

# ON THE EDGE OF SCARCITY: UNDERSTANDING CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITY CONFLICTS IN ODISHA, INDIA

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**Abstract.** *The contemporary state of Odisha, India, has been experiencing a series of ethnic, caste, religious, resource-based, and political conflicts. These conflicts are the product of different magnitudes of deprivation, marginalization, and exploitation, which have created unrest among different communities and dissatisfaction with the state authorities. These experiences simply highlight antagonism, aggression, and resistance in a context in which the policy making process and administration respond through violent means. It presents a complex picture of contemporary violent community conflicts in Odisha by considering conflicts of Kandhamal and Narayanpatna within the broader framework of competition to gain control over, or access to, natural resources. The competition to control or access natural resources leads to the emergence of community conflict between the Adivasis (indigenous people) and non-Adivasis in Odisha. The growing insecurity among the Adivasis due to the gradual alienation of their resources to the non-Adivasis compel them to engage in a conflictual relationship with the non-Adivasis, thereby threatening and creating insecurity for the latter.*

**Keywords:** *community, assertion, conflict, Maoist, Odisha state, India.*

## Introduction

The resurgence of community conflicts over resources in the contemporary world has provoked renewed debate among social scientists about the nature and significance of community conflict in contemporary societies. Such conflicts are conspicuous in South Asia in general and India in particular. Conflicts over resources are apparently linked to the nature of Indian society that is seen as the complete grid of inequality, discrimination, deprivation, exploitation, marginalization and social exclusion. The experience of different magnitudes and

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levels of impoverishment and the attainment of different stages of social, economic, and political developments by different communities lead to the emergence of conflicts.

Conflict generally occurs due to the diverse nature of the society, to a precipitous decline of mediating institutions (David and Gange, 2006-2007:12-16; Bardhan, 2005:185) and to the failure of the modern welfare state to provide equal opportunities to all communities (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, 2005:108).

Different communities compete for scarce natural resources they need or want to ensure their livelihood. Such competition for use and access to resources result in violent conflicts.

Since the previous decade, there is a growing body of literature, which has studied the changing relationship between different communities. The probable reason for such outgrowth is the greater visibility of community conflicts in contemporary societies within the broader framework of assertive identities and material survival. Large numbers of scholars have been engaged in understanding contemporary community conflicts in the context of ethnicity defined in terms of religion (Varshney, 2002; Brass, 2003); social scientists, however, have paid little attention to the study of contemporary community conflicts between the Adivasis (officially recognized as Scheduled Tribes [STs]) and non-Adivasis in India in general, and Odisha in particular. A fundamental distinction between this paper and the existing literature lies in the type of actors and contexts under consideration.

The central theme of the paper is to explore the nature and dynamics of community conflicts over resources in contemporary Odisha. Within this backdrop, the paper is divided into four parts. The first part deals with the relationship between resources and conflicts. The second part discusses the conflicts over resources between the Adivasis and non-Adivasis in Odisha, by considering two cases, namely Kandhamal and Narayanpatna. The third part explores the role of the Maoists in these conflicts. And the fourth part deals with the role/response of the state to these conflicts, followed by the conclusion.

### **Resources and Conflict**

Natural resources, such as land and forest, have occupied a central position in Adivasi life. Natural resources have fundamental spiritual, social, cultural, economic, and political significance (Northcott, 2012:74) to the Adivasi society. Land is not only the source of livelihood for the Adivasi communities; it is also connected with their sense of history and it is a symbol of social prestige (Elwin, 1963:50). Livelihood, wealth, and power are often established by the ability to access, use, and own land. Similarly, there is a symbiotic relationship between the Adivasis and the forest. The forest plays an extremely significant role in contributing to the subsistence economic system of Adivasi communities. The Adivasi society heavily depends upon two major sources

of production, that is, land and forest, which are described as 'twin pillars of Adivasi economy'. Their relationship with the two, especially with the former, is something like their 'philosophy of life' (Ambagudia, 2010:61). The Adivasis have, therefore, an inherent and inalienable right over land and forest. Denial of such rights to natural resources or any attempt to dilute their profound relationship with land and forest certainly leads to the generation of inter-community tensions and violent conflicts.

