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# **Imagined Wounds**

The False Grievance behind  
India's Maoist Movement

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## Abstract

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*Indian Maoism – or Naxalism as it has come to be called – is the largest terrorist movement in India today. Built upon layers of political, social and economic grievance, it is an insurgency that has gripped the country since independence. However, although Maoism may have had its origins fighting against injustice, it has since evolved into a predatory movement, with a malleable attachment to ideology; a movement that pursues violence for its own sake, is happy to self-cannibalise dissenting elements, and often actively works against the interests of the communities it claims to be fighting for.*



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## India's Maoist Movement

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There is a strange terrorist movement in the jungles of Eastern India. Indian Maoism – or Naxalism as it has come to be called – appears as an odd and frozen-in-time threat to national security. But with between 10,000 to 20,000 heavily armed combatants (Morrison 2012: 54) – or “*hard-core underground cadre*” as they were once described by India's Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) (Chakravarti 2009) – and responsible for several thousand deaths across the last decade alone, Maoism is the largest terrorist movement inside India today.

Operating in the ‘Red Corridor’ – a strip of land that stretches from the Chinese border in India's Northeast, down to the Southern-most point of Kerala (an area comprising a third of India's geographical territory) – Indian Maoism is older than India itself. Following the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857, the brutal British suppression that followed, and the move from East India Company rule to ‘Crown rule’; and following a series of subsequent decentralising measures, the Indian independence movement – though still simmering away – was largely pacified. When it finally came, the great spark for independence was not delivered by any of India's long revered statesmen – Jawaharlal Nehru, MK (Mahatma) Gandhi or BR Ambedkar – but from the now happily forgotten pioneer of India's communist movement, Manabendra Nath Roy. Roy's public – and personally risky – call for ‘radical democratisation’ (Nath: Acc 2016) in 1934, not only placed India back firmly on the path to independence, but also offered a pre-echo of the Maoist direction that Indian communism would eventually take.

In the 1940s, the Telangana movement in Andhra Pradesh and the Tebhaga movement in Bengal brought Indian communism to life as local peasants and farmers rose up against landlords in a fight for long denied basic rights. Yet with independence in 1947, such grievances were funnelled into a hope that the Indian state would bring a new prosperity and social dynamic. And with communist influence reaching deep into both the minds of the founding fathers, as well as the language of the founding documents of the country (“*Socialism*” is one of the four core constitutional pillars of India), much of these grievances were soothed into mainstream politics. That was until Naxalbari.

Independence is never the magic bullet that people imagine it to be; the failures of Indian social life maintained, and in many ways deepened following the British withdrawal. Now disillusioned with the false promise that an independent homeland would bring, and still suffering under a

situation akin to medieval serfdom – whereby the landless workers, tied to landowning elite in ways similar to that of property, would be forced to toil the land and then relinquish upward of 95 per cent of all profits to the landowners – resentment steadily built its way back to boiling point, and back into the arms of communism.

In 1967, in a small and largely insignificant region of West Bengal called Naxalbari, a series of isolated peasant revolts eventually found their combustible moment. Minor clashes between peasants and landlords (with police forces supporting the latter) had been running in Naxalbari for years as local farming collectives began self-demarcating sections of land for common production and refusing to harvest seeded crops as a form of protest. After a local peasant, Bigul Kisan, was savagely beaten by security forces at the instruction of a local landowner, the residents of the Naxalbari villages armed themselves with rudimentary weapons – spears, bows, arrows and farm tools – and escalated their grievances to the level of terrorism and insurgency. Following an overreaction from security forces that resulted in the murder of nine women and children, the creation of kangaroo courts to convict the villages, and the sealing of the entire district following thousands of arrests and police beatings, the movement caught national attention (Revolutionary Publications: Acc 2016).

Almost immediately, banners went up on the streets West Bengal's capital Calcutta, proclaiming *“Murderer Ajoy Mukherjee must resign,”* in reference to the chief minister. China then welcomed the uprising with a radio broadcast: *“A phase of peasants’ armed struggle led by the revolutionaries of the Indian Communist Party has been set up in the countryside in Darjeeling district of West Bengal state of India. This is the front paw of the revolutionary armed struggle launched by the Indian people.”* And in the weeks following the Naxalbari uprisings, Charu Majumdar, soon to become the key author of the movement, and writer of the now ubiquitous Maoist hand-guides known as the ‘History Eight Documents’, sent out a sustaining signal fire by announcing that *“Hundreds of Naxalbaris are smouldering in India... Naxalbari has not died and will never die”* (Revolutionary Publications: Acc 2016) (Chakravarti 2009).

Naxalbari and the related peasant uprisings in the 1960s and 1970s constituted the first of four distinct phases of Maoism in India. The second phase, in the 1980s, saw both an ideological entrenchment within the movement and an internal fracturing between competing Maoist factions. In the 1990s, the third phase involved fast evolution into a broad-scale insurgency, with established strongholds in various parts of the country. The fourth, and current, phase is



where the Communist Party of India CPI(Maoist) has gained dominance over rival factions, and become the figure head for Maoism in India (Chakravarti 2009).

The footnote 'Maoist' in the 'CPI(Maoist)' party is important. Other CPI parties include 'L = Leninist', 'M = Marxist', 'ML=Marxist and Leninist', and 'MLM= Marxist, Leninist and Maoist'; and this is just a fraction of a much larger and much more diverse cross-section of highly visible, and in many ways highly successful, Maoist political parties at the national, state and regional levels. On the ground, CPI(Maoist) shares similarities with international resistance movements such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN-Maoist) (responsible for the collapse of the Nepalese monarchy). Their closest cousins however, are the Senderistas in Peru, who offer an almost perfect mirror for CPI (Maoist) in terms of philosophy, practice, structure and policy – particularly the individualistic, militarised targeting strategy known as 'hammer the countryside' (Mukherji 2012: 233). However the Indian government, in an open attempt to shift public sympathies, prefers to make allusions comparing CPI (Maoist) to the wilful and wonton violence of the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda.

In ideological terms, Maoism, due to its uniquely Chinese origins, might seem a slightly jingoistic form of Communism to embrace. Yet there are 100 separate Maoist movements operating in the world today, and none inside the Chinese mainland – revolutionary Maoism is now an export only ideology; and of these movements, none are comparable in size or influence to India's Maoist insurgency (Mukherji 2012: 3). Maoism moves away from traditional Marxism that sees a certain stage of capitalist development and production as an inevitable trigger for revolution as sections of society are forced into conflict by their differing relationships to that production. In China however, Mao Zedong, the founder of the People's Republic of China, realised that waiting for a level of industrialisation to be met before launching a revolution would delay Communism taking hold in China by decades, even centuries. Recognising a weakness in relying upon industrial workers alone, instead focussing on farming peasants as the critical mass of the revolution, and advocating a broader social revolution involving a 'worker-peasant alliance', or "*United Front Theory*" (Katoch 2015), Mao adapted Communism to Chinese conditions.

