

Research Article: The Ruins of a Failed Revolution: The Rise of Naxalism and Its Socio-Economic Impact in Tribal Odisha (1990–2015)

I. Introduction (400 words / 1–1.5 pages)

The Naxalite movement, often dubbed the “single greatest internal security threat” by the Indian state, has developed over decades as a historically rooted movement shaped by patterns of land disputes, forest rights conflicts, and uneven integration of tribal regions into the broader developmental framework. The roots of this movement can be traced back to the rise of radical Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology in eastern India, originating in the small village of Naxalbari in West Bengal in 1967. A peasant uprising against exploitative landlords in Naxalbari set in motion a widespread rebellion, primarily in eastern India. With the instilled belief that revolutionary violence was crucial in dismantling feudal oppression and state apathy, the movement systematically evolved from a fragmented set of militant actions into an organized armed struggle, spearheaded by groups like the Communist Party of India (Maoist). The movement was initially concentrated in parts of West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. By the 1990s, the Naxalite movement had spread across what is now known as the “Red Corridor,” a region in southern and eastern India encompassing large parts of the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, and Odisha.

Among these, Odisha emerged as a crucial frontier of Maoist activity, owing to its porous inter-state borders and a predominantly tribal population. The southern and western districts, including **Malkangiri** and **Kandhamal**, became epicenters of violent encounters, guerrilla recruitment, and brutal retaliation by the state. The Maoists found resonance in these regions not simply because of their geographical advantage, but because the socio-economic conditions were ripe for rebellion: land alienation, forced displacement due to mining and dam projects, acute poverty, non-functional state welfare schemes, and the consistent limitations by the centre to recognize tribal rights under constitutional safeguards.

The study will explore the idea that the roots of Naxalism in Odisha cannot be solely understood as a problem in law and order. On the contrary, it is a structural outcome born out of decades of underdevelopment and state apathy. The underlying theme of the analysis in this study is not limited to developing a better understanding of why the insurgents came, but why they stayed, and how their presence influenced the very development they claimed to fight for, through a deep analysis of the districts of Kandhamal and Malkangiri.

Research Questions:

1. What factors enabled Naxalism’s rise in the tribal districts of Odisha?
2. What have been the economic implications of the Naxal insurgency in Malkangiri and Kandhamal, and how will they shape the economic outcome of the future?

The article will analyze two districts in the state of Odisha: firstly, Malkangiri, a deeply forested district bordering the neighbouring states of Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh, and Kandhamal, a central highland district that has witnessed both

Maoist activity and communal tensions. Both share similarities in the form of high tribal populations, consistent shortfalls in development, and a prolonged insurgent presence.

The structure of the article unfolds as follows: a literature review of existing scholarship on Naxalism and tribal development in Odisha; a detailed discussion of the research methodology and data sources; a historical trajectory of Maoist expansion; district-wise analysis of socio-economic indicators from 1990 to 2015; a section assessing the developmental impacts of Naxalite activity; an overview of state counter-insurgency responses; and finally, a conclusion that explores the moral implications of the Naxal insurgency and offers policy recommendations rooted in grassroots-led development that prioritises inclusivity.



(Archival photo of Maoist graffiti in Odisha)

II. Literature Review (450 words / 1.5–2 pages)

Although there has been a considerable amount of research done on the subject, scholarly debates on the root causes of Naxalism in India often oscillate between two broad camps. Firstly, some intellectuals tend to attribute it primarily to chronic poverty and the deprivation of critical resources. On the other hand, there are those who frame it as a deeper crisis of governance and the legitimacy of the state as a whole. Firstly, scholars like Biplab Dasgupta and Walter Fernandes argue that structural inequality, as well as the failure of developmental promises, act as the primary drivers behind the growth in Maoist ideology. Others, such as Ajai Sahni and Bibhu Prasad Routray, stress that the absence of accountable institutions, disproportionate political representation, and the lack of trust in state organisations are what sustain Naxal movements, particularly in tribal-dominated regions, not only limited to Odisha.

Whilst specifically focusing on Odisha, a growing body of literature has worked to better understand the crossroads between tribal marginalization and its correlation to Maoist expansion. Walter Fernandes' work on displacement caused by industrial and mining projects highlights how tribal populations in Odisha's forested interiors have faced forced evictions, loss of shared community land, which has led to fertile ground for insurgent recruitment. The Odisha Development Report (2004) and subsequent studies by the SCSTRTI (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute) have detailed how state schemes often bypass tribal regions due to their location being relatively remote, high levels of corruption, and consecutive administrations focused on the implementation of law and policy through militarised means. The findings of these reports are further bolstered by field studies from NGOs such as ActionAid and Vasundhara, which underscore the failure of forest rights implementation and the continued neglect of health, education, and food security in Maoist-hit districts.