Access to natural resources has become the site for competition and conflict. Different communities compete for scarce natural resources they need or want to ensure their livelihood. Such competition creates inter-group inequalities and generates the feeling of 'relative deprivation', thereby leading to the occurrence of potential conflicts among different communities in India. Competition for use and access to resources results in violent conflicts. Conflict gets accentuated particularly if the resource is scarce and the claimants to the resource are many. Homer Dixon linked the idea of resource conflict with environmental degradation. He argued that environmental degradation generates simple scarcity conflicts, group identity conflicts, and relative deprivation conflicts (Homer-Dixon, 1991:104-116). Natural resources can play a direct or indirect role in inter-community conflicts. The former is attributed to the direct interface between different communities for control over or access to natural resources. The latter can be accounted to the process through which the extraction of natural resources has located various groups at different levels of power relations, which invariably lead to the emergence of inter-community conflicts. To put it differently, conflicts emerge in relation to who should manage, use, and benefit from scarce natural resources. In this context, given the scarce political power and economic resources, it is inevitable that conflict will emerge on the basis of competition to control or access these resources between different communities in contemporary societies.

### **Community Conflicts over Resources in Odisha**

The recent history of Odisha provides several cases showing that conflict is not an isolated phenomenon. The state has been experiencing a series of ethnic, class, religious, resource, and political conflicts which have beset the state, vitiating its potential for development and on various occasions questioning the credibility of the state. These conflicts are increasingly threatening peace in different parts of Odisha with the government remaining more or less a mute spectator. During the last couple of years, there have been major clashes between the Adivasis and non-Adivasis in relation to competition for control over or access to natural resources in the Kandhamal and Koraput districts Odisha.

#### **Kandhamal**

The Kandhamal district is one of the Adivasi districts of Odisha, consisting of a total population of 648,201, out of which 109,506 (16.89 percent) and 336,809 (51.96 per-

cent) are Dalit (the former untouchables, officially recognized as Scheduled Castes [SCs] and Adivasi respectively. Although the existing literature considers the conflicts between the Adivasis and Dalits as the manifestation of communal violence (Kanungo, 2008; Kanungo, 2014), the present study looks at the conflict by going beyond the religious dimension and links it with resource utilization, argues that the socio-economic competition came to be transformed, over time, into communal conflicts between the Hindu and the Christian communities, and that it has much to do with the increasing influence of the right wing Hindu forces such as Bajrang Dal and Sangh Parivar.<sup>1</sup> The Kandhamal conflict emerged between Kandhas (Adivasis) and Panas (non-Adivasis/Dalits). The historical anecdote will provide the contested ground of the emergence of community conflicts between the Adivasis and non-Adivasis in Kandhamal.

Exploring the historical relationship, it is worthwhile to note that both Kandhas and Panas were living together before the debut of British and missionaries in the district. Their entry led to the discovery of the *meriah*, (human sacrifice) practiced by the Kandhas. In this practice, Panas acted as the broker of supplying *meriah* children to the Kandha community. This is due to the fact that the Adivasi communities never use their progeny as *meriah*. The Kandhas believed that the goddess (Earth-Taru Pennu) would only accept the *meriahs* if they were brought with a price. They also emphasized that victims from their own community were not procurable. In this context, Swaro states that “the agents, mainly Panas – a cleaver and business like people – lived with the Kandhas and cheated them in all possible ways, sometimes purchased but more frequently kidnapped the children (from outside plains) whom they sold to the Kandhas. They occasionally (even) sold their own offspring without any hesitation” (Swaro, 1990:131).