These conditions translate neatly across the Indian border. Emancipative ideologies need to be easily contextualised into the everyday experiences of its target audience, and Maoism, largely indistinguishable and unchanged from the original ideology of Mao Zedong, manages to do this for the Indian milieu. This is a consciously puritanical ideology that dismisses Communist shifts in the post-Mao era as 'revisionist', including changes in Chinese ideology and social order. For example, Indian Maoism strangely still seeks to align itself with Stalinism because Mao did so whilst alive, even though he did so largely for political considerations (Mukherji 2012: 232). In practice, "*Maoism post-Mao is almost identical to Leninism post-Lenin*" (Lea-Henry 2016).

For India's Maoists, elections, though always dismissed as a sham due to their failure to address the basic needs of the country, can, and indeed ought to be, contested. But then only as a temporary measure allowing for control of the country to be seized and a communist society implemented. Failing this, boycotts and then armed struggle ought to be used to overthrow an Indian government that the Maoists see as 'autocratic' and 'reactionary'. This "*new democratic*" structure (Mukherji 2012: 2) would overthrow both feudalism and imperialism simultaneously, under a democratic leadership of the Proletariat – a workers' paradise (Katoch 2015). And of course, the hope is that following the standard set by this Maoist government, communism would spread throughout the world in true internationalist fashion. And the Indian Maoists certainly play the part well. From the outside, all the right language, gestures and pronouncements are there.

On camera the Indian Maoists still speak, if slightly atavistically, in precise communist clichés, referencing 'class enemies', the 'bourgeoisie', the 'inevitability of history', and often make use of Mao Zedong's own unique propaganda epitaph: the "*red sun in our hearts.*" Maoists are still seen greeting each other by raising fists into the air (palm facing forward) in 'Red Salutes', and when they target missionaries and other religious sites, they can be relied upon to justify it by regurgitating Karl Marx from his 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right': religion is "*the opium of the people.*" Whilst leaders of the movement, such as the now imprisoned Sabyasachi Panda, who once occupied India's 'most wanted list' (DNA India 2014) attract iconographic labels such as 'India's Che Guevara' (Pandita 2012).

Though, as tends to be the case, Maoism is a movement that is reported-on much more in terms of its violence than of its ideology. Most mainstream Maoist parties in India have underground military wings, which then fracture into ever smaller and less centralised militias,

most significant of which is the CPI (Maoist)'s underground wing, the People's Liberation Army. This compartmentalisation allows for a legal separation between political party and political violence.

Maoist groups have amassed significant arsenals of weapons over the years, including military grade light arms, rocket launchers and landmines, which, in a lesson learnt from the LTTE, have been deployed across large swaths of land in order to cripple government offensives (Chakravarti 2009). A now infamous example of this involves a government attempt to produce a land survey of the forests in Chattisgarh's Narayanpur district. The governor, realising the extent of Maoist activities in his state, exclaimed, *"the surveyors could not move even 2-3kms inside the region because it was mined extensively in concentric circles and remains to be that way even today"* (Mukherji 2012: 234).

The military capabilities of the Maoists were further highlighted in 2003, when the convoy carrying the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, N. Chandrababu Naidu, was attacked as he travelled through the southern temple town of Tirupati. Amazingly, Naidu managed to escape the attack with only superficial injuries despite being blown clear from his vehicle; but it was only afterwards that the full extent of the ambush came to be understood – the Maoists had used nine military grade claymore mines in the attack (the type of advanced weaponry that local security forces could only dream of) (Chakravarti 2009). Naidu's successor, Y.S.R. Reddy, immediately set about initiating peace talks in order to placate further violence from an obviously well-armed enemy (these broke down in 2005).

Access to arms has traditionally not been a problem for the Maoists. Either by raiding military and police facilities, or by illicit international imports, the Maoists have tended to be one of the better armed terror groups in the world – with a long obscure history that has involved events as strange as the Purulia arms drop in 1995, when a large and unclaimed cache of arms landed in a field in the dead of the night in West Bengal; delivered, it seems, from a Latvian aircraft, whose crew refused to cooperate with investigations nor shed any light on the purpose of the drop. Without any link to who financed the operation, it has since been assumed that the arms were either destined for the local Maoists, or possibly the fascistic, extreme right-wing, and explicitly anti-Maoist organisation, the Ananda Marga (Lea-Henry 2016).





Following the Tirupati attack, the chief ministerial transport in Andhra Pradesh was upgraded with military grade Kevlar and 'tank' modifications (Chakravarti 2009), yet the home minister of Telangana (then a newly separated state from Andhra Pradesh) sought to do what countless other politicians have over the years, and downplay the Maoist threat, announcing that there were no Maoists in his state (DNA India 2014). In response, and highlighting the reach and audacity of the movement, the Maoists sent a near instantaneous message of their own by kidnapping six influential leaders of the Telangana Rashtra Samithi Party (TRS). The threat posed by the Maoists was best explained by former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh when he described the movement as *"the single biggest internal-security challenge ever faced by our country"* (Kennedy 2014).



## The Maoist Grievance Narrative

The success of the Maoist movement in India hinges upon grievance. Maoism separates the world into spheres of oppressed and oppressor, victim and perpetrator, prey and predator. It is not enough to draw a picture of an ideal society. It must also be drawn in contrast to the real world suffering of everyday citizens. This is a reality that has been recognised in detail by the Indian government in the 2008 Planning Commission Report, as well as by the then President of the Indian National Congress party, Sonia Gandhi, who acknowledged that *“The Naxal problem is not a mere law and order problem”* (PTI 2014). And lamenting the fertile ground on which to find grievance – social, political and economic –in modern India, V.P. Singh, the country's seventh Prime Minister, once publically complained *“What is stopping the youth of our country from becoming Maoists”* (Chakravarti 2009).

India is a country where 750 million people still live in villages. Mahatma Gandhi, at independence saw this as a good thing in a letter he wrote to India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, in which he said, *“I am convinced that if India is to attain true freedom, and through India the world also, sooner or later the fact must be recognised that people will have to live in villages, not towns; in huts, not in palaces.”* However – temporarily ignoring the dire economic implications of such a vision – the chief framer of the constitution, and member of the ‘untouchable’ caste (now ‘Dalit’ – a term literally meaning ‘oppressed’), BR Ambedkar, attacked Gandhi for the patronising indifference he was showing toward the social conditions, namely the harm caused by the caste system, that village life represented for people like himself, stating that *“The love of the intellectual Indian for the village community is of course infinite, if not pathetic... What is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow mindedness and communalism?”*

Ambedkar hoped that democracy and constitutional protections, if unrestricted by the misplaced sentimentality of people such as Gandhi, would destroy the entire caste system. Yet in the years since independence, if anything the role of caste has deepened inside Indian society; and the onset of democracy has been largely responsible for this, as voting along caste lines has further entrenched caste divisions (Sankaran 2013). In response, the Maoists

have promised to address this, and other long lingering social harms, via the imposed equality of a communist society. This would, they claim, eradicate all issues of caste, just as it would improve the still second class status of many Indian women, and offer a defence against the concerns of local populations regarding religious conversions from both local and international missionaries; as well as any other social concerns that the Indian democracy is currently failing to address.