At the national level, the Planning Commission's 2008 "Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas" report remains a landmark. It was the introduction to the idea that Naxalism is not solely limited to faults in law and order, rather it is caused by a significant development failure that calls for a proper rebalancing of policy priorities. Furthermore, more recent interdisciplinary work has analysed how insurgencies influence governance, especially through "shadow state" mechanisms in the form of parallel taxation, conflict mediation, and welfare distribution by Maoist cadres, which can co-opt state authority.

Despite the contributions, there continues to be a research gap. Most studies remain macro-level, focusing on national trends or statewide violence patterns. There continues to be relatively little detailed, district-specific analysis over extended periods of time that correlates to longitudinal socio-economic data in correspondence with Naxalite activity. This project aims to fill that gap by offering a data-driven

analysis of Malkangiri and Kandhamal districts over 25 years, understanding the rise of Naxalism, its subsequent decline, and its lasting effects. In doing so, it bridges the divide between theoretical debates on insurgency and the grounded realities of development in tribal regions.

III. Methodology

The goal of this study is to investigate how Naxalism has affected socio-economic development trajectories in Malkangiri and Kandhamal districts of Odisha between 1990 and 2015 through the employment of a mixed-methods approach. The methodology includes both quantitative and qualitative data analysis in order to produce a nuanced understanding of the insurgency-development nexus.

1. Justification for Case Selection

Malkangiri and Kandhamal were chosen as case study districts based on three core criteria.

1. First, both regions have a high concentration of tribal populations, making them socio-economically vulnerable to Naxal infiltration and historically underserved by state-led development initiatives.
2. Second, chronic poverty and marginalisation in these districts have persisted over decades, reflected in poor human development indicators such as literacy rates, maternal health, and household income.
3. Third, and most critically, both districts have been privy to prolonged and active Naxalite presence, particularly during the peak insurgency years between the early 2000s and mid-2010s. Their location along the Andhra-Odisha Border (AOB) corridor further intensified exposure to Maoist recruitment, leading to heightened militia activity and anti-state violence, making them ideal for comparative analysis.

2. Data Sources

The study will utilize both quantitative and qualitative sources to create a comprehensive developmental profile of the two districts.

- Quantitative Data will be presented in the form of district-level figures from the Census of India (1991, 2001, 2011), National Family Health Surveys (NFHS), District Statistical Handbooks, and reports from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). These sources are used to track various socio-economic indicators such as school enrolment, health outcomes, infrastructure growth, and crime related to extremist activity.
- Qualitative data will be extracted from NGO reports, journalistic coverage, state government development plans, and peer-reviewed academic literature. These sources will be beneficial in procuring narrative insights into the failures of policy implementation, the ground-level perception of the state presence, and the socio-political troubles that fuelled insurgency

3. Analytical Approach

The analysis will follow a comparative historical framework, which will trace changes in the developmental outcomes in the two districts of Malkangiri and Kandhamal by evaluating data between 1990 and 2015. The study overlays temporal data on Naxal activity (e.g., number of incidents, types of attacks, reported fatalities) with development indicators (e.g., school openings, road connectivity, PDS coverage) to understand whether periods of heightened violence correspond with stagnation in development indicators.

A second layer of analysis involves thematic analysis of qualitative reports to extract recurring leitmotifs, such as distrust of state institutions, militarisation of the region, and resistance to mining or displacement. Through these different themes, it will be examined how these narratives correlate with insurgent growth or state withdrawal. This mixed-method approach enables both factual measurement and contextual interpretation.

4. Limitations

The study brings with it its own set of limitations. The most important challenge is data inconsistency across varying courses and timeframes, particularly when aligning district-level statistics with annualised insurgency data. On top of that, the study lacks primary field interviews, which would provide first-hand perspectives from affected communities and local administrators. Lastly, causality remains difficult to establish due to the complex interdependence between development failures and insurgency dynamics. Therefore, this research focused on correlation and economic trajectory rather than definitive causation.

IV. Historical Trajectory of Naxalism in Odisha

The rise of Naxalism in Odisha is deeply intertwined with patterns of exclusion, conflict over resources, and the withdrawal of state institutions. The origins of the Naxalite movement lie in Naxalbari, West Bengal, in 1970. It was in the late 1980s when Naxal groups made strategic inroads into tribal-dominated districts in southern Odisha that bordered Andhra Pradesh. The incursion acted as an aspect of a broader movement along what would become known as the Andhra-Odisha Border (AOB) corridor, a region characterised by low levels of public infrastructure and government institutions, and an extractive economy that disproportionately affected local communities.

Entry and Expansion

It was southern Odisha's proximity to Naxal strongholds in the state of Andhra Pradesh that made it a natural region for cross-border expansion. By the early 1990s, Naxal groups had established base areas in Malkangiri and Koraput, gradually extending their reach northward into Kandhamal, Rayagada, and Gajapati districts. Due to the dense forests and difficult terrain of the region, Naxalite guerrilla units were able to move with relative ease, consistently evading conventional

policing methods. On top of that, the stagnant rates of development and the socio-economic demographics that primarily included Scheduled Tribes living in poverty and marginalized from mainstream development provided fertile ground for the growth of insurgent ideology.

