liberated zones through 'the barrel of a gun'. In more than one-third districts out of 634 districts in India the Maoists had strong influence. But they were very active particularly along the territory of the Red Corridor. In Junglemahal of West Bengal extremist violence was the culmination of arms conflict between the Maoists and the 'counter-insurgency' forces of the state. The ethnic groups who were facing extreme social exclusion were more susceptible to extremist activity as found in the present study. At the same time, they were also showing a trend to develop societal mechanism of their own in order to strengthen ethnic consolidation of individual ethnic group within the context of violent conflict between the extremist groups who were striving to grab the state power through the power of gun, on the one hand, and the counter-insurgency forces who were deployed by the nation-state to keep the area under control, on the other. It was further found that as the ethnic elements of the engaging ethnic groups increased, the possibility of their detachment from the extremist activities also increased. The growth and decline of violent extremism in Junglemahal area is indeed very much contextual.

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Notes

1. The wide area spanning across Indian territory from south to north through the states of Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Chattisgarh, Odisha, West Bengal, Jharkhand and Bihar and beyond up to Nepal).
2. In the *Aims and Objectives* of the Constitution of the CPI (Maoist) it is stated that, "the ultimate aim of the party is to bring about communism by continuing the revolution under the leadership of the proletariat and thus abolishing the system of exploitation of man by man from the face of the earth..." Retrieved from www.satp.org on July 9, 2012.
3. An ethnic group here simply means, as Fredrik Barth observes, a population which is biologically self-perpetuating, shares fundamental cultural values, makes up a field of communication and interaction, and has a membership which identifies itself and is identified by

others as a distinct group (Barth 1969:10). Sociologist A.D. Smith defines an ethnic group in terms of six features: a common proper name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, or shared memories of a common past or pasts, one or more elements of common culture, a link with a homeland, and a sense of solidarity (Smith 1986: Ch. 2). There are other definitions with significant connotations also (e.g., Handelman 1977; Schermerhorn 1978: 12; Van den Berghe 1981; Brass 1985; R. Cohen 1994).

4. This has been reported in one of my previous studies (Midya 2014b)

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