Politically, the vein of potential grievance for the disenfranchised sections of Indian society is running strong. Corruption, dysfunction, nepotism, and open fraud (such as the practice of 'vote banking' where community leaders vote *en masse* for whole villages), are not just tolerated, but have become widely accepted cultural norms. This has naturally spread from politics to entrance examinations for education institutions and to the hiring processes of many professions. Just as many government initiatives, such as 'reservations' for underprivileged groups, and welfare programs, have been undermined by this corrosive culture (it has been estimated that 40 per cent of all holders of 'Below Poverty Line' cards don't satisfy the qualifying category). When asked about this problem, former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi famously dismissed concerns by saying, "*What can you do about it? It is a global phenomenon.*"

Beyond the obvious disillusionment with the government's role, the effects of such ingrained corruption produces an institutional, downstream damage that incentivises violent seizures of government as well as authoritarian government behaviour such as the Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act (Pogge 2008: 29) (Pogge 2010: 45-46). Add to this the impact of the loss of substantial tax revenue, the damaging of the business environment and the loss of spending on welfare and development programs. Statistically, violent movements and insurgencies almost universally occur in situations of state weakness (Ulfelder 2012), in times of repressive government (Bellamy 2011: 97), and with deficiencies in genuine political representation (Pogge 2010: 41).

But it is in terms of economic harm that Maoism holds its strongest theoretical and practical resonance.

Following independence, unchecked by the handbrake of British economic extraction, India was expected to shake off the poverty and underdevelopment that had characterised the country up until that point. Yet from 1950 to 1980, and based largely on Nehru's dream of a



socialist, protectionist, closed Indian market, the economy grew at an unbelievably low rate of 3.2 percent; with the real growth figure reaching only 1 percent after adjustments were made for population growth. A period of relative economic stagnation that came to be derogatorily called the 'Hindu rate of growth' (Siva 2013).

This economic failure was brought to a head in 1991 as India teetered on the edge of bankruptcy. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) was forced to step in, and with the stewardship of the then Finance Minister Manmohan Singh, a series of wide sweeping liberalising reforms were imposed (Anand 2014), and the economy jumped towards 7 percent; and today sits as the world's fastest growing major economy (Chen 2016). During this time, oddly neglected primary resources were invested in, with the sector established as a key driver for India's new development strategy (FICCI 2013).

These two countervailing cycles of development have produced a layering of grievance. Firstly, despite the promises of Nehru's India – along with constitutional sureties of 'welfare', 'equality', and 'socialism' – the country, riddled by cultures of corruption, nepotism, fraud and bureaucratisation, failed to supply even a fraction of the prosperity that was promised. Secondly, despite the neo-liberal transformation in 1991 and the corresponding increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and basic living standards, these improvements were extremely unequal. Since 1991, living standards have not statistically improved, in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP), for the bottom 300 million Indians. Three quarters of the country are without access to basic sanitation or clean drinking water. Half of all Indian children satisfy the categories of 'malnourished' or 'undernourished' (Lea-Henry 2016a), and nearly 30 percent of the total population still live below the poverty line -a situation that economist Utsa Patnaik famously described as the "*republic of hunger*" (Patnaik 2004); very little economic benefit has so far trickled down from the top (Bakshi 2009).

This rising inequality might have been grievance enough, but it also came on the back of a sudden stripping away of protections, loss of land, economic exclusion and a perception of a hurried state indifference to the suffering of its own population. Rather than falling, unemployment has risen whilst development has soared; farmer suicides have skyrocketed following the abrupt loss of subsidies; cottage industries have been crushed following an influx of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI); and basic infrastructure in large portions of the country, such as schools, hospitals, power plants, transportation and irrigation, remains almost entirely

absent. Effectively, despite significant improvement in economic output, significant sections of India remain marginalised, and their human rights unfulfilled, by incompetent and erratic government-led development policies (Kujur 2006).

These economic disparities and social challenges statistically overlap with increased support for, and the presence of, Maoism. The Supreme Court of India has thrown its support behind this connection by blaming uneven development for the rise and success of Maoism (Morrison 2012: 64). At the 2006 Chief Ministers' Conference on Internal Security, a *"walk on two legs"* response was advocated for countering Maoism that involved development solutions to match military engagement (Bakshi 2009: 32-33). And in Odisha, when Maoist leader Sabyasachi Panda was still evading capture, the deputy opposition leader explained Panda's high level of community support as being the *"voice of 57 percent in Odisha, who have only 12 rupees to spend per day"* (Pandita 2012).

The creation of relative deprivation, particularly when it occurs at times of heightened expectations that are subsequently left unfulfilled, or reversed by sharp failures, produces a category of grievance (leading to violence) that has a long, well explained theoretical foundation (Jacoby 2008: 103-123). The presence of significant economic improvements and material wellbeing, tend to manifest as a bulwark – or *"financial cushion"* (Collier, et.al. 2003: 122) – against the rise of violence, terrorism and insurgency. The rise of significant conflict in regions around the world – such as Sierra Leone (Bellamy 2011: 107), Ethiopia (Ignatieff 1999: 16), Bangladesh (Bellamy 2011: 98), Rwanda (Weiss & Collins 2000: 100), Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua (Weiss & Collins 2000: 72) – can be, at least in part, causally linked back to entrenchments of underdevelopment, economic stagnation and poverty.

A wide ranging study of over 50 countries over a 40 year period found that the chances of any given developing country falling into insurgency and large scale communal violence would be reduced by 1 percent for every corresponding 1 percent increase in economic growth (Collier, et.al. 2003: 58). In a similar fashion, increases in youth opportunities and employment help to immunise societies from the rise of such internal grievance and related violence (Collier, et.al. 2003:62-63). Such links led the then- UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, to acknowledge that *"Every step taken towards reducing poverty and achieving broad-based economic growth is a step toward conflict prevention"* (ICISS 2001: 3.19). In line with this understanding, Maoism is largely absent from regions of higher economic development (Morrison 2012: 58), and is



isolated both to areas of relative underdevelopment (Kujur 2006) and areas performing badly on human development indices (Chandra 2013).

The roles of land and natural resources in modern India offer an extra dimension for Maoist grievance. The extraction of primary resources, the mining sector in general, and mineral development has become a significant growth engine of India's economy. The development of traditional energy sectors such as oil, gas, coal and now nuclear, have been pursued to brake dependency on foreign imports. Just as mineral extraction and refinement has been geared-up, and targeted towards producing a foundation that future GDP growth can be built upon. Assisting in the development of India's strangely neglected manufacturing sector, this type of primary resource development appears to stand in the country's national interest with an estimated US\$1 trillion worth of mineable resources still unexplored in the Maoist Red Corridor alone (Lea-Henry 2016a).