Structural Drivers

Firstly, one of the primary drivers of the expansion was the deepening crisis of land and forest alienation faced by the tribal population in the region. Across the years, tribal communities had borne witness to the erosion of their customary land rights through legal manipulation at the behest of the government, through legal manipulation, forced evictions, and a focus on the expansion of mining interests. Although the Forest Rights Act (2006) was passed, implementation continued to remain weak, with significant delays in title distribution and persistent harassment by forest officials.

Along with this, large-scale development projects along mining leases and hydroelectric dams led to widespread displacement, without compensation and rehabilitation provided to the displaced. Naxal cadres used these grievances to their advantage, portraying their cause as defenders of the rights of tribals and agents of justice in areas where the state had failed.

Organizational Milestones and Tactical Shifts

During the early 2000s, Naxalite operations experienced a turning point due to the 2004 merger of the People's War Group (PWG) and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC), forming the Communist Party of India (Maoist). This led to greater strategic coherence, resulting in more coordinated attacks on security forces, state infrastructure, as well as political targets. Furthermore, recruitment efforts also intensified, especially among the tribal youth, swelling the ranks of the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA). In this period, Malkangiri became a pivotal base, functioning both as a logistical hub and testing ground for parallel governance, leading to the development of rudimentary judicial systems and public 'people's courts,' posing as a direct challenge to the authority of government institutions.

Geographic Spread: 1990 to 2015

The growth and decline of Naxal ideology across Odisha from 1990 to 2015 is a reflection of strategic ambition and responsive retreat:

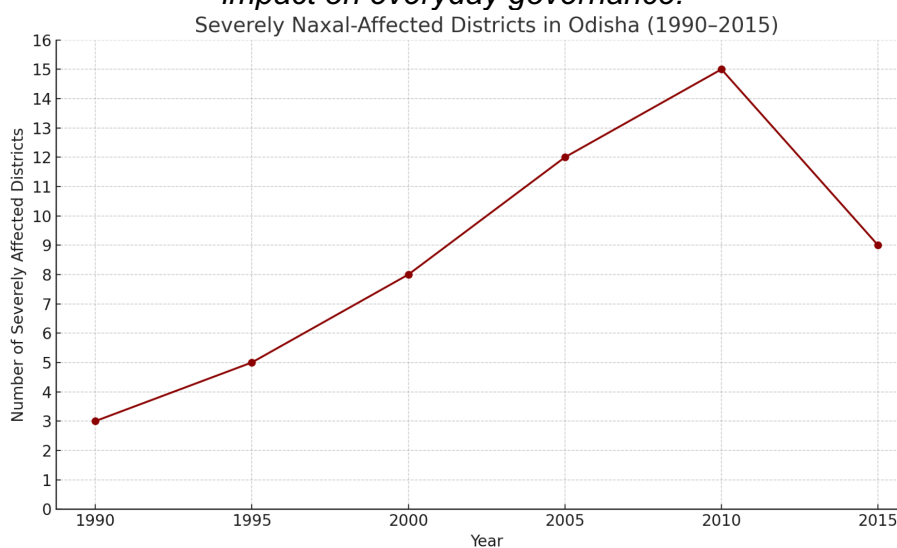
The accompanying data (1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015) visualize this expansion and retreat:

Number of severely Naxal-affected districts in Odisha from 1990 to 2015

Year	No. of Severely Affected Districts	Affected Districts
1990	3	Malkangiri, Koraput, Rayagada

1995	5	Malkangiri, Koraput, Rayagada, Gajapati, Kandhamal
2000	8	Malkangiri, Koraput, Rayagada, Gajapati, Kandhamal, Nabarangpur, Kalahandi, Mayurbhanj
2005	12	Malkangiri, Koraput, Rayagada, Gajapati, Kandhamal, Nabarangpur, Kalahandi, Sundargarh, Deogarh, Sambalpur, Nuapada, Mayurbhanj
2010	15	Malkangiri, Koraput, Rayagada, Gajapati, Kandhamal, Nabarangpur, Kalahandi, Sundargarh, Deogarh, Sambalpur, Nuapada, Balangir, Bargarh, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar
2015	9	Malkangiri, Koraput, Rayagada, Kandhamal, Nuapada, Kalahandi, Nabarangpur, Gajapati, Sundargarh