In short, there are two basic prerequisites for the Kandhas: (i) that the *meriah* must have been bought with a full price by the free will of the seller, whether middle men or parents; and (ii) that the sacrifice must be voluntary, that is, with the victim neither bound nor offering the least resistance (Boal, 1984:53). So, the process of exploiting Kandhas by the Panas started long before the British rule in India. After the British made their debut to the district, they started rescuing *meriahs* from the houses of the Panas as well as Adivasi villages, and they initiated the conversion process with the rescued *meriahs*. Simultaneously, the Panas faced numerous challenges regarding the supply of *meriahs*. When it became impossible to supply *meriahs* to Adivasi villages, they came closer to Christianity and embraced the Christian religion. Subsequently, the dynamics of the conversion process started among the Panas. Meanwhile, this process contributed to the initiation of hating the Christian Panas by the Kandhas as they discarded their

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1 The similar role of the Hindu forces has been comprehensively explored by Froerer in the context of Ratiya Kanwars and Oraons conflict in Chattisgarh (Froerer, 2010).

old religion. After becoming Christians, they started exploiting the Adivasis in the form of grabbing their land with the help of the British administration. This was one of the instrumental reasons of conflict between them because the Kandhas had been seeing the total landscape as their own and they had given some land to the Panas to live and supply *meriah* as per requirements. This kind of relationship took the shape of what Kanungo called a 'king-subject relationship' (Kanungo, 2008:17) between Kandhas and Panas because the Kandhas, the original inhabitants of Kandhamal, due to their control over land, perceived themselves as rajas (kings) and the migrant Panas from the plains as their prajas (subjects) (Ibid).

The process of land grabbing and exploitation of the Adivasis accentuated even after independence, through different processes. This uneasy relationship became even worse in independent India, when there was a bloody clash between Adivasis and Dalits during February-June 1994. This conflict occurred due to the need to gain control over and access to political, economic, and cultural resources, and to fight against indignities. These two competitive social groups found themselves locked in a battle over scarce resources. The Adivasis saw Dalits' participation and increased power in the larger politics as a potential threat to their 'moral economy' (Mohapatra and Bhattacharyya, 1996:162). The Adivasis perceived that by producing fake Adivasi certificates, the Panas were diminishing the benefits of state resources, and they felt 'relatively deprived' of using the state resources. In other words, this conflict emerged to avail the benefits of different types of affirmative policies meant for the Adivasi communities.

The conflict between the Kandhas and Panas is reinforced by the increasing socio-economic gap between these communities. Considering the socio-economic problem the main reason for the recent Kandhamal violence, the Justice Sarat Chandra Mohapatra Commission<sup>2</sup> stated that the violence in Kandhamal was the result of concentrated discontentment prevailing among people since long ago. It pointed out that conversion, re-conversion, land grabbing, lack of maintenance of land records, and issuing of *fake certificates* were mainly responsible for the outbreak of the conflict (emphasis added). The interim report stated that the perception, threat, and reality of marginalization and deprivation have engendered a conflict situation in Kandhamal, which has facilitated feelings and expression of mistrust, division and resentment between the Kandhas and the Panas. This has led to the existence of social conflicts because the Kandhas have the feeling that the state, as appropriated by the Panas, has shortchanged or deprived them of desired or accruing social benefits, rights, and entitlement (Migdal, 2001:114,128).

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2 Justice Sarat Chandra Mohapatra, the former Lok pal, was appointed to judicially probe the recent violence between the Kandha and Pana communities in Kandhamal district. Expressing his inability to submit the final report within the given time limit, he submitted the interim report to the Home Department, GOO, on July 1, 2009.

The Kandhas always saw the Panas as traitors, exploiters, and grabbers of benefits meant for the Adivasi communities (Mohapatra and Bhattacharyya, 1996:162). Though the Odisha land legislations prohibit the transfer of Adivasi land to non-Adivasis, a large amount of land has been grabbed by the Panas by producing fake Adivasi certificates. Laws have been enacted, repealed, amended, and enforced, but all failed miserably to check the transfer of Adivasi land to non-Adivasis in Odisha (Ambagudia, 2010:60-67).