For example, the underdeveloped and Maoist stronghold of Odisha, holds 99 percent of India's chromate ore, 92 percent of its nickel, 66 percent of bauxite, 65 percent of pyrophyllite, 65 percent of graphite, 32 percent of manganese, 28 percent of iron ore, and importantly 24 percent of all national coal reserves (Kujur 2006). Domestic and international capital has rushed to this new epicentre of Indian development, with large multinational companies such as Rio Tinto and BHP-Billiton competing for extraction, refinement and manufacturing rights. The rights to well over 1000 million tonnes of bauxite have been acquired by such companies already. Yet this just helps amplify local grievances, as residents of Odisha compare the wealth coming out of their land with failing social conditions where – according to the Indian Planning Commission – only 63 percent of the population are literate, where 50 percent of people exist below the poverty line, infant mortality rates remain one of the highest in the country, reliable electrification is absent, and thousands of people die each year from easily preventable and/or treatable diseases.

To make matters worse, the rising business considerations in such areas of the country have been privileged above considerations of the rights and desires of local populations. Fighting for investors, local and state governments have often handed out overly generous concessions. For example, across India's mineral belt, the rights to high value resources such as coal, iron ore and bauxite, have been sold to private companies at rates so low that in some cases only 60 cents in royalties return to government coffers for every US\$100 of profit. Similarly, designed for purpose regulation has allowed companies, such as with the Indian Tobacco



Company in Andhra Pradesh, to privatise areas of forest as third parties to government deals (under the Joint Forestry Management programme).

Such a single-minded focus has often produced unchecked environmental degradation, and an over-incentivising of non-labour intensive industries and 'upstream' development projects such as timber and mineral extraction that offer significant national development benefits but largely ignore the needs of the region in question. Inadequate local consultation, corruption and poor regulatory environments where governments and businesses are able to openly skirt laws and local rights have created a situation in which certain communities have come to see development not as a solution to their problems, but as a cause – what the Maoists call “*oppressive capitalism*” (Morrison 2012: 57).

An extreme form of this has been felt in terms of forced displacements, or the surreptitious redistricting of land as a means of avoiding compensation obligations all together; this itself playing on an existing historical grievance from independence when only 5 percent of land was redistributed back to the people who lived on it and worked it, as opposed to 90 per cent in neighbouring China (Morrison 2012: 60). It is therefore unsurprising that Maoist sympathies have tended to congregate around mining activities, areas of resource extraction, and sites of new development (particularly in the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Odisha) (Kujur 2006); and have led to prominent public figures such as Arundhati Roy talking up the Maoists' Robin Hood credentials by describing them as “*Gandhians with a Gun.*”

And once again there is a significant body of theory to support this understanding of environmental degradation, loss of land, and resource extraction as constituting a grievance leading to violence. A 1998 UN Secretary General report on achieving sustainable peace highlighted “*exploitation of natural resources*” as a constantly forming barrier to the protection of human rights and the maintenance of peace (United Nations 2006). A 2005 report by the UN Security Council recognised the link between inflows of light arms leading to insurgency and the exploitation of natural resources (United Nations 2006). The more reliant a country becomes on natural resource extraction, the more likely they are to fall into civil war and internal conflict (Collier, et.al. 2003: 58) (Goodhand 2001: 26-27); this is largely due to the incentives that such wealth presents current and future governments (Pogge 2005: 72). Neatly matching this understanding, mining activity in India is a strong predictor of Maoist violence

(Hoelscher & Miklian & Vadlamannati 2012), just as have been losses of traditional land and farmable agricultural land (Vanden Eynde & Hansen-Lewis & Wrightz & Shapirox 2015).

The final core element comprising Maoist grievance involves India's tribal populations, or 'Adivasis' (translating to 'ancient inhabitants'). With 88 million people comprising over 500 separate tribal groups (Bakshi 2009), the Adivasis represent a significant demographic share of the Indian population. And while caste discrimination tends to dominate the imaginations of many Indians, tribal discrimination gathers far less attention despite a very similar history, and a very public airing of such bigotry by Mahatma Gandhi, who insisted on referring to the Adivasis by the derogatory term *Girijans* (meaning 'Hill People') (Mukherji 2012: 1). Rarely too far divorced from issues of caste discrimination (Morrison 2012: 61), the new Indian state inscribed specific constitutional protections for its 'scheduled tribes', as well as unique national, state and regional welfare provisions (including the reservation of educational and job placements). The defining distinction of the Adivasis is their attachment to specific geographical, historically significant, and largely forested, regions of the country (Bakshi 2009).

As such, the Adivasis represent a highly vulnerable part of society. The human development indices and economic growth rates for tribal regions lag well behind the national average (Morrison 2012: 60), and in an attempt to address such development challenges, and reverse this trend, successive governments have added immeasurably to the suffering of the Adivasis by dislocating them from their ancestral land. The national disconnect between the lives of urban and rural populations, is best encapsulated by the Adivasis. Much of the population displacement for mining activity has been felt by them as traditional forests have been cleared for development by predatory corporations and governments, who, due to an often absence of formal documentation, have tended to both seize Adivasi land, and also avoid any substantial compensation obligations (Morrison 2012: 59).

It is in these Adivasi communities that Maoism has often found its spiritual home. This has become such a close marriage of convenience that the very term 'Maoist' is regularly used mistakenly as a generic term for all Adivasi grievance and oppression -just as it is often mentioned by government ministers and media commentators that the Maoists and Adivasis are so intricately linked as to make a practical policy distinction between them impossible. The sad fact of this matter is that before the Maoists took up their fight, the plight and development challenges of the Adivasis were often happily ignored. Through collectivising their grievances





and channelling them into violence, Maoists gave the Adivasis certain legitimacy. Indeed the Indian government has itself acknowledged that new waves of public funding to tribal regions have been motivated by rises in Maoist activity in those areas of the country (Morrison 2012: 60).

## Imagined Wounds – The Reality on the Ground

The overall grievance narrative that the Indian Maoists employ can often appear overwhelmingly rich in both content and scope; and it often evades what ought to be legitimate criticism, largely because its understanding of grievance leading to violence is one that the Indian government has bought into as well. Indian government policy in regard to Maoist violence is too regularly drawn from simply following the logical trail that the Maoists have created for themselves, in their own ideological image. This involves:

1. Acknowledging the presence of violence
2. Accepting that such violence is the direct result of the grievance that the perpetrators espouse, no matter how superficial or incidental it may seem
3. Searching for statistical differences between demographic groups to support this grievance narrative
4. Imagining that the violence can be addressed simply by working towards closing this statistical gap

This is evidenced by the Planning Commission, which sees the solution to Maoist violence as a simple combination of addressing ‘high poverty’, ‘low education’, ‘political marginalisation’, ‘limited employment opportunities’, ‘social discrimination’, and ‘human rights violations’ (Planning commission 2008).

This however, makes the mistake (amongst others) of visualising a single category of recruits to the Maoist ranks: the harmed or oppressed individual. Yet even the most basic reading of the movement has to acknowledge the internal break in world views between this category of oppressed person seeking to fight injustice that they either witness or feel directly, the ‘*Instinctual Revolutionaries*’, and the solely ideologically motivated category of persons that comprise the inner sanctum of the movement, the ‘*Informed Revolutionaries*’ (Bhatia 2005).