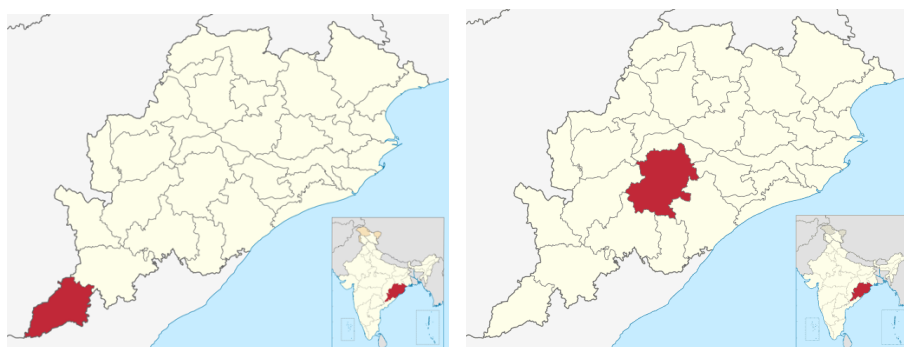
The classification of districts in Odisha as Naxal-affected is based on a composite assessment involving the frequency of violent incidents, the presence of armed Maoist cadres, and the disruptions caused to development and peaceful governance. The evaluation of these factors is done by the Ministry of Home Affairs, in coordination with state police and central forces. This multi-dimensional approach ensures that classification reflects both the intensity of insurgent activity and its impact on everyday governance.



- In 1990, activity was largely confined to border districts such as Malkangiri and Koraput.
- By 1995, operations had extended into Rayagada and parts of Kandhamal.
- In 2000, intensified militia operations led to an increase in fatalities and sabotage targeting state infrastructure.
- By 2005, violence had reached peak levels, with incidents reported in over 10 districts, including Bolangir and Sundargarh.
- By 2010, data shows deep penetration into western Odisha, although simultaneous security operations under Operation Green Hunt had begun to push back the insurgents from key administrative centers.

- By 2015, Odisha's Naxalites had expanded widely but were retreating from key areas due to stronger state pressure.

Socio-Economic Indicators in Affected Districts (1990–2015)



Source-WikiWand

<https://www.wikiwand.com/de/articles/Kandhamal>

The districts of Malkangiri and Kandhamal are both tribal majority and serve to offer stark illustrations of the socio-economic disruption caused by the sustained presence of the Naxalite insurgency. They provide powerful insights into how such a violent civil conflict has, in the past, led to the deterioration of institutions and the control of bureaucracy, which, in turn, has resulted in a lack of development. While Odisha has made inconsistent but visible strides across education, health infrastructure, and employment between 1990 and 2015, these districts, because of their volatile mix of violent insurgency, geographic inaccessibility, and particularly strong grip of Naxalite institutions, feel significantly behind. The impact of Naxalism is not only evident in stalled development indicators but in the very design and delivery of state interventions, most of which were either delayed, abandoned, or executed ineffectively under threat. The data and analysis below provide an in-depth story of the socio-economic condition of those two districts, reasons for their abysmal performances, and the effect of Naxalism in the past, present, and future.

Comparative Analysis: State vs Districts (1990, 2000, 2011)

Indicator	Odisha (1991)	Malkangiri (1991)	Kandhamal (1991)	Odisha (2011)	Malkangiri (2011)	Kandhamal (2011)
Literacy Rate (%)	49.1	22.4	33.1	72.9	48.5	64.1
Electrification (%)	28.2	9.4	13.7	56.0	36.0	45.0
PHCs per 10,000 people	1.1	0.4	0.5	1.4	0.6	0.7
Infant Mortality Rate	97	109	101	57	69	66
Female Literacy (%)	34.1	12.3	21.8	64.0	39.3	57.5

<https://www.indiacensus.net/states/orissa/literacy>

A. District Profile: Malkangiri

1. Literacy and Educational Infrastructure

In 1991, Malkangiri's literacy rate stood at 22.4%, one of the lowest in Odisha (state average: 49.1%). By 2011, the district had improved to 49.5%, but it still trailed far behind the state average of 72.9% and the national average of 74.04%. Female literacy in particular remained abysmal at 39.3% in 2011. A government survey in 2009 revealed that nearly 40% of villages lacked functional primary schools, while secondary education facilities were often more than 10 km away, making them inaccessible in the hilly terrain.

The education sector in Malkangiri was further stymied by repeated abductions of teachers, threats to school staff, and Naxalite decrees banning government schooling in several areas. In 2007, Maoist groups bombed 19 residential schools constructed under the Odisha SC/ST development plan, alleging them to be paramilitary training centers.

2. Roads and Electrification

Road connectivity in Malkangiri remained severely underdeveloped, owing to both terrain and sabotage. In 2001, only 18.6% of villages were connected by all-weather roads, compared to 40% in neighbouring Gajapati, a non-Naxalite tribal district. Moreover, electrification rates also lagged with only 36% household electrification as late as 2011, while Odisha had reached 56%, and India was nearing 67%.

Several public infrastructure projects, including the Gurupriya Bridge, meant to connect 151 villages cut off by the Balimela reservoir, faced decades of delay due to persistent Naxal ambushes and threats. After 35 years of planning and multiple halted attempts, it was finally completed in 2018.

