
Socio-Economic Profile of Women Associated with the Naxalite Movement in Chhattisgarh: A Comparative Study of Arrested and Surrendered Women

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Abstract

The Naxalite movement has significantly influenced the socio-political landscape of several tribal regions of India, particularly in the state of Chhattisgarh. Women's participation in this movement has drawn increasing scholarly attention in recent decades. The present study analyzes the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of women associated with the Naxalite movement by comparing two groups: arrested women cadres and those who have surrendered to government authorities. The study is based on a sample of 120 respondents, including 60 arrested and 60 surrendered women. The analysis focuses on age, education, language, family structure, livelihood patterns, income levels, land ownership, and infrastructural conditions. The findings reveal that most respondents belong to marginalized tribal communities characterized by low educational attainment, extreme poverty, forest-dependent livelihoods, and limited infrastructural access. Family influence, patriarchal social structures, and socio-economic deprivation emerge as important factors shaping women's involvement in the movement. The study highlights the need for inclusive development policies, improved educational access, and livelihood security in conflict-affected regions to address the structural roots of insurgency.

Keywords: Naxalite movement, women insurgents, tribal communities, socio-economic conditions, Chhattisgarh.

1. Introduction

The Naxalite movement, which originated in Naxalbari village of West Bengal in 1967, gradually spread to several tribal and rural regions of India. Over time, the movement evolved into a major insurgent challenge in central India, particularly in states such as Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh. These regions are characterized by high tribal populations, uneven development, and persistent socio-economic inequalities.

In recent years, women's participation in insurgent movements has become an important subject of sociological and political analysis. Women are no longer confined to supportive roles but actively participate in ideological propagation, logistical support, and even armed activities. In the context of the Naxalite movement, women constitute a significant proportion of cadres, particularly in tribal regions.

Several factors influence women's involvement in such movements, including socio-economic deprivation, gender inequality, family networks, and ideological motivations. In tribal societies, where patriarchal structures often restrict women's autonomy, insurgent movements may appear to offer opportunities for empowerment and participation in decision-making processes.

Understanding the socio-economic background of women involved in the Naxalite movement is essential to analyze the structural conditions that sustain insurgency. This study attempts to

examine the demographic and economic characteristics of women associated with the movement by comparing arrested and surrendered women cadres in Chhattisgarh.

2. Review of Literature

Several scholars have examined the causes and dynamics of the Naxalite movement in India.

Ramanna (2005) highlights that insurgent mobilization in tribal areas is closely linked with socio-economic marginalization, land alienation, and state neglect. Tribal communities often perceive the movement as a response to exploitation and developmental exclusion.

Chaudhary (2016) argues that cultural propaganda, including revolutionary songs, theatre, and local networks, plays an important role in attracting youth and women toward the movement.

Sinha Roy (2006) discusses the intersection between patriarchy and insurgency, suggesting that women sometimes join militant movements to escape oppressive gender relations in traditional societies.

Studies by Bhatia (2011) and Duey (2018) emphasize that patriarchal structures continue to influence women's roles even within revolutionary organizations, where formal equality does not necessarily translate into actual empowerment.

Research on tribal societies in central India has also highlighted the role of poverty, land inequality, and forest dependency in shaping political mobilization among marginalized communities (Jha, 2017).

Despite these studies, limited empirical research has focused specifically on the socio-economic background of women cadres in the Naxalite movement. The present study attempts to fill this gap by providing a comparative analysis of arrested and surrendered women Naxalites in Chhattisgarh.

3. Theoretical Framework

The study draws upon **conflict theory** and **feminist sociological perspectives**.

Conflict theory suggests that social inequality and unequal distribution of resources create tensions between dominant and marginalized groups. In regions where communities experience economic deprivation, land alienation, and political exclusion, insurgent movements may emerge as forms of resistance.

From a feminist perspective, women's participation in insurgent movements can also be interpreted as a response to patriarchal oppression and gender inequality. While traditional societies often restrict women's autonomy, militant organizations may provide opportunities for participation, mobility, and social recognition.

However, scholars argue that insurgent movements may reproduce existing gender hierarchies despite ideological claims of equality. Thus, women's participation reflects a complex interaction between structural inequalities, political ideology, and gender dynamics.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The study adopts a **comparative research design** to analyze socio-economic characteristics of two groups of respondents:

- Arrested women Naxalites

- Surrendered women Naxalites

4.2 Sample Size

The study is based on a sample of **120 respondents**, comprising:

- 60 arrested women
- 60 surrendered women

4.3 Data Collection

Primary data were collected through structured interviews and field surveys conducted in Naxalite-affected areas of Chhattisgarh.

4.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using statistical techniques including:

- Percentage distribution
- Chi-square test
- Fisher Exact test

These tools were used to examine differences between arrested and surrendered respondents across various socio-economic indicators.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Age Distribution

The findings indicate that arrested women are predominantly younger, particularly in the age group of 20–25 years, whereas surrendered women are more concentrated in the 30–35 and 35–40 age groups. This suggests that younger women are more actively involved in the movement, while older women often choose to surrender after experiencing disillusionment or seeking stability in life.

5.2 Language and Social Exposure

Most respondents primarily communicate in tribal languages such as Gondi and Halbi. Only a quarter of the respondents are able to communicate in Hindi, indicating limited interaction with mainstream society and low exposure to broader educational and administrative systems.

5.3 Educational Status

The educational attainment of respondents is generally low. A significant proportion of women have only primary or middle-level education, while very few have completed higher secondary education. Low literacy levels restrict employment opportunities and make individuals more vulnerable to ideological mobilization.

5.4 Family Structure and Patriarchy

Most respondents belong to patriarchal family systems. Interestingly, while arrested women largely come from joint families, surrendered women tend to live in nuclear families. This may reflect the social isolation faced by women after participating in insurgent activities.

5.5 Family Influence on Recruitment

The study reveals that family background plays an important role in shaping women's participation in the movement. Many respondents reported that their family members were either active participants or sympathizers of the Naxalite movement.

5.6 Livelihood and Economic Conditions

Most respondents belong to families dependent on agriculture, hunting, and forest-based livelihoods. The heavy reliance on natural resources reflects the limited diversification of economic activities in tribal regions.

Low income levels further highlight the economic vulnerability of these communities, with many families surviving on extremely low daily income levels.

5.7 Housing and Infrastructure

Housing conditions differ significantly between the two groups. Most arrested respondents live in kachha houses, while surrendered respondents often live in pakka houses due to government rehabilitation schemes.

The study also indicates poor road connectivity in many villages, which restricts access to markets, healthcare, and educational institutions. Such infrastructural deficiencies contribute to regional underdevelopment.

5.8 Land Ownership

Most respondents belong to marginal land-holding families with less than one hectare of land. Land inequality and limited agricultural productivity contribute to persistent poverty in these regions.

6. Conclusion

The study reveals that women associated with the Naxalite movement largely come from economically marginalized tribal communities characterized by poverty, limited education, and inadequate infrastructure.

Several structural factors contribute to women's participation in the movement, including:

- Socio-economic deprivation
- Patriarchal family structures
- Limited educational opportunities
- Land inequality and livelihood insecurity
- Family networks linked to insurgent organizations

The findings suggest that addressing insurgency requires not only security measures but also comprehensive development strategies. Policies aimed at improving education, infrastructure, livelihood opportunities, and gender equality are essential for reducing the appeal of insurgent movements in tribal regions.

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