



NAVIGATING THE INTERSECTION: THE STRUGGLES OF KOYA TRIBAL YOUTH AMIDST POVERTY AND LEFT-WING MOVEMENTS IN MALKANGIRI DISTRICT, ODISHA, INDIA.

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ABSTRACT

This article delves into the multifaceted struggles faced by Koya tribal youth in Malkangiri District, Odisha, India, as they strive to emancipate themselves from poverty amidst the rise of left-wing movements. It examines the socio-economic challenges confronting these youth within the context of pervasive poverty and explores how the presence of left-wing movements further complicates their efforts for socio-economic empowerment. Drawing on qualitative research and personal narratives, this article aims to illuminate the complex dynamics at play and proposes strategies for addressing the unique needs of Koya tribal youth in Malkangiri District.



KEYWORDS: Koya Tribal Youth, Poverty, Left Wing Movement.

INTRODUCTION

Malkangiri District, situated in the southwestern part of Odisha, is home to a diverse array of tribal communities, including the Koya tribe. The Koya people have historically inhabited the forests and hills of this region, maintaining their distinct cultural identity and traditional way of life. However, the district is plagued by pervasive poverty, with a significant portion of its population living below the poverty line. Against this backdrop, the emergence of left-wing movements has further complicated the socio-economic landscape, posing both opportunities and challenges for Koya tribal youth seeking to emancipate themselves from poverty. There are several issues which have made the tribal youth of Malkangiri to become disillusioned one being mainly the Left Wing Insurgency. Though most of the atrocities are being suppressed still the problem of poverty and unemployment and underemployment are still high. Many of the villages do not have basic facilities like water, electricity, road, proper houses. Some of the villages are still under the grip of fear and suspicion that someday the insurgence might come up unexpectedly. The article is aim to highlight the difficulties faced by the people especially youth of the Malkangiri district in the face of this alarming situation. The developmental activities are slow as the entire district has not recovered from fear and atrocities that had happened a few years back. The government officials are afraid to visit deep interior pockets of the district as they fear there might be the presence of this uprising. The entire district is enveloped by the strong security officials, a 250 of out posts, still there are rumors of violent encounters. It might take some more years for the

population to come to the mainstream and seek for developmental action. This study shows the plight of the youth caught up in the midst of this overwhelming situation. Due to poor educational facilities, lack of infrastructure in the area of health, sanitation, unemployment, land alienation, migration, cultural erosion, poor marketing facility and communication the policy makers are bound to take action and to bring the lives of the tribal youth to normalcy. The findings and the recommendations would help the policy makers to take right action for the future.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

A study was conducted by Niranjan Sahoo, titled 'Half a Century of India's Maoist Movement Insurgency: An appraisal of State Response in 2019' where the author explains the atrocities committed by the Maoist movement and how the youth were lured or intimidated to join the group. The disoriented youth who were left with nothing to live on had no option but to fight for their own emancipation. The study suggests policy makers should create more employment opportunity, land settlement of the tribal people, proper security measures should be initiated.

A Study was conducted by Anshuman Behara, titled 'Maoist conflict in Odisha: National Institute of advanced science, 2016. It highlights that land alienation of the Scheduled Caste and Schedule Tribe, poverty, and unemployment are some of the cause of conflict and thereby the uprising of insurgency. Development induced conflicts also play a vital role in the disillusionment of the tribal people. He concludes with suggesting, land security, employment, rehabilitation, and inclusive development programs should be initiated by the policy makers.

A study was conducted by Profulla Kumar Lakra, titled, 'Tribal Poverty, Alienation and Growth of Naxalism in Koraput and Malkangiri Districts of Odisha, 2021. This study highlights that due to the tribal poverty, and land alienation the youth fall prey to Naxal ideology. It concludes by suggesting, policy makers should make sure a corrupt free government institutions, healthy atmosphere, education, public work, irrigation, employment, tribal rights, accountability and participatory planning for a holistic development of the tribal community.