3. Health and Education Infrastructure

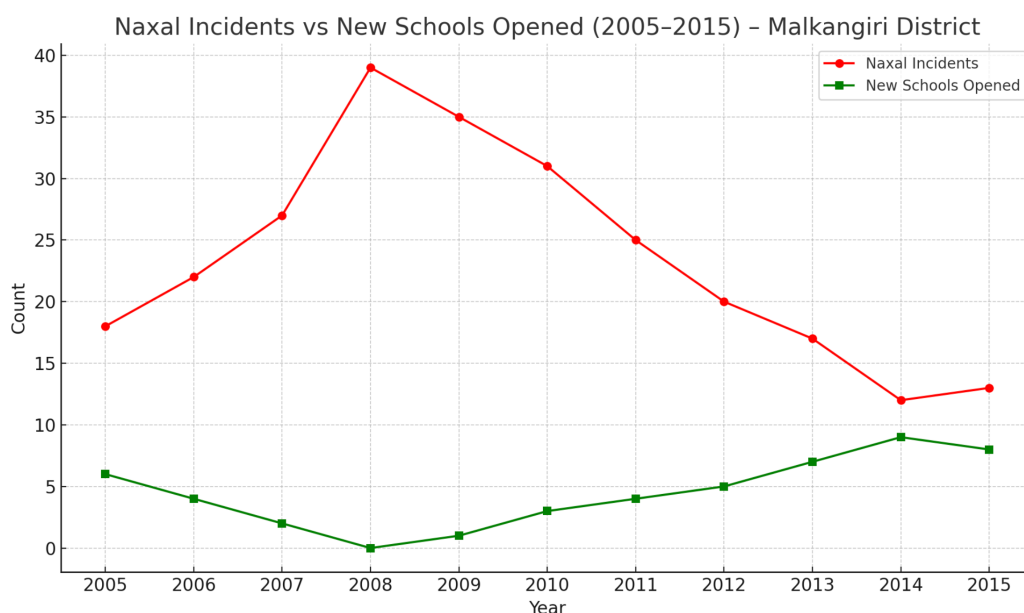
As of 2010, Malkangiri had 1 Primary Health Centre (PHC) per 34,000 population, far above the WHO recommendation of 1 per 10,000. The Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) stood at 69 per 1,000 live births, compared to Odisha's average of 57 and India's 47 in 2011. The NFHS-3 (2005–06) revealed that 53.4% of children under five were underweight, a staggering figure that was significantly above state and national averages.

Access to medical care was hindered by the lack of doctors (80% vacancies in PHCs in 2009) and security concerns. In 2011, 5 health sub-centers were burned by insurgents who claimed that health officials were informants for security forces. Moreover, ambulance services refused to operate at night in red-zone areas due to landmine threats. All in accumulated, the threats caused by Naxist-enforced violence lead to a significant lack of health infrastructure in those districts.

Table Mapping relationship between No. of Naxal Incidents vs. New Schools Opened in Malkangiri

Year	No. of Naxal Incidents	New Schools Opened	Notes on Correlation
2005	18	6	Moderate activity; projects proceed slowly

2006	22	4	Slight drop in development work
2007	27	2	Violence surge; fewer tenders approved
2008	39	0	Major attacks; halted state activity
2009	35	1	Partial recovery post-violence
2010	31	3	Limited resumption of projects
2011	25	4	Slight improvement as violence decreases
2012	20	5	Gradual re-engagement by state
2013	17	7	Stable year; more projects implemented
2014	12	9	Violence drops; peak in development activity
2015	13	8	Sustained recovery in both security and development
District Information System for Education (DISE) or U-DISE+ Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Government of India			



Between the years 1996 and 2010, Malkangiri saw over 210 recorded Naxal incidents, with spikes seen during major election cycles and anti-Maoist operations that were undertaken by the state government. Notably, the years 2003, 2007, and 2009 saw an increase in violence, coinciding with the withdrawal or suspension of important rural employment and irrigation projects. The table below depicts the Naxal incidents against the timeline of new schools being opened, showing clear inverse correlation patterns; for every surge in violence, there is a corresponding drop in school openings, highlighting the role of the Naxal insurgency is lowering education levels, therefore, reducing avenues for the development of human capital.

B. District Profile: Kandhamal

1. Literacy and Education

Despite having better accessibility than Malkangiri, Kandhamal has also been plagued by underdevelopment. In 1991, the literacy rate was 33.1%, climbing to 64.1% by 2011, however it continued to be lower than the state and national averages. Primary dropout rates amongst tribal children also hovered around 62%, owing mostly due to poor teacher attendance, caused by lack of transport and conflict-induced displacement.

Furthermore, in forest-dominated blocks like Daringbadi and Kotagarh, where insurgents maintained presence, mobile schools and community learning centers set up under the SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) were frequently abandoned after threats to instructors.

