

# SubscriberWrites: Democratisation of media crucial to solve Maoist issue

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May 17, 2023



**As long as political parties continue to be inert in areas & do not fulfill their core responsibilities, there will be space for Maoists to exploit, writes Shashank Ranjan.**



Col Shashank Ranjan 17 May, 2023



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As per Global Terrorism Index 2023, the Maoists rank 12 among the 20 deadliest terror groups. Also, as per SATP (South Asia Terrorism Portal) data, indices of Maoists violence have dipped over the years – from 1180 killings in 2010 to 135 in 2022. Notwithstanding the above, the Maoists challenge, especially in Bastar remains formidable. The outfit retains its ability to strike at will, as demonstrated in Aranpur ambush on 26 April.

The cornerstones of government’s approach to deal with Maoist challenge are – security, development, ensuring rights and entitlements of local communities, improvement in governance and public perception management. It is felt that there are missing pieces in the state’s strategy, leading to distancing of the majority tribal population. The current phase of Maoism in Bastar has tribal population as its primary support base and the solution lies beyond the mentioned cornerstones vis-a-vis winning over the tribals.

Two of the crucial aspects that can potentially bridge the divide between the state and tribal population are, firstly filling up the prevalent political vacuum in the affected areas and secondly, democratising media to provide the tribal population with means to communicate with the state and society.

**Political Activism**

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The world over, 'political engagement' closely followed by law enforcement has been the most successful strategy in combating terrorist groups. The eventual resolution of the Maoist conflict has to be political. Unfortunately, the mainstream political parties are conspicuous by their absence at the grassroots in these regions. Political parties need to have a strong local structure to accommodate aspirations of tribal youth. As long as political parties continue to be inert in areas and do not fulfil their core responsibilities, there will be space for Maoists to exploit.

Although development and creating opportunities is crucial yet, the issue is as much of rights as of development. A person does not become a Maoist because there is no school or health centre in his village. He becomes a Maoist due to a different set of circumstances emanating from lack of justice. Participation in Maoist activities becomes a tool to acquire mobility and realise self esteem.

In the current context of the existing Maoists' fault-line of being ideologically feeble can also be exploited by the State. Over the years, the Maoist movement has weakened on the ideological front. The decision of tribal youth to join Maoists rank is based on incentives, than ideology. This has created a void of committed, mid level leadership to keep a check on errors and misconduct of the cadre. The state needs to exploit the said gap by exhorting political outfits to step up their activities.

## **Democratising Media**

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Since the medium of dissemination and thus communication in present times, is owned by few, it has ceased to be democratic. Many of the India's tribal communities lack access to any mainstream media outlets. This often poses serious barriers to their socio-economic development, as their grievances about government neglect and economic exploitation remain unvoiced. In addition, the Maoists exploit their frustration for ulterior gains.

To address this, an initiative known as CG-Net Swara (a voice portal that enables ordinary citizens to report and discuss issues of local interest) has been empowering the tribal population, in Chhattisgarh. CG-Net Swara has given a chance to the adivasis to tell their stories their own way and not bound by a particular editorial line.

The initiative started by a former journalist, Shubhranshu Choudhary, has consistently evolved to perform better with each passing day. For Choudhary, and rightly so, there are two wars going on in Chhattisgarh. One involving a small fraction of the rebels who are committed to communism and the other involves vast majority of their followers, mainly poor, lower-caste tribal people, who pick up rifles and join the Maoists because they have run out of patience. It wasn't communism they wanted, but to have a voice, to be heard and taken seriously.

In more than a decade since it went live, in February 2010, CGNet Swara has transformed the way news is shared among the rural poor in central India. Reporters record their news reports using an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system. A group of



professional journalists review and verify the news reports. Once approved, the stories are available for playback on the phone or on the CGNet Swara's website.

The state needs to encourage and support such initiatives to make them grow in an optimal manner. In interaction with the outside world, the adivasis feel more empowered and chances of weaning them away from Maoists get brighter.

In tandem with the governmental efforts, non-traditional endeavours have to be taken ahead for a reasonable shot towards conflict resolution. It is time, the approach to resolve the Maoist challenge is diversified and new options are explored towards more effectiveness.

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*These pieces are being published as they have been received – they have not been edited/fact-checked by ThePrint.*



Col Shashank Ranjan 17 May, 2023