Nevertheless, it must be recorded that the Justice Mohapatra Commission's interim report did not mention anything about the role of the much debated Hindu groups in the entire process of the recent conflict. Different political parties also maintained a similar position. For instance, speaking at the National Integration Council meeting on October 13, 2008, in New Delhi, the Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik stated that the Kandhamal violence is a manifestation of the 'conflict of interest' between Dalits and Adivasis. A high level team of the Odisha Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), who visited the affected area, linked the tensions with the land disputes and credit system, and ruled out any connection with the Hindu forces (*The Hindu*, January 9, 2001). But we must admit that the Hindu forces have succeeded in exploiting the tense situation and mobilizing the Kandhas against the Christian Pana community. They have played an important role in transforming the resource competition into inter-communal conflicts between the Kandhas and the Panas. The 2008 unrest in the state of Odisha started on August 23 after the murder of the rightwing Hindu nationalist leader Laxmananda Saraswati in his Chakapada Jalespata Ashram in Kandhamal district, who was working to unite the Kandha Adivasis to challenge the conversion activities of the Christian missionaries in addition to numerous developmental activities meant for empowerment of the marginalized groups such as Adivasis in the district (Kanungo, 2003). The Christian missionaries and the Chakapada Jalespata Ashram were engaged in mobilizing the Adivasis by imparting education and providing much needed medical facilities and gain legitimacy in rural areas (Kanungo 2003:150-156; Froerer, 2010:13-14).

The religious dimension of the argument in the context of the Kandhamal conflict can be strengthened by examining different statements of Hindu forces. Laxmannaanda Saraswati stated that "you are just burning tires. How many Isai houses and Churches have you burnt? Without kranti (revolution) there will be no shanti (peace). Narendra Modi<sup>3</sup> has done kranti in Gujarat, that's the reason why shanti's there" (Prasad, 2008). On 6 September 2008, Apurvananda Maharaj at the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's (VHP) Shradhhanjali Sabha announced that "Attack on Swamiji is the same as attacking Hindu religion. All saints and sadhus need to counter attack unitedly otherwise India will be converted into a Christian nation" (Ibid). Again the supporters of the VHP at the

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3 Narendra Modi was the Chief Minister of the state of Gujarat and is the current Prime Minister of India.

Shhradhanjali Sabha of Laxmanananda Saraswati in Chakapada, Phulbani, promised to wipe out Christians from Kandhamal districts. In short, the Hindu forces are working as what Brass terms as 'conversion specialists' (Brass, 2003:32-33; Froerer, 2006:54), *converting* these complex socio-economic tensions at the local level into the simpler, broader, and more potent language of inter-communal conflict (Froerer, 2006:54). Mahapatra argued that the agitated Hindu forces did not even touch the Odiya *Sahi* (street) of Bastingia village where mostly non-Adivasi/non-Dalit Odiya people used to live (Mahapatra, 2008). This was because these non-targeted outsiders worked as informers to the rioters in many cases. This was also demonstrated in the case of 1994 conflict between the Kandhas and Panas where the upper caste Hindus were entailed in further fuelling the already tensed area by telling the Adivasis that 'Dalits loot the illiterate Adivasis and disrupt the moral order of the village' (Mahapatra and Bhattacharyya, 1996:162). No doubt the Kandha-Pana ethnic divide may be partially responsible for the 2008 violent conflict, as it was in February-June 1994 and December 2007, but it is not a good enough reason to explain the dynamics of the recent community conflict in Odisha. It is an active involvement of the Hindu forces that resource conflicts have recently assumed an ethnic and communal orientation.

### **Narayanpatna**

Narayanpatna is one of the most backward and Adivasi dominated blocks of the Koraput district in south Odisha. According to the 2001 Census, it consists of a total population of 38,276, out of which 31,132 (81.33%), 2,714 (7.09%) and 4,430 (11.57%) are Adivasis, Dalits, and others respectively. The seed of the Narayanpatna conflict was scattered in the mid-1990s. During this period, the tension over resources among Adivasis and non-Adivasis emerged. The emergence of land tensions enabled the Adivasis to form the Chasi Mulia Rayat Kuli Sangh (CMRKS) in 1995 in this area. This organization re-emerged in 2009 under a different name, i.e., Chasi Mulia Adivasi Sangh (CMAS). The aims and activities of both these *sanghs* (organizations) are similar. The main objective of the CMAS is to protect Adivasi rights over natural resources, such as land, water, and forest, and address other grievances of Adivasis. The Narayanpatna conflict emerged in relation to these grievances. The Adivasis have two distinct but inter-related grievances: sale of liquor and growing land alienation.