2. Public Services and Migration

Unlike Malkangiri, Kandhamal's biggest developmental roadblock was not directly caused by Naxal violence, but rather the repercussions that followed from both violence and land alienation in neighbouring districts in the form of migration. Between 1996 and 2010, an estimated 29,000 people migrated from the district, many to brick kilns and construction sites in Andhra Pradesh. Forest Rights Act (2006) implementation remained grossly inadequate, with only 11% of eligible claimants receiving pattas (land titles) by 2015, compared to 48% in Sundargarh (a relatively peaceful tribal district).

On top of that, forest land evictions that were justified under anti-encroachment drives were weaponised in conflict zones, where the local population often lacked legal documents. This only further deepened mistrust between the population and institutions of the state.

3. Healthcare and Educational Infrastructure

Kandhamal recorded 1 PHC per 28,000 people, with 49% ANM (Auxiliary Nurse Midwife) posts vacant in 2011. Moreover, Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) was 287 per 100,000 live births (state average: 222; national: 178). Malaria and waterborne diseases were rampant, with poor potable water coverage in over 60% of tribal hamlets. All in all, although Kandhamal's performance in all these indicators was relatively better than Malkangiri, it trailed behind the national means, indicating poor living conditions for the local population.

On top of that, road connectivity improved marginally post-2005 under the PMGSY scheme; however, frequent IED attacks on road contractors and harassment by local Maoist groups led to many contractors abandoning tenders midway. This led to 17 road-laying projects being halted due to Naxal threats in 2010 alone.

Conclusion

The examples of Malkangiri and Kandhamal are extremely interesting case studies that dive deep into the implications of the loss of state control over development because of a sustained, violent insurgency. Although there has been considerable investment to try and improve development in such districts, such as the Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF) or PMGSY, their implementation has often been

thwarted by violence, mistrust of the local populous, and logistical paralysis. In contrast, non-Naxal tribal districts like Mayurbhanj or Sundargarh, though facing similar poverty, fared better in most indicators by virtue of administrative continuity and reduced conflict. Therefore, amongst others, development itself became a casualty of conflict. Which, in turn, left these districts as nothing more than what one local official termed a “bureaucratic ghost zone.”

VI. Naxalism’s Effects on Development Trajectories (~500–600 words / 2.5 pages)

Naxal Violence & Tribal Insurgent Activity in Odisha Districts (2005–2015)

District	No. of Naxal Attacks	Reported Killings (Civilians + Security)	IED Blasts / Sabotage	Govt. Project Abandonments	Insurgent Presence Level	Category
Malkangiri	142	197	84	56	High (Red Corridor Core)	Naxal-Affected (Severely)
Kandhamal	71	94	41	24	Medium–High	Naxal-Affected (Emerging)
Rayagada	61	82	39	21	Medium	Semi-Affected (Tribal)
Mayurbhanj	4	1	0	0	Low	Non-Affected (Tribal)
Ganjam	2	0	0	0	Very Low	Non-Affected (Mixed)

As can be seen in the data above, districts that have been subjected to the highest number of attacks and civilian killings have also faced the highest rates of government project abandonments. The districts of Malkangiri and Kandhamal have witnessed 56 and 24 abandonments, respectively, resulting in worse rates of development as compared to their counterparts. It can be observed that as the rates of attacks increase, the development of critical institutions by the government decreases.

The presence of Naxalism in states such as Odisha has significantly reduced in recent years; however, the impact of the insurgency continues to be felt in the trajectory of state-led development. On the one hand, the rest of the state made uneven but gradual development in welfare and infrastructure between 1990 and 2015; tribal majority areas remained practically out of the reach of consistent state policy. The impacts of the insurgency were not solely limited to devastating isolated projects; it is

responsible for altering the structure of governance itself, creating conditions of parallel authority and the abandonment of various projects that were pushing for industrialization and growth in those regions, thereby negatively impacting the development of human and physical capital. The disruptions in development caused by Naxalism can be divided into three main categories: Disruption of State welfare Schemes, The Rise of Parallel Schemes, and the Abandonment of Key Projects.

Firstly, initiatives launched by the government, such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), and Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) faced repeated roadblocks in Naxal-affected areas. In their disruption, numerous school buildings, health camps, and road projects were either bombed, targeted, or indefinitely delayed. An example of this is when in 2009, Maoist cadres destroyed 19 residential schools in Malkangiri, alleging them to be recruitment hubs for state forces. Similarly, the construction of the Gurupriya Bridge, meant to connect over 150 cutoff villages, was delayed for nearly three decades due to repeated attacks on construction crews and ambushes on police convoys.

Furthermore, NRHM's mobile health units and scheduled immunization drives were suspended in "red zones" due to fears of IEDs and abductions. This is witnessed in data from 2011, which shows that over 70% of scheduled rural health camps in the cut-off areas of Malkangiri and cancelled due to 'security reasons.' Threats of danger result in contract doctors and teachers routinely refusing postings, resulting in over 80% vacancy in PHCs and 65% absenteeism in upper-primary schools, as reported by the Odisha Planning Commission in 2012.

