

Abstract of Thesis

Title: Culture and Politics in the Maoist-affected villages of Junglemahal in Paschim Medinipur district of West Bengal, India

The Maoist conflict is one of the greatest challenges toward Indian society. As many as 84 districts spreading over 12 States in India have been seriously affected by the conflict. The affected districts are located across the so-called red corridor region of India. The red corridor region is very rich in mineral resources of the country and, at the same time, inhabited by the poor tribal and other disadvantaged communities. The Junglemahal area in West Bengal, comprising of the forested areas of Paschim Medinipur, Jhargram, Purulia and Bankura district, falls under this region. The area is mostly populated by the tribal people. The area is marked with the Maoist extremism and counter-insurgency violence over a decade. The most severe movement and counter-violence, popularly known as the 'Lalgarh movement', occurred during 2007 – 2011 at the Junglemahal area in West Bengal. Dealing with four affected villages in the erstwhile Paschim Medinipur district in Junglemahal area, I have tried to examine the role of culture in politics in connection with the violent Maoist movement of the recent past and to assess the impact of the Maoist violence and counter-violence perpetrated by the Joint forces which are deployed by the Government of West Bengal and the Union Government. The study shows that the Santals and other communities of the area under study demographically characterized by relatively long life span, higher sex ratio, extreme poverty, high rate of illiteracy, high rate of early marriage, high rate of drop-outs, etc. It is observed that all these demographic indicators have strong association with the Maoist insurgency and the counter-insurgency. It is further observed that the arms conflict between the Maoists and the security forces has deeply shattered the intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic pattern of relationships among the ethnic groups living in the area. The social and cultural life of the tribals has been severely affected by the violence, and resulted in destruction of family life, very early marriage of girls to provide them a safe shelter, forced disappearance, killing of poor fellows and neighbouring people, sexual abuse of women, destruction of the traditional political organization (e.g., of the *Soloana* of Santals), and demise of

traditional ritual performances, etc. It suggests for government intervention by adopting a soothing strategy to heal the wounds of the victim families and initiative for cultural restoration, and for adoption of a comprehensive plan for socio-economic development of the ethnic groups living across the Junglemahal area.