A study was conducted by Dr. Mohsin Uddin, titled Educational Schemes and Tribal Welfare: A Study of Mandlar District, 2013, in which the author emphasis the importance of education for the tribal youth who have the tendency to follow the old way of life ignoring the importance of education and then remain ignorant about the outside world. He suggests that some types of incentives should be made available for the youth to get motivated and then continue with their studies. These types of measures by the government will help the education of the tribal youth

OBJECTIVE:

To investigate the status of Koya Tribal youth in village development in the Naxal infested District of Malkangiri, Odisha

HYPOTHESIS:

Koya Tribal youth have the potential to mainstream themselves, given an opportunity

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN:

The research adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to gather comprehensive data from the youth in their participation in village development.

TOOLS:

The data collected are from selected youths including the elders aged between 18 to 65 years old. To determine the sample size needed to obtain a sample of 300 from a targeted population of 8000 with 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. A purposive sampling was used to select participants who could provide valuable insights into the research. The criteria here used are the Inclusion and exclusion criteria, that is, those eligible and ineligible to participate in the study. They are

aged above 18 years of age in the inclusion criteria and ineligible are below 18 years age. The tools used for data collection are surveys, interviews and focus group discussion.

SOCIO-ECONOMICAL:

Poverty remains a pervasive and entrenched reality for many Koya tribal youth in Malkangiri District. Limited access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities perpetuates cycles of intergenerational poverty within their communities. Despite government initiatives aimed at poverty alleviation, structural barriers such as landlessness, lack of infrastructure, and inadequate social services continue to impede socio-economic progress. For Koya youth, navigating these challenges requires resilience, resourcefulness, and often, migration to urban centers in search of livelihood opportunities.

The lack of industries and economic opportunities further compounds the situation, pushing many young people towards migration in search of livelihoods, often to urban areas where they face exploitation and marginalization. Moreover, factors like insurgency and a history of conflict in the region have hindered development efforts, leaving many youth disillusioned and vulnerable to radicalization or involvement in illicit activities. Despite government initiatives aimed at addressing these issues, the plight of Malkangiri's youth underscores the urgent need for comprehensive and sustainable socio-economic development strategies. (Reference: Odisha Government website, Malkangiri District Profile)

The lack of viable employment opportunities exacerbates the issue, leading to high rates of unemployment among the youth. According to reports from the Odisha government and various development agencies like UNICEF, the situation is further compounded by factors such as inadequate governmental intervention, geographical remoteness, and historical neglect.

As highlighted by studies conducted by organizations like the Center for Youth and Social Development (CYSD), addressing the socio-economic challenges in Malkangiri requires holistic interventions that prioritize education, skill development, employment generation, and conflict resolution, ensuring a brighter future for the district's youth.

IMPACT OF LEFT-WING MOVEMENTS:

The presence of left-wing movements, particularly Maoist insurgents, adds another layer of complexity to the struggles faced by Koya tribal youth in Malkangiri District. These movements operate in the remote and inaccessible regions where many Koya communities are located, often exploiting grievances stemming from socio-economic marginalization and state neglect. While some youth are drawn to the promise of social justice and revolutionary change espoused by these movements, others are coerced or intimidated into joining their ranks. The militarization of these areas exacerbates tensions and perpetuates a cycle of violence that disproportionately affects tribal communities. However, the involvement of youth in left-wing movements also poses risks, as they may become embroiled in violence and conflict, jeopardizing their safety and future prospects. Reports from organizations like the Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses (IDSA) shed light on the complex dynamics between left-wing groups and youth in Malkangiri, emphasizing the need for comprehensive strategies that address the root causes of discontent and provide constructive avenues for youth participation in development processes.