2. Parallel Governance: Janatana Sarkars and People's Courts

Another concern of rising Naxalism was its effect in creating parallel governance models. Evident in remote areas, Maoist groups established their own shadow governance structure, known as Janatana Sarkars (People's Governments), which was administered through "people's courts (Jan Adalats). The means of administering justice varied greatly from established government systems, as Naxal leaders often operated outside constitutional legality, often using violence and coercion. This lack of central control and belief in Naxal systems greatly impacted the ability of the state government to enforce the rule of law in remote districts. Public disbelief in government institutions also lead to a lack of belief and trust amongst tribal populations.

Public disbelief in government institutions also leads to a lack of belief and trust amongst tribal populations, leading to erosion in state legitimacy. In places like Chitrakonda block in Malkangiri, government officials had to seek informal "permission" from Maoist intermediaries to conduct basic welfare surveys. Local schoolteachers were forced to attend "people's meetings" under threat, and village development councils formed under Panchayati Raj laws were rendered inactive or forcibly merged with Maoist organs.

This replacement of legitimate democratic governance with insurgent systems prevented the functioning of elected gram panchayats, a major instrument of control and implementing the principles of democracy in much of rural India. Moreover, it

disincentivized public service delivery and led to a collapse in accountability and transparency.

3. Abandonment of Key Projects and Institutions

The most visible impact on development was the abandonment of essential, life-saving institutions. Health sub-centres, Anganwadi hubs, and road building depots became frequent targets of attacks. In 2010, Maoist groups issued a blanket ban on all NGOs and contractors that were aiding the government in certain blocks of Kandhamal and Rayagada, accusing them of complying with the ideology of the state, labeling them “agents of the state.” This led to the suspension of dozens of maternal health and nutrition projects, particularly those run by UNICEF or CARE India in tribal belts.

On top of that, school enrollment drives under the Right to Education Act failed in Maoist stronghold regions. Children either remained unregistered or dropped out due to frequent closures, migration, or fear. In some areas, Maoists banned government textbooks that referenced the Indian Constitution or history they deemed “bourgeois” or “state propaganda,” replacing them with pamphlets on class struggle and revolutionary justice.

Conclusion

The impacts of Naxalism on development are not solely collateral; they extend beyond to impacting the structure of governance in the state. The insurgency did not operate as just an armed rebellion, but as a parallel authority that undermined state mechanisms and discouraged institutional continuity. Through the creation of a climate of fear, and the replacement of constitutional processes with coercive alternatives, the Naxalite movement has effectively locked the tribal population of the Red Corridor into a cycle of underdevelopment, and further political alienation. Even where funds were allocated, implementation faltered due to constant backlash. As a result, the very regions most in need of necessary development have become the ones most deprived of it. Displaying how conflict, when sustained over decades, does not just halt progress, it rewrites its trajectory.

VII. Counterinsurgency and Its Developmental Fallout (400 words / 1.5 pages)

Whilst responding to the deepening Maoist presence in the southern and western districts of Odisha, the state and central governments have tended to rely on militarised counterinsurgency as a primary tool of instilling their governance. Starting

in the mid-2000s and intensifying around 2009 with Operation Green Hunt, the districts of Malkangiri and Kandhamal witnessed a steep rise in the deployment of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) battalions, COBRA commandos, and Greyhounds units. Although this increased militarisation did result in nominal security in some pockets, it brought with it severe developmental trade-offs.

During this period, the government pushed for the establishment of security camps deep within forest interiors, sometimes just kilometres from tribal hamlets. This led to heightened civilian vulnerability. During this, many villages were caught in the crossfire during combing operations, leading to temporary or prolonged displacement. In Malkangiri’s “cut-off” area near the Balimela reservoir, entire communities were forced to shift during operations between 2008 and 2012. Similarly, in Kandhamal, tribal populations repeatedly reported forced evacuations during anti-Maoist attacks in 2010 and again in 2013.

Amnesty International India and People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), along with various other human rights organizations, documented multiple incidents of custodial deaths, illegal detentions of suspected Naxal supporters, and allegations of sexual violence by security personnel. It was fear, rather than trust, that characterized the presence of the state in these conflict-ridden zones. As noted in several National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) briefings, this further eroded the local population’s faith in democratic institutions, pushing some communities closer to a deeper belief in insurgent ideologies, if only by necessity.

