Grass Root Democracy against Maoism

Why in news?

The low polling turnout in the Maoist-affected areas of Chhattisgarh is a pointer that democracy needs to be strengthened at the grassroots.

History of Maoist insurgency in Chhattisgarh
• Chhattisgarh is a part of the *larger Naxalite-Maoist insurgency* that has been going on in India since the late 1960s. • **Maoism**- It is a doctrine to capture State power through the combination of armed insurgency, mass mobilization and strategic alliances. • **Aim**- To overthrow the Indian state and establish a "*people's democracy*" through a protracted people's war • **Geographical location-** The State's strategic location, dense forests, rugged terrain and remote areas provide the ideal conditions for Maoist groups to operate and hide. • **Internal security issue-** In 2006, then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh declared the Maoist insurgency as the *"greatest internal security challenge"* facing India. • **Operation green hunt, 2009-** It is multipronged offensive of the Indian security forces against the Maoists, that has begun in the forests of Chhattisgarh. • **Operation Prahar, 2017**- It is a targeted action by police officials in various States including Chhattisgarh against criminals, outlawed elements or even for illegal liquor sales.

Why there is lower turnout ratio of voters in Maoism affected areas of Chhattisgarh?

> *As per report only 3% to 4% of the voters in Maoist-affected areas such as Bijapur and Konta participated in the elections, indicating the failure of the political parties to address the Maoist challenge.*

- **Influence of Maoists**- They claim to fight for tribal cause, force the tribals to shun the democratic process and instead follow their own 'janta sarkar'.
- **Fear of violence-** The Maoists often threaten and attack the voters, candidates, and security forces to disrupt the elections and enforce their boycott call.
- **Disrupt election**-They also plant improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and landmines on the roads and near the polling booths to deter the voters from reaching the polling stations.
- **Lack of trust**-The Maoists claim to represent the interests of the tribals, who form a large part of the population in these areas, and accuse the government and the mainstream parties of exploiting and neglecting them.
- **Logistical challenges**- The Maoist-affected areas are often located in remote and inaccessible regions, with poor road connectivity and communication facilities.

- **Inconvenient-** The voters have to travel long distances, sometimes on foot, to reach the polling stations, which may not be feasible or convenient for many of them.
- **Limited voting time**- The polling hours are often reduced in these areas due to security reasons, which may limit the voter participation.
- **Religion based conversation**- It is used by political parties as a 'manufactured agenda' to divert attention from basic issues affecting the tribals such as their rights and aspirations.