CULTURAL IDENTITY AND RESILIENCE:

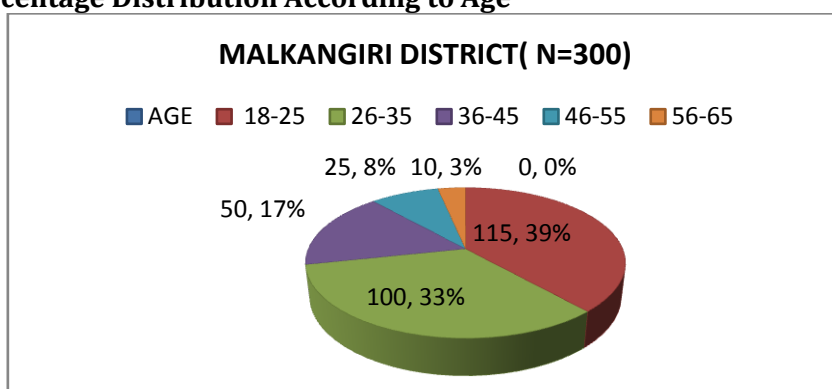
Amidst the socio-economic challenges and the specter of left-wing movements, Koya tribal youth demonstrate remarkable resilience and cultural pride. Despite the pressures of modernization and external influences, they continue to uphold their traditional customs, rituals, and language. Cultural identity serves as a source of strength and solidarity, enabling Koya youth to resist assimilation and preserve their distinct way of life. However, the interplay between tradition and modernity poses dilemmas for many youth, who must reconcile their cultural heritage with the aspirations for socio-economic advancement. Studies such as those conducted by the Tribal Research Institute of Odisha and

anthropological research by scholars like Virginius Xaxa highlight the importance of cultural identity in shaping the resilience of tribal youth in Malkangiri. Moreover, initiatives by grassroots organizations and NGOs focused on cultural preservation and youth empowerment play a crucial role in nurturing this resilience and fostering positive identity formation among the tribal youth, paving the way for their active participation in community development and social change.

GENDER DYNAMICS AND EMPOWERMENT:

Gender dynamics intersect with the struggles of Koya tribal youth, shaping their experiences of poverty and engagement with left-wing movements. Gender disparities persist within Koya communities, with women and girls facing additional barriers to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Moreover, the militarization of the region exacerbates gender-based violence and restricts the mobility and agency of women and girls. Efforts to empower Koya youth must be gender-sensitive and inclusive, addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by young women and girls.

Frequency & Percentage Distribution According to Age



Recent initiatives aimed at empowering Koya women have begun to challenge these norms, promoting gender equality and enhancing women's agency. Programs by organizations such as the Odisha Tribal Empowerment and Livelihoods Programme (OTELP) and local NGOs focus on education, vocational training, and self-help groups, fostering economic independence and leadership skills among Koya women. Studies like those from the International Journal of Rural Management highlight that while these efforts have led to noticeable improvements in women's social status and economic contributions; deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes still pose challenges. Continued emphasis on gender-sensitive policies and community-driven development is essential to sustain and further the empowerment of Koya women in Malkangiri District.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:

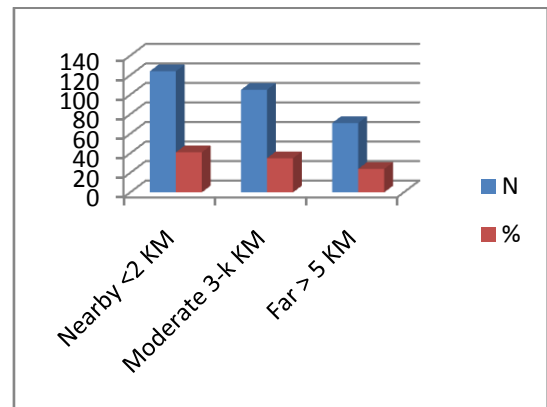
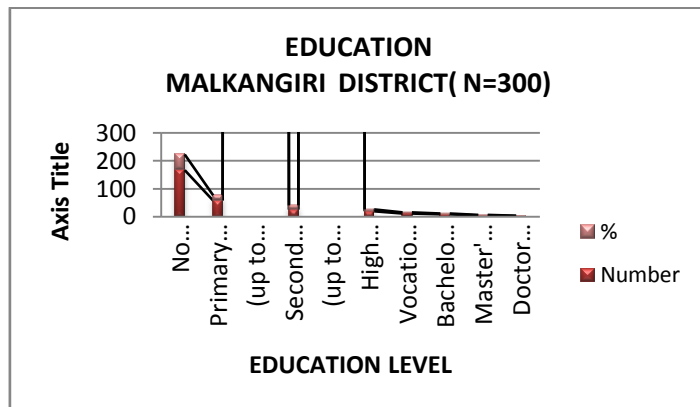
As per the findings and data collection, a majority of the people are below poverty line. There is also economical disparity, illiteracy, gender discrimination, migration, cultural erosion and unemployment.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