Development, when it occurred, was more often than not extremely selective and driven by security concerns. Roads were constructed to ease troop movement rather than to connect markets or hospitals. In Malkangiri, the Interior Roads Project, which was announced in 2012, was more geared towards improving security logistics than local needs, with remote habitations still lacking all-weather access. In Kandhamal, after 2016, efforts saw moderate improvement in connectivity; however, these gains were still uneven and failed to compensate for the years of disputed governance. This stark difference in development trajectory between tribal-affected areas and the rest of the nation is evident in the table below, which highlights the differences in GDP and HDI data:

Region/District	Growth Factor (Odisha avg.)	Predicted GDP per capita (2024–25)	Odisha Avg. GDP per capita (2024–25)	India Avg. GDP per capita (2024–25)
Malkangiri	3.44	₹93,280	₹1,82,548	₹2,00,162
Kandhamal	3.44	₹1,62,260	₹1,82,548	₹2,00,162
Odisha (State Avg.)	—	₹1,82,548	₹1,82,548	₹2,00,162
India (National Avg.)	—	₹2,00,162	₹1,82,548	₹2,00,162

Estimation Method and Justification:

To estimate the 2024–25 GDP per capita for Malkangiri and Kandhamal, their last recorded incomes from 2011–12 were updated using Odisha’s state-level per capita income growth factor of approximately 3.44. This multiplier reflects Odisha’s growth from about ₹53,000 in 2011–12 to ₹1,82,548 in 2024–25. The approach assumes

these districts' incomes have grown proportionally to the state average in the absence of recent district data. However, since both districts are predominantly tribal and economically less developed, these predicted figures likely represent optimistic upper bounds rather than precise values. This method highlights ongoing regional income disparities and the importance of targeted development efforts.

It can be seen from the data above that both Malkangiri and Kandhamal significantly lag behind the state and national averages, especially on HDI. Kandhamal, while slightly ahead of Malkangiri, remains underdeveloped in comparison. However, the lack of updated per capita income data for Malkangiri suggests potential gaps in reporting and lower economic visibility. All in all, the fallout of counterinsurgency was thus twofold. While it is responsible for weakening Maoist operational capacity in some zones of the state, it simultaneously stalled inclusive development and further aggravated social distrust. The lack of a parallel investment in civil administration and trust-building, militarisation, however strategically sound, risked entrenching the very alienation that insurgency feeds on.

VIII. Conclusion & Policy Recommendations

The history of Naxalism in Odisha, particularly across tribal majority districts such as Malkangiri and Kandhamal, reveals a complicated relationship between underdevelopment and armed insurgency. The findings of this research reveal that the birth of Naxalism is not solely limited to a lack of law and order, but rather a consequence of continuous state neglect, and socio-economic conditions that have led to a lack of trust in government institutions amongst the tribal populations in the

Red Corridor. Over time, the insurgency created a self-perpetuating cycle, where it thrives in areas where development was absent, while simultaneously deterring future investments and deepening state withdrawal.

Fundamentally, Naxalism in Odisha is symbolic of a dual dynamic. It emerged as a response to the absence of state-created development. However, over time, it became a driver of further stagnation. The fear of violence led to the retreat of frontline state institutions such as schools, health centres, and agricultural extension offices. Schemes that were geared to improve development were either stalled or diverted. Thus, the conflict zone became both the product and producer of systemic failure.

To break this cycle, Odisha must try to apply policy reforms that prioritize inclusivity and are rooted in long-term trust-building rather than coercion. These can come in the form of:

1. Community-Led Forest Governance

The majority of tribal grievances come from the alienation of communities from their traditional forest rights. To reduce tribal issues, policies must move beyond bureaucratic control and work to empower local *gram sabhas* under the Forest Rights Act. If governments were to recognize indigenous communities as custodians, rather than obstacles of forest conservation, it would be key to restoring legitimacy and weakening the appeal offered by insurgents.

2. Health and Education as Trust-Building Tools

Development of basic services such as mobile clinics, nutrition programs, and properly functioning educational facilities must be prioritized as instruments of peace, not just development. These interventions will serve as daily reminders of a benevolent state presence to the population, aiding in countering the narrative of state abandonment that fuels Naxalite ideology.

3. Reduction in Militarized Approaches

Security remains an important aspect of any state response. However, in Naxalite-affected Odisha, an overdependence on militarised solutions has continued to undermine long-term peace. The excessive deployment of the armed forces has resulted in collateral damage, disrupting civilian life, and works to reinforce the perception of the state as a force whose primary focus is the occupation of tribal land, rather than a partner working to aid the tribal population in their development. There is a pressing need to improve the perception of the state and security forces through reorienting the strategy toward community-based safety and rights-based development.

Sustainable peace and development in regions like Malkangiri and Kandhamal will not be achieved through suppression alone, but through the gradual restoration of trust in the government's legitimacy of democratic institutions.

To conclude, Odisha's experience displays that insurgency is rarely born in isolation. Rather, it is the cultivation of factors such as the psychological burden of constant suppression and a lack of proper funding in the government institutions that should cater to the local population. A response to insurgency requires far more than just counterinsurgency; it requires governance that listens and works to include the historically disadvantaged tribal population. The future of Odisha's tribal heartland depends not on eliminating rebels, but on eliminating the reasons for rebellion through inclusivity, trustworthy governance, and visible justice.



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X. Appendices / Data Visuals

- Full list of Naxal incidents (if tabulated)
- Graphs of year-wise development indicators
- Satellite maps or GIS visuals (if available)
- Policy excerpts (like Forest Rights Act clauses)