Regarding the sale of liquor, we must admit that the using of intoxication is a part of Adivasi social life. Besides consuming liquor in different festivals, Adivasis use liquor to make the marriage ceremony more enjoyable. Country wines called *Mahula* and *Salapa* are in use among them. Within this perspective, Elwin stated that 'there must be dance and feast with plenty of liquor for everyone to get some pleasure out of the marriage event' (Elwin, 1954:532). An important ritual, a medicinal and social necessity, local liquor distilled from the flower of the *mahua* tree occupies a central position in the

daily lives of Adivasi society.<sup>4</sup> The drinking of wine is so much a part of Adivasi social and religious life that the Government of Odisha (GOO), when introducing prohibition, excluded the districts with a large Adivasi population out of its scope (Dash, 1997:80).

Taking the advantage of Adivasis' weakness towards liquor, selling liquor has become not only a profitable business for the non-Adivasis but a significant source of different forms of exploitation for Adivasis. This aspect greatly contributes to the transfer of Adivasi land to non-Adivasis in the southern part of Odisha (Bagchi, 1999:99).

Regarding the sale of liquor, the Narayanpatna block comes under the scheduled areas where the different provisions of the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), 1996 can be operationalized. PESA has empowered the gram sabha (village council) to prohibit or control the sale of liquor [4(m)(1)]. The effective implementation of the PESA would be able to ban the liquor trade and that would resolve the first issue. Regarding the second, the Adivasi communities of the area feel that both at the time of settlement, an operation which was concluded in Narayanpatna area in the early 1960s (Behuria, 1963; Upadhyaya, 2014:292), and thereafter, a large amount of Adivasi land was transferred to the non-Adivasis, both through illegal and seemingly legal means. Consequently, the Adivasis have been marginalized, dispossessed and deprived of their entitlement to land. The 'politics of entitlement' (Horowitz, 1985; Froerer, 2010), therefore, leads to the emergence of community conflicts in Odisha. It must be noted that the issue of deprivation is not only restricted to the protest of those excluded or sidelined in the struggle for, or control of resources, it is also an important factor in the quest by Adivasis for greater control of the means of their livelihood such as land and forest.

In addition, there are also other important reasons behind this conflict, such as the government's indifference towards providing basic facilities, i.e., a below poverty line (BPL) card, job card, primary health care center, drinking water, roads etc.; deliberate and false cases registered against the Adivasis; and sexual abuse and assaults of Adivasi girls and women by non-Adivasis. To put it differently, their struggle was against moneylenders, liquor traders, contractors and corrupt government officers and non-Adivasis who were indulged in exploiting and marginalizing Adivasi communities in different ways.

Since the 8<sup>th</sup> of May, 2009, the Narayanpatna conflict was fueled-up under the auspices of the CMAS. The CMAS formed the *Lal Bahini* (Red Army) with the aim to collect information regarding the activities of police and to protect the Adivasis. According to the available information, they formed around 35 groups in 35 villages in Padapadar, Tentulipadar, and Balipeta panchayats of Narayanpatna block, and the membership strength of these groups runs between 15 and 20, armed with different types of tradi-

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4 The use of local liquor in the Adivasi society in India has been thoroughly examined by Froerer in the context of Chhattisgarhi Adivasi communities (Froerer, 2006:46-53).



tional weapons. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June, 2009, the deployed Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) arrested some of the members of the *Lal Bahini*. In reaction, more than 3,000 Adivasis with traditional weapons protested against this arrest and, consequently, the police apologized for their activities and freed them. This circumstance was described by Aditya Prasad Padhi, the then Home Secretary, as a 'war situation' (*Draritri*, 25 June, 2009).

The community conflicts between the Adivasis and non-Adivasis forced a large number of non-Adivasi families to leave their villages in the Narayanpatna block and created the fear of insecurity among the latter. All non-Adivasis, including the Dalits, were attacked and deemed as anti-Adivasis and exploiting groups. During the months of May-June, out of 127 villages in the Narayanpatna block, 500 families from 25 villages, which were Dalits and Shundis, had to leave their home and land to save their lives. Carrying their mission further, the CMAS was indulged in restoring the alienated Adivasi land by force. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of June, 2009, they forcefully occupied more than 1,000 acres of land in Narayanpatna block. On that day, the CMAS forcefully cultivated 500 acres of land in Narayanpatna headquarter, 100 acres in Bikrampur, 70 acres in Balipeta, 40 acres in Tentulipadar, 20 acres in Harikudia, 4 acres in Kanika etc. (*Dharitri*, 17 June 2009).