Deeper analyses often split this perceived homogeneity even further, and in the process, offer more profound challenges to the movement’s claims to grievance based motivation. For instance, the dilution of Maoists into the following categories:

1. ‘Committed’
2. ‘Opportunists’



### 3. 'Drifters'

When analysed in this manner, it becomes apparent that the 'Drifter' category makes up the bulk of the Maoist ranks. Recruits of this category have no particular history of grievance or oppression. Rather they join the Maoist ranks for the "*promise of immediate power and adventure,*" as something offering meaning, fulfilment and excitement; this is a "*quasi-occupational*" form of membership. Following this, the second largest group within the Maoist movement are from the 'Opportunist' category - people who become members in order to further specific, carefully planned, personal agendas. For these highly transient members, the insurgency and the violence is merely a vessel through which they can achieve certain goals unrelated to Maoist ideology. This leaves a marginal role for the 'Committed' category of Maoist recruits (Chitralkha 2010).

These internal divisions have infected the everyday functioning of the movement. Communist movements have traditionally created an internal role for women, which is progressive in terms of social equality and liberating when compared to otherwise pervading social norms. The Maoists have naturally adopted just such a position, and have received significant numbers of women recruits either seeking to live in an egalitarian society as a matter of ideology, or as a means of escape from immediate oppressive customs, such as forced marriage, domestic servitude and domestic violence. However, once inside the Maoist ranks, this idealism tends to break down, with ex-members regularly reporting the same discriminatory treatment that they suffer outside the movement. Compounding this has been the largely unaddressed and happily ignored problem that has been inundating the movement for decades – that of rape, sexual abuse and sexual torture within jungle camps (Mishra 2010).

Similarly, the record of Maoist anti-exploitation ideology does not pass the entrance exam when it comes to the treatment of children. The Maoists have regularly sought the recruitment of child soldiers (Morrison 2012: 63), often between the ages of 6 and 12. With the promise of food, shelter, clothing, collective belonging, prestige and meaning; such children offer the added benefit of being more vulnerable, less questioning and more gullible than adult recruits. And once inside the movement, child members are invariably used as cannon fodder for the more risky jobs of bomb making, setting landmines, operating as lookouts, spying on police, and being the frontline in military raids (Mukherji 2012: 139).

Just as the vulnerability of children is useful both in their recruitment, and for their role inside the movement, the Maoist concern for caste discrimination often takes on a similarly ulterior dimension. Strong correlations exist between high densities of lower caste populations, and the presence of Maoist activity and violence (Hoelscher & Miklian & Vadlamannati 2012). Yet based on their own documentation, the Maoists have been actively seeking out under-educated and geographically isolated sections of society in their recruitment drives – the issue of caste is just an identity that happens to overlap with these characteristics. Such groups are just easier to sell exploitation to, just as they are easier to sell Maoism to as the bundled solution for their problems. In this regard, the Maoists have been desperately seeking to establish new presences in poorly educated regions of Gujarat, Meghalaya, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Kashmir (Morrison 2012: 56-59).

In the cases when core ideology has taken centre stage, and has been the driving force behind Maoist behaviour, it has also too often been the case that it has quickly turned malleable and counterproductive, as political calculations have washed clean the ideological foundations of their own actions. The targeting of missionaries – a core principle of Indian Maoism – is legitimated by the belief that religions constitute ‘exploiter ideologies’, playing on the fear and insecurities of the masses. To put aside the strange, and politically expedient, hypocrisy of largely focusing their anti-religious fervour toward the non-dominant, non-Hindu, faiths, a case in 2008 highlights just how loose this ideological principle has become.

Swami Lakshmanananda Saraswati, an 84 year old monk with a significant local following across Odisha, was ambushed and killed by 30 armed Maoists, along with three of his close followers (including a young child) (Two Circles 2008). Based on the religious nature of Saraswati – a leader of the Khond Varavasis, largely devoted to restoring certain parochial ancient traditions – the attack was originally thought to be a case of mistaken identity.

The Maoists had made no such error. Rather the assassination was undertaken with the Machiavellian hope that the shock and suffering of the attack would enrage dormant religious tensions (particularly with the local Christian population). This in turn would spark communal violence, which would then lead fearful populations into the Maoist ranks, in a desperate search for protection (World Watch Monitor 2008). Across the following month, the rumbling back-and-forth communal conflict resulted in 45 deaths, the destruction of 80 religious sites, the burning of 1400 homes, and the forced displacement into refugee camps of 18,500 villagers (Kumar & Timmons 2008). The nefarious intention of the killing – the attempt to stoke



grievance and suffering rather than offering an escape from it – only became apparent after the violence had died-off.

To further explain this malleable attachment to ideology, in a desperate search for allies, the Maoists have formed alliances with theocratic Islamist groups in states such as West Bengal. These have been alliances that the Maoists were all too happy to sell publicly, even espousing ideological sympathy. During a 2009 interview, Ganapathy (as he is mononymously known), the general secretary of CPI (Maoist), when asked to take a stand on Islamic terrorism explained that *“jihadist movements of today are a product of imperialist – particularly U.S. imperialist – aggression, intervention, bullying, exploitation and suppression... as part of their designs for global hegemony”* (Mukherji 2012: 233-234). He then went on to repeatedly bring the conversation back to ‘Zionist’ conspiracy theories. This, in conjunction with an embracement of the barbaric practice of beheading as a form of execution (often reserved for government informants) – a practice often also used by Islamist and Jihadist groups –the Maoists’, rather than seeing religion as an intrinsic problem, are often all too happy to marry themselves to religious groups, both in practice and in ideology.

These unsettling episodes in recent Maoist history touch upon another cultural emergence within the movement that has dragged it away from the grievances that it claims to stand up for. In reality the resources do not allow for it, but it is sold as a recruiting tool that every Maoist receives a gun upon joining. And while this in itself is not a problem – the Maoists after all are a terrorist organisation – the focus on the violent side of the movement has tended to take on a life of its own, both divorced from core ideology and self-fulfilling in its nature. The original violence associated with Maoism, where it was common for farming peasants to *“slit the throat of a landlord”* (Chitralkha 2010), tended to be proportionate to the stated goals of the movement. Violence drew attention to long accepted injustice, helped to build a national consciousness around that injustice, and spread fear only within very specific and targeted sections of the broader society. This was violence that ‘could’ build sympathy.

Today the violence of the Indian Maoists has taken on a much more indiscriminate and unprincipled dimension. Mines and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) are now widely used, offering a helpful form of defence against security forces for the Maoists that lay them; yet they are also just as likely to kill, maim or limit the ability to move freely of the local populations (the people for whom they claim to be fighting). And when conventional explosives are used, they



are increasingly done so against significant, headline-making, 'institutional targets'; ignoring the type of small scale, everyday grievance, that the Maoists' core constituency feel working on the land (Chitralkha 2010).