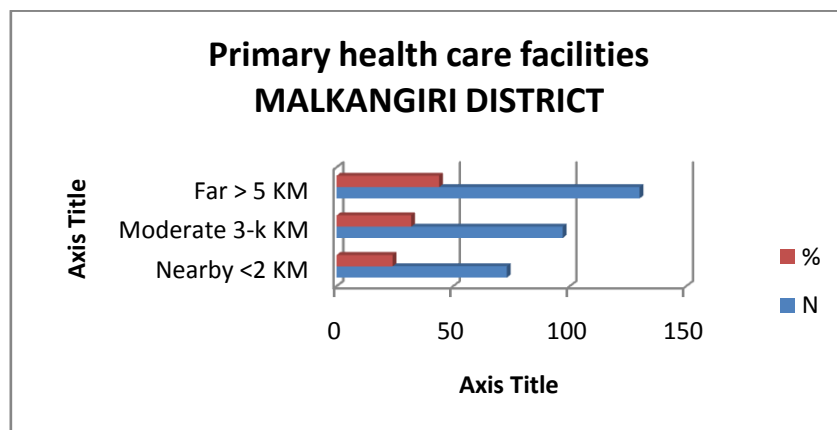
Addressing the struggles of Koya tribal youth in Malkangiri District necessitates a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of poverty and socio-economic marginalization while addressing the grievances underlying the rise of left-wing movements. Policymakers must prioritize initiatives aimed at improving access to education, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities in tribal areas. Furthermore, efforts to promote peace building, dialogue, and conflict resolution are essential for mitigating the impact of violence on Koya communities. Empowering Koya youth through skill development, entrepreneurship, and leadership training can foster resilience and agency, enabling them to shape their own futures.

To address the socio-economic challenges faced by the Koya tribe youth and the broader population of Malkangiri district, comprehensive and multi-faceted policy interventions are essential. First, enhancing educational infrastructure and accessibility is critical. This includes establishing more schools and vocational training centers, particularly in remote areas, and providing scholarships and financial aid to ensure that tribal youth can pursue higher education. According to a report by the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD), education is pivotal for breaking the cycle of poverty and empowering young people with the skills needed for gainful employment.

Frequency & Percentage Distribution According to Education level Frequency & Percentage Distribution According to Distance to Educational Institutions