The women were also growingly involved in the entire process of the struggle for control over resources by participating in large numbers in different protests and rallies called by the CMAS. After occupying land on 15 June 2009, the CMAS organized a meeting in the Dumusil village of the Balipeta panchayat, where the collector and the superintendent of police of Koraput district rushed to the spot and talked to the Adivasi leaders Nachika Linga and Pendruka Singana. During their dialogue, the Adivasis demanded their full rights on water, land, and forest. The government authorities assured them of delivering justice. In spite of the government assurance, on 6 July 2009, the CMAS started its next phase of restoring alienated land on the very next day, i.e., 7 July, 2009, and occupied more than 400 acres. The reason was that the marginalized Adivasi communities had been listening to all types of rhetoric promises from the government for too long; reality, however, seems to tell a different story.

Exploring the relationship between the CMAS and the course of land restoration further, one may wonder about the process of distribution of restored land. In this context, it is important to cite the interview of Gananath Patra, the adviser of the CMAS, who stressed on the process of land distribution. The CMAS gave utmost importance to three important principles of distribution of restored land (Upadhyaya, 2015:294). First, the priority was given to those who had lost their land through illegal transfers. The second priority was given to those Adivasis who did not have any land in their name. Third, those Dalits who were interested in cultivation and were landless. While restoring the land and distribution among the landless, the CMAS ensured that they were not dispossessed again.

What do conflicts of Kandhamal and Narayanpatna suggest concerning the larger questions of mobilization and struggle for material well-being? The community consciousness has become a feature of the day and their scale of assertion has expanded to a great extent and the diverse communities are involved in more and more confrontations among themselves. The Adivasis and Dalits were increasingly placed in a position of marginalization and exploitation, constant threats to their existing position and social status and value system. This position, a sense of social deprivation and a constant fear of losing their identity and status, often created an atmosphere of apprehension by the concerned communities. They were at the same time more self-conscious, and were very much aware of the differences between themselves and others, the distinction between 'us' and 'them'. Such assertions aim to transform the very sense of 'dominant community' of the higher caste and redefine it at every level.

### **The Role of Maoists**

Various levels of marginalization, deprivation and exploitation have created unrest among the Adivasi and Dalit communities and disappointment with the state. The growing negligence of the state leads to unrest, sometimes of a violent nature, in Odisha (Ambagudia, 2011:41). It creates the impression that the policy making process and administration respond to violent means quite effectively (Government of India, 2008:44). This situation has tactically been cultivated by the Maoists in Odisha. So, the existing literature claims that the extremist groups are securing support from marginalized groups such as Adivasis and Dalits. This is due to their long experience of the modern welfare state, its inability to address the structural problems and lack of effective implementation of different welfare projects since its independence (Chakrabarty and Kujur, 2010:112-117). Within this backdrop, it is essential to look at the link between the Maoists and these conflicts.

Exploring the Kandhamal episode, there is a clear visibility of Maoists' connection in the entire process of carrying out the strategy to kill the controversial VHP leader Laxmanananda Saraswati along with his four associates. The Maoist claimed responsibility for the killing (Ibid, 145) because the sadhu had been involved in mixing religion with politics and pursuing a fascist and divisive communal agenda in the country (Kanungo, 2008:16). Although the Maoists claimed responsibility for this murder, the Hindu groups blamed the Christians for the murder and reacted by rampage killing several people and destroying several missionary schools, churches and buildings (Grim and Finke, 2010:149).