To further ratchet up the violence, the Maoists have developed and canonised cults of self-sacrifice and martyrdom for their cause. In this way, low ranking recruits are often considered more useful dead than alive if through their deaths they can extract a greater cost from their enemies – this touches on a trend whereby the Maoists feel no compunction in using their own members as cannon fodder, and justifying away the suffering of the people they claim to be fighting for (Morrison 2012: 63). Casualty data for the violence supports such a culture of operational disregard, with civilian deaths from Maoist violence significantly outweighing the deaths of both insurgents and security forces across the life of the Maoist movement. Of the 14,000-odd officially attributed deaths, well over half are civilian, with the other two groups balancing out almost equally for the remainder.

Extreme violence is now part of the movement's 'deep-culture' – a culture that is self-sustaining. A new branch of Maoist target – increasingly the most popular – has been military armouries and police stations; not for ideological purposes, but in the hope of seizing military grade armaments in order to sustain future violence. A now infamous attack in Nayagarh in 2008 stands as an example of just how divorced from purpose Maoist violence has become. The small coastal town was targeted solely for the large cache of weapons being held by security forces in the local armoury. Hundreds of Maoists converged in the middle of the night, and the weapons were easily seized without much opposition. The violence then took on a life of its own. The town's communication lines were destroyed, as was the power supply, and under the cover of darkness the residents were systematically terrorised until daybreak. Property was looted, and basic infrastructure vandalised beyond function; the town was under effective siege. Yet worse was to come, as fourteen local police officers were executed as part of a gruesome and gratuitous massacre (India Today 2008).

The modern Maoist movement feeds on an ever escalating, and self-perpetuating cycle of indiscriminate violence. Violence that, in its very increasing need to find targets, has spread to ideologically similar socialist organisations, to sympathetic elites, to both the local peasants and Adivasis for whom they claim to be fighting for; and as a final logical extension, back onto factional divisions within, challenges to authority from, and wavering members of, the Maoists themselves – a self-cannibalisation.



This is a foundational shift from fighting to abolish old structures of social domination, to instead seeking to replace those structures with their own form of authoritarianism, control and fear. Maoism is now a movement that spreads across the country more like a hostile invasion, than an insurgency built on legitimate grievance. One of the strongest predictors of a region's susceptibility for Maoism today, is simply the existence of Maoist violence in neighbouring districts (Lea-Henry 2016a).

In terms of political grievance, the Maoists seem on face value to have a legitimate driver for their cause. And certainly the presence of high levels of corruption is a strong indicator of a region's predisposition to Maoist violence. Yet unlike many other communist organisations, the Maoists are a political movement in themselves, fighting for elected office; and a relatively mainstream one at that. What's more, they mirror, and occasionally outdo, the political incompetence and unabashed self-interested behaviour of the broader political landscape. In nearly all practical ways, the Maoists now resemble the same political establishment that to which they justify their violence as a response. And this narrow desire for individual power has accelerated the infighting between Maoist political factions to comical levels, whereby new parties are formed, dissolved, splintered and ostracised so often that accurate information about the Maoist political landscape becomes outdated as each month goes by.

Corrupt political practices that were once a driving grievance behind the Maoist movement – such as the practice of 'vote banking', where village leaders seize the voter registrations of their communities and then vote *en masse* for the entire village after auctioning away that block of votes to the highest bidding politician – have now become key tools used by the Maoists themselves to achieve electoral success. This shows up in voting statistics, where the average national voter turnout is 65 per cent, but in Maoist controlled regions – regions that otherwise would expect to have lower turnouts based on the limitation of rural infrastructure, imperfect communications systems, and difficult terrain – this often reaches unnatural highs of 95 per cent. Similarly, the Maoists have gone down the rabbit hole so entirely in their fight, that even the most reasonable political request, such as a government's demand that peace negotiations involve Maoist groups disarming themselves voluntarily, have been rejected (Morrison 2012: 67).



Economic concerns are the centre of the Maoists' grievance nexus. And as explained, this takes the form of both underdevelopment and the anti-protectionist economic shock of the neo-liberal reforms post-1991. But what is missing for the latter of these two understandings of grievance leading to violence is just how unavoidable it is, and just what the alternative would be. The 1991 reforms were implemented because India was, after decades of socialism, on the brink of bankruptcy. Such reforms are never easy and always come with significant amounts of pain and dislocation. But just like a drug user being weaned off their addiction, the alternative would have been much worse. If India had tried to stick the course and resist liberalisation, millions more people would still remain in extreme poverty as GDP hovered at less than half the current rate; and the country would have defaulted, causing a significantly more violent economic shock than what was felt with the 1991 reforms.

This leads one to the other half of the Maoists' economic grievance equation – underdevelopment. As much as certain rural populations might feel betrayed by creeping inequality and a development story that has spread unevenly across the country, the imagined counterfactual possibility (perfectly even development) is just never the case, and the solution to this problem just cannot be a rejection of the free market. In our modern globalised economy, protectionism is a choice that governments can make, but it also by definition means that capital and investment will bypass your markets in favour of better conditions. To take an example internal to India, in West Bengal, a state originally designated to become a multinational corridor for investment, the failure of successive governments to provide adequate land and business conditions meant such companies simply shifted their operations south to Hyderabad. The growth of Hyderabad has not been without its problems in terms of inequality and the loss of traditional jobs, but when compared to Calcutta which has stagnated terribly during the same period, the problems in Hyderabad are simply better problems to have.

The crisis of rural underdevelopment in India was seeded long before 1991, and though inequality may have stretched after the reforms, the level of overall development as well as the overall standard of living has increased across India. Even then it is a strange grievance to be hung up on, because India still has some of the world's strictest labour laws; thereby still being a nation willing to sacrifice growth for equality and workers' rights. And it is easy to get the sense that the Maoists see how unworkable their economic grievances actually are: the CPI (Maoist) has never managed to agree upon a fully structured alternative for development. Not that one would be that difficult. It could take the form of deepening local governments (already in place as the *Panchayats*) into autonomous development cooperatives, whereby local





communities could choose to pursue international and interstate capital on their own grounds and in competition with other cooperatives.

As oversimplified as this is, it still represents a baseline economic policy that the Maoists have failed to agree upon, even if it were just to represent a first step towards deeper socialising reforms. Many former and current members have accused the Maoists of not actually presenting achievable reforms out of the realisation that

1. A flight of capital would produce huge drops in revenue for their political movement and any future Maoist government, or
2. A measurable increase in the material wellbeing of local populations would mean the Maoists would lose their *raison d'être*

This is a double-game, where once again the grievance on which the Maoists survive is lit by the Maoists themselves and then periodically stoked to sustain the movement (Morrison 2012: 57-58). And as more-and-more research comes to light indicating that when poverty is held as a cause of terrorism and political violence, it is often just a pretext upon which existing political ideas, cultural motivations and deeper emotional attachments can gather traction, Maoism, as it plays out in practice, begins to make some perverse sense (Krueger & Maleckova 2003).