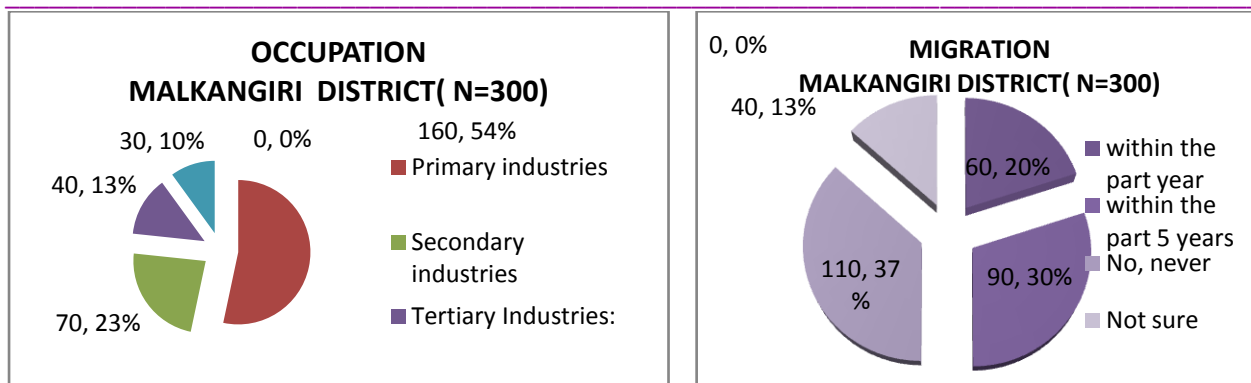


Second, improving healthcare services is vital, with a focus on maternal and child health, and addressing malnutrition. Mobile health units and telemedicine could play a significant role in reaching remote communities, as suggested by studies from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

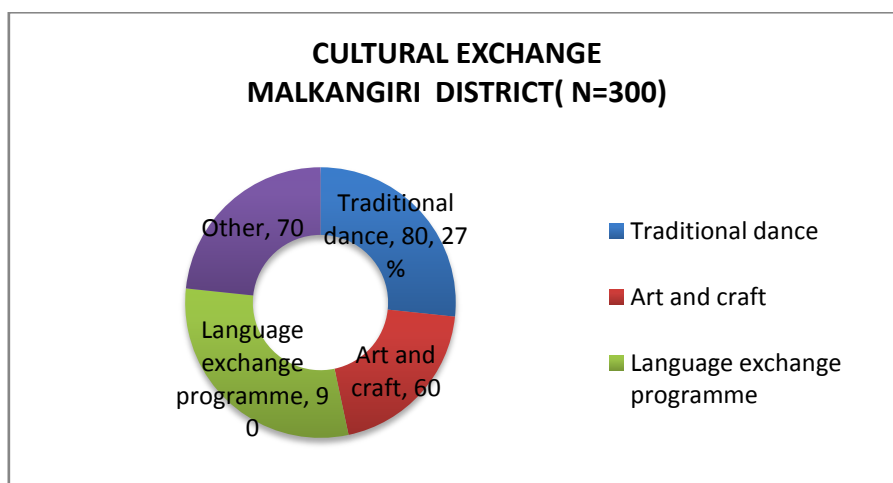


Third, promoting economic development through the creation of sustainable livelihood opportunities is crucial. This involves supporting traditional crafts and agriculture with modern techniques and market access, as well as encouraging entrepreneurship through microfinance and skill development programs. The Odisha Tribal Empowerment and Livelihoods Programme (OTELP) has demonstrated success in similar contexts and can serve as a model for such initiatives.

Frequency & Percentage Distribution According to Occupation Frequency & Percentage Distribution According to Migration



Additionally, fostering gender equality and women's empowerment should be a priority. Programs that focus on the education and economic participation of women, as well as measures to combat gender-based violence, are essential. Research by the International Journal of Rural Management indicates that empowering women leads to broader socio-economic benefits for the entire community.



Lastly, addressing security concerns and promoting peacebuilding efforts are essential to create a stable environment conducive to development. This includes dialogue and rehabilitation programs for former insurgents, as highlighted by the Institute for Conflict Management.

By implementing these policies, the government and relevant stakeholders can significantly improve the socio-economic conditions of the Koya tribe youth and the entire Malkangiri district, paving the way for sustainable development and improved quality of life.

CONCLUSION:

The struggles faced by Koya tribal youth in Malkangiri District amidst poverty and the rise of left-wing movement underscore the urgent need for holistic and inclusive approaches to development and peace building. By addressing the socio-economic, cultural, and gender dimensions of their experiences, we can work towards building a more equitable and sustainable future for all members of society. Empowering Koya youth to become agents of change within their communities requires collaborative efforts from government agencies, civil society organizations, and the broader community. Through collective action and solidarity, we can support Koya youth in realizing their full potential and aspirations for a better tomorrow.

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