On the contrary, in the case of Narayanpatna conflict, though the members of the CMAS deny any connection to Maoists, their techniques and methods of activities come under close scrutiny. Taking the advantage of the government's negligence to address the rights of the Adivasis, Maoists started their own organization in the region of Narayanpatna and Bandhugaon in 1995 and in the same year, the CMRKS had emerged and now this

organization is known as CMAS. The activities of both the Maoists and the CMAS are quite similar. The members of the *Lal Bahini* wear red color garments, sleepers and are tagged with red ribbon on their head, which symbolizes the color of Maoists. The CMAS followed the similar method by blocking the roads by trees when they organized meetings. This is invariably to check the interference of police in their meetings. During their attempt to restore the alienated land they carried the red flag carrying the Maoists symbol (hammer and sickle) as a sign of restoration. The CMAS's affiliation would be clearer if we emphasized the fact that after the release of its leader Nachika Linga, he addressed the press conference called by the state committee of the Communist Party of India (Maoist-Lenin) (Upadhyaya, 2004:295).

Pointing out the land problem, as well as the social, economic, education and health problems of the Narayanpatna area, the Maoists started gaining Adivasi support since the mid-1990s. By naming themselves the People's Guerrilla Liberation Army, the Maoists incorporated the Adivasis and trained people for violent activities by sending them to various Maoists training centers in Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. It has been observed that presently three committees are actively involved in violent activities in the undivided Koraput district,<sup>5</sup> namely the Andhra-Odisha Border Special Zonal Committee, the Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee and the Odisha Rajya Committee, which was formed by the erstwhile People's War Group (now CPI-Maoist) in 2001. All these three committees are working under the direction of the Odisha-Andhra Joint Committee. The Maoists function through their *dalams* (squads). In the Narayanpatna region, the Jhanjhabati *Dalam* and the Machhkund *Dalam* are involved in violent operations.

The violent activities of Maoists have become more visible since 1998, when the Andhra Pradesh police attacked the camp of Maoists/naxals in the Kapadang village of the Bandhugaon block in the Koraput district and killed the Maoist leader Gantha Ramesh. Since 1998, they have engaged in a series of violent attacks in different parts of the undivided Koraput district. They attacked the Damanjodi National Aluminium Company Limited (NALCO) on 12 April, 2009, and looted two tons of explosives, used in Narayanpatna, and killed nine policemen while clearing the Narayanpatna-Laxmipur roadblocks. Seven blocks of the Koraput districts have been completely captured by Maoists namely Bandhugaon, Narayanpatna, Laxmipur, Nandpur, Lamtaput, Patangi and Baipariguda. More recently, raising the similar issues as the Adivasis, the Maoists have warned to stop the liquor business in the Narayanpatna block. Looking at these

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5 Undivided Koraput district of Odisha includes all the present four districts, such as Koraput, Malkangiri, Nabarangpur and Rayagada. For the sake of administrative convenience and for a more effective implementation of different developmental programmes, the Koraput district was divided into four districts on October 2, 1992, as per the notification no. 4913/R, dated October 1, 1992 of the Revenue Excise Department, GOO.

issues of the Maoists, the marginalized Adivasis and Dalits are extending support to them. So, it is not an embellishment to argue that the main support for Maoists/naxals comes from the Adivasis and Dalits (Government of India, 2008:3; Borooah, 2008:325). Meanwhile, the Maoists have created paradoxical space in Odisha. Sometimes they misrepresent the land question as well as other aspirations of Adivasi communities to increase conflicts between Adivasis and Dalits in Odisha (Chakrabarty and Kujur, 2010:124). Citing all these incidents, there is clear visibility of increasing involvement of Maoists in these conflicts.

### **The Role of the State**

The Adivasi communities of Odisha show their disappointment with the state through rallies, dharnas, protest meetings, and road blockades. Within this perspective, the impact of the state responses is complex and somewhat unpredictable. All these conflicts among different communities are the product of the gross negligence of state machineries. In all these conflicts, the state is not showing its affirmation to explore root causes. For instance, starting with the 1994 conflict, both Adivasis of Kandhamal are repeatedly making similar demands but the response of the state is not clearly visible. Subsequently, the Justice Mohapatra Commission is set up to probe the recent conflict in Kandhamal and the Commission in its interim report urged the state to explore the root cause and the effective implementation of different affirmative policies. It is crucial for the state to understand the history of conflicts and develop policies for peaceful solutions of the problems. The state, therefore, has succeeded in setting up different commissions to probe the conflicts but failed to follow any specific approach to settling the disputes. The state is apparently delaying justice to the victims by setting up judicial commissions and even if the commissions submit reports on time (which is very rare), there is an apprehension that the state will not take any strong actions against the culprits especially where there is an indulgence of political leaders.