This surreptitious undercurrent has come to be known as the 'Rebel Greed' hypothesis, a situation where insurgent movements such as the Indian Maoists, use economic grievance as a veneer for their own economic gain and exploitation. With an active presence in over 200 sprawling districts (and looking to expand), with the constant need to acquire new weapons and pay basic salaries to recruits, the Maoists have an estimated annual operating budget of over US\$3 million. And without a sustainable revenue source, the Maoists have turned to extortion as the primary means of funding (making up 75 per cent of their overall income). This is the Maoist movement lording over local communities, extracting regular 'protection' money under the threat of violence like well-run mafias. Other forms of revenue have been just as harmful and problematic for local communities such as the cultivation and manufacture of illegal narcotics (Tripathi 2013).

This process of actively working against the development and material wellbeing of the communities that they claim to be helping shows up statistically, with the onset of Maoism



within a region correlating strongly to subsequent reductions in various indices that designate quality of life. For the period spanning 1980 to 2000, Maoist affected areas of India have lost an average 12.48 percent per capita of their share in State Domestic Product (SDP) (Morrison 2012: 55). And importantly, when this trend is occasionally reversed, and government targeted development programs have managed to be successful in producing economic improvement, rather than producing reductions in Maoist violence (as would be expected considering the evaporation of some of their claimed grievances), the opposite has tended to occur; with increases in development being met by increases in violence.

Ironically, these government programs are often exactly what the Maoists and their supporter base have advocated for in the past. In an open attempt to placate sections of the Maoists' grievance narrative, Integrated Action Plan (IAP) projects, the Backward Regions Grant Fund, the Backward Districts Initiative, National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA, re-titled now as MGNREGA), and broader national infrastructure commitments such as the development of rural communication infrastructure under the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF), the building of rural transportation infrastructure under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), and the creation and improvement of rural electricity infrastructure under the Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana (RGGVY), have all been expanded to specifically target Maoist affected regions. Rather than welcoming such projects, the Maoists have tended to fight back and escalate their violence, seeing the potential dissipation of local grievance as a challenge to their movement (Vanden Eynde & Hansen-Lewis & Wrightz & Shapirox 2015).

The creation of the new states of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh in 2000, carved out of the states of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh respectively, offers an interesting microscope onto this phenomenon. Both states, heavily impoverished, chronically underdeveloped, and predominantly rural, saw the promise of self-determination and closer self-government in the form of secession, as a means to address these complaints, and in turn ease the Maoist insurgency in the region. Maoist violence was expected to decline as some of their central grievances were satisfied.

Instead the Maoists unleashed new strategies of 'mobile warfare' (Kujur 2009), and began permanent sieges of vulnerable villages where extortion was ratcheted up to previously unseen levels. Close to 20 percent of the movement's annual budget now comes from Jharkhand alone; and regular extortion efforts have been buttressed by the creation of Maoist imposed permanent tax levies on all businesses and construction work, as well as some taxation on



farming activity. Additionally, is another layer of tax on the incomes of all farmers and labourers in the regions of Garhwa, Giridih, Palamu, Latehar and Chatra. All this goes above and beyond what these struggling communities already owe in government taxation. Since separating from their parent states, Maoism has actively expanded their presence within Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh – moving opportunistically into the security vacuums that have been created (Kennedy 2014), just as they have expanded the scope of their violence. Studies undertaken in 2014, show that of all the Maoist violence registered across India, nearly 70 percent was committed in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh (Routray 2015); part of a much larger growing trend of violence in the two states (Jaiswal 2015).

Yet, and taking the Maoists on face value, since the 1960s, the Indian government has openly accepted that the building of rural infrastructure is a means of addressing core grievances of the movement (namely the absence of such infrastructure) (Mehra 2015). However for nearly just as long, the confused claims of the Maoists have consistently run in the face of such an understanding. The disconnect between professed ideology and the behaviour of the Maoists is perhaps best felt from their extraordinarily ironic tactic of destroying rural infrastructure in order to draw government and public attention to a lack of rural infrastructure, and destroying public services in complaint against a lack of public services. Not only schools and hospitals, but also teachers and healthcare professionals are regularly targeted by Maoists, the latter often designated as 'class enemies'. A permanently impoverished community simply represents the Maoists' best, and perhaps only, chance of having a permanent supporter base. If the government begins supplying solutions for the everyday grievances of rural populations, then the Maoists' very reason for existing disappears (Morrison 2012: 61).

The same muddled ideological thinking is represented by the Maoists' approach to the mining industry. Based on the heavy focus that mining activity draws for the Maoists, it has seemed reasonable to conclude that it is the environmental damage and exploitative nature of the mines that are the source of grievance (a line of thinking that matches with the Maoists' self-professed motivations). However, this does not stand true. The perceived causation between harmful mining activity and Maoist violence is largely a causation between the pull factors of large quantities of explosives being held at mining sites that can be stolen and then weaponised, as well as the heavy forestation surrounding most sites that makes them easy targets to approach, assault, and also escape from (Lea-Henry 2016a).



And just as with other forms of development, mining projects are often attacked by Maoists – just as they have been by insurgents in places such as the Philippines – not as a response to grievance, but out of a fear that such projects will improve the lives of local populations to the point of no longer accepting the Maoist narrative (Crost & Felter & Johnston (2014). However, a secondary threat that an expanding and professional mining sector poses for the Maoists comes in terms of loss of revenue. The Maoists take in a significant amount of revenue from participating in, and imposing levies upon, existing illegal mines - revenue that would dry up once these mining operations become mainstream (Tripathi 2013).

Large scale mining and manufacturing operations such as the proposed steel plant in Odisha by the South Korean Pohang Iron and Steel Company (POSCO) were fought by a well organised Maoist campaign from the moment government permission was granted for the project in 2005. Maoists inundated local communities with a highly successful campaign, inciting local opposition and delaying the project through frivolous law suits, countless appeals and systematic violence to the point of its cancellation in 2017. Just like all large investments of the kind, the POSCO plant was less than perfect, came with significant trade-offs, and was not helped by ridiculously high economic estimates that predicted the generation of almost a million jobs (a figure that would have meant the creation of jobs for 90 percent of the state's unemployed workers).

Still, as the Maoists celebrated their victory against 'predatory capitalism', and as POSCO handed back the 1880 acres of previously acquired land, what they actually had defeated was a US\$12 billion investment in the impoverished state (the second largest foreign investment in Indian history), a commitment by POSCO to further invest in the state's basic infrastructure and the creation of 13,000 jobs as direct employment, and another 35,000 indirectly (based on conservative estimates). Just as any future hopes of large scale investment were also lost through the damage inflicted upon business confidence, and now a demonstrated unacceptably high risk of investing in Odisha.

When it comes to India's tribal populations – the Adivasis – the Maoist grievance narrative hits a more pure note. The Adivasis have a fairly unique social structure that places an extremely high value on the importance of self-determination and the collective use of resources, and comparatively very little value on progress and development. This plays perfectly for the Maoists, because any government encroachment, any loss of control over traditional lands, and any form of resource extraction is often considered an assault on their very identity. This



conveniently allows the Maoists to develop a supporter base that is near-permanently opposed to development, that never highlights the gap between Maoist theory and actions, and that never offer up challenges to their absentee development models. Whilst also allowing the Maoists to outwardly sell the relative economic underdevelopment and failing social conditions of the Adivasis as proof of the incompetence of the Indian state and the inherent evils of capitalism in general. The Adivasi are a perfect storm for opportunistic Maoism.

This inherent malleability, and exploitability, of Adivasi grievance is oddly best explained by an antithetical example of violent mobilisation. In Gujarat in 2002 – a state rapidly shifting economic gears that would take it from one of India's more backward states to being an economic powerhouse over the following decade – the poverty, disenfranchisement and growing disaffection of the local Adivasis were latched onto not by the Maoists, but by their ideological opposites, ultranationalist groups Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP). The list of grievances that the Maoists find so easily exploitable in the Adivasis, was the exact same list that these far-right groups managed to exploit; the RSS and the VHP simply substituted the antagonist categories of 'class warfare' and 'destructive capitalism', with cultural warfare and aggressive religious imperialism. The communal riots that followed caused the deaths of over a thousand people, as the local Adivasis (amongst other groups), launched a wave of rolling violence against Gujarat's Muslim population (Mukherji 2012: 32-33) (Kannabiran 2002).

Just as with the case of mining, the Maoists' commitment to the Adivasis has as much to do with forest density and the inaccessibility of the terrain near such populations than with any particular attachment to their suffering (Shah & Pettigrew 2009). And yet as the conflict has shifted pace, this protective attraction has been steadily degraded, bringing greater pain and suffering to the Adivasis; centred upon a growing realisation by the Indian government that the Maoist insurgency will need to be confronted by overwhelming security measures. The growth of state government counter-terrorism initiatives such as 'Q-Branch' in Tamil Nadu and the Organisation for Counter Terror Operations (OCTOPUS) in Andhra Pradesh have been followed by a national counter-insurgency operation that the government describes as an "*all-out offensive*" on Maoism named Operation Green Hunt (Insights on India 2015).

What this looks like in practice is 70,000 minimally trained paramilitary troops stalking their way through traditional Adivasi forests, with the discretionary backing of the Indian government.



The Maoists, in response, have invariably abandoned their strongholds – something the Adivasis, with their traditional attachment to the land, naturally tend not to do. As the only people left behind, the Adivasis have borne the brunt of the government violence, and have found themselves arrested and torn from their ancestral homes (Mukherji 2012: 22-23).

And with the level of violence growing by the year (SATP 2016) (Maoist Insurgency 'Update' 2009) (SATP 2016a) as the Maoists respond with ever bloodier massacres of security forces such as the Dantewada massacre in Chhattisgarh where 75 police officers were executed as a proclaimed "*direct consequence*" of Operation Green Hunt (Centre for Conflict Resolution & Human Security 2010), and as government forces – supported by a new wave of public backing – consider ever stronger military responses such as bombing campaigns from the Air Force (India Today 2010), the Maoists are actively bringing new grievances to the Adivasis (and then abandoning them), rather than providing solutions to existing ones.

Worse still – and once again behaving like a mafia organisation – the Maoists have been known to return to these communities after the security forces have passed through in order to perform vengeful and bloody purges of Adivasis suspected of colluding with the government, as well as Adivasis expressing doubts about the continued presence of Maoism in their community (Morrison 2012: 59-62). This "*mindless violence*" (Mishra 2010) and "*unnecessary class annihilations*" have been acknowledged by ex and imprisoned Maoists, pointing out the irony that they themselves have become the "*exploiter ideology*" (Pandita 2012).



## Future of the Movement

The Grievance narrative behind the Indian Maoist insurgency has in its favour a certain common sense relationship between harm caused and violent reaction. And it is likely for this reason that so many people – government ministers, journalists and public intellectuals, as well as large sections of the general public – have accepted that the solution to Maoist violence is as simple as addressing Maoist grievances. Even if this were true in the founding years of the movement, Maoism, as it increasingly only recruits people via individual one-to-one ideological salesmanship, has, rather than being a collection of grievances seeking ideological solutions, become an elite driven ideology actively seeking out grievances; grievances that are increasingly detached from any possible real world understanding of the word.

As fragile as this Maoist foundation stone is, it is steadily fracturing further as the modern Indian state – despite being far from an ideal model of governance and development – grows into an economic powerhouse and pushes the benefits of this development into rural communities.

A sharp example of this is the 2016-17 national demonetisation policy. This anti-corruption initiative, despite certain short term inconveniences, ought to have been just the sort of policy that the Maoists would support insofar as it would limit not just everyday corruption, but also make local politicians and government development policies more accountable to the concerns of the less wealthy sections of the Indian population (the Maoists' supporter base). However, it also proved to have an impact on the day-to-day functioning of the Maoists who by running an entirely cash based operation suddenly found that money useless, and themselves unable to exchange it for new currency due to their inability to declare it as income (India TV News Desk 2016). Rather than bear even tougher conditions than they were used to, 564 Maoists voluntarily surrendered in the first month of demonetisation (Chauhan 2016). Feeling the pinch, the Maoists have abandoned their principles yet again, firstly by launching a slightly desperate "*pamphlet war*," littering local communities with propaganda deriding a "*dictatorial move*" and the "*Hindu-fascism fuelled capitalism of Modi*" for which, once again, only "*revolution is the answer*" (Levi 2016); and secondly, by turning to petty banditry by robbing small businesses, banks and ATM customers (PTI 2016).



Rural populations, rather than seeking Maoist support in order to address perceived government failures, are increasingly turning to the Indian government to protect them against Maoist violence and standover tactics. With this shift, and with increased international pressure following the high profile targeting of foreigners such as the kidnapping of two Italian nationals in the Kandhamal forests in 2012 (Mohanty 2014), and the 2017 kidnapping of a Canadian national in the Sukma district in Chhattisgarh (Noronha 2017), the Indian government has largely addressed failures of security coordination, of a narrow counterinsurgency/counterterrorism focus on issues concerning Kashmir and Pakistan, and have unleashed successful outreach programs offering partial amnesty as well as stipends for surrendering Maoists (Morrison 2012: 66).

As the movement is gradually suffocated from numerous directions, the Maoists, defensively doubling down on notions of ideological purity, have begun applying their own carotid pressure from within. Rather than accept responsibility or regret for civilian deaths, the Maoists invariably label them as 'police informers' (SATP 2017). When members have criticised the direction of the movement, they have been purged as being "*in cahoots with the ruling classes*" (CPI Press Release 2012). All the while remaining members pass their days in comically peripheral discussions about which grooming habits, selected toiletries, as well as which foods and cooking habits, are ideologically permitted. It is hardly any wonder why the stream of Maoist surrenders is fast becoming a flood, and why it is increasingly hard to find anyone willing to take on the mantle of 'Maoist Leader' following the killing or capture of their predecessors.

Indian Maoism has become the same embodiment of intolerance, corruption, and uncaring authoritarianism, against which they once claimed to be fighting; an unscrupulous and predatory movement, selling false grievances and false solutions to desperate and vulnerable communities. A parasitic insurgency that only tightens its grip, and extracts more from its hosts, as the grievances it originally claimed to stand for are addressed without the help of, and often directly countered by, the Maoists themselves.



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