Tracking the positive side of the story, the state has taken some initiatives to address the issues raised by marginalized communities in different conflicts. The state government has formed the 'Peace Committee' comprising the representatives of Congress, BJP and BJD, Adivasi village heads, Dalits and non-Adivasis to restore normalcy in the Narayanpatna block. The Naveen Patnaik government also formed the Nagarika Suraksha Samiti (Citizen's Protection Committee) in all blocks of the Koraput district. It is closely examining different provisions related to Adivasi land alienation and taking necessary steps for their restoration. Due to the emergence of land conflicts in different parts of the state, the BJD-BJP coalition government amended the Orissa<sup>6</sup>

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6 The name of the state has changed from 'Orissa' to 'Odisha' with the passing of the Orissa (Alteration of Name) Bill, 2010 and the Constitution (113<sup>th</sup> Amendment) Bill by the Parliament, with effect from November 1, 2011.

Scheduled Area Transfer of the Immovable Property (by Scheduled Tribes) (OSATIP) Regulation, 1956, in 2002 and completely banned the transfer of *patta* (entitlement) Adivasi land to non-Adivasis; and laid down the provisions that all non-Adivasis owning land originally owned by Adivasis have to submit the record of rights within a year that they had acquired the land by legal means, otherwise such land would revert back to the original Adivasi owner and the illegal land grabber would be fined and imprisoned (Ambagudia, 2010:64).

With the emergence of the Narayanpatna conflict, the government has issued instruction to all concerned authorities to check the detail procedure of land transfer from Adivasis to non-Adivasis since 1956. In this context, the then Revenue Divisional Commissioner (RDC), Satyabrata Sahu, instructed all the four collectors of the Koraput, Malkangiri, Nabarangpur, and Rayagada districts of South Odisha to study legal implications within three months. The state government is also worried to distribute *patta* to Adivasis under the Forest Rights Act of 2006. Under this Act, the data from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Department, the GOO, shows that by April 9, 2010, 19,131 claims had been approved by the District Level Committee (DLC) for titles, out of which 17,801 were distributed among the landless Adivasi communities in the Koraput district. As the CMAS promised to continue their struggle till problems get solved, the Chief Minister, during his visit to Koraput to evaluate the situation, ordered to distribute *patta* to Adivasis as soon as possible. So, the effective and meaningful implementation of different legal provisions, which are primarily designed to protect the Adivasi rights over natural resources, would somehow calm down the already highly tensed Adivasi communities who have been consistently resisting different forms of exploitation and deprivation in Odisha in order to live with dignity.

## **Conclusion**

The recent history of Odisha provides several cases showing that conflict is not an isolated phenomenon. Community conflicts represent a complex picture in Odisha. The Kandhamal and Narayanpatna conflicts have created the feeling of insecurity for both Adivasis and non-Adivasis in relation to the issue of material survival in terms of assertion of ancestral rights of entitlement to natural resources within the parameters of justice and livelihood of Adivasi communities. The gradual alienation of the Adivasi resources has created the regime of marginalization, deprivation and dispossession, thereby creating insecurity among the Adivasis. This notion of insecurity led to the initiation of violent attacks by the Adivasis, thereby leading to the emergence of insecurity among the non-Adivasis in Odisha as well. The Adivasis are gradually losing their faith in the CMAS as well as in the Maoists due to the fact that the state has consistently been hunting them; the Adivasis are also showing their disappointment with the activities of the Maoists due to their failure to fulfill the objectives they had set. There is, therefore, a need to deal with the Adivasi issues with the sensitivity and seriousness they deserve.

While addressing the question of resources in the context of Adivasi society in Odisha, their issues and concerns have to be given utmost importance. The struggle of Adivasi communities for justice and livelihood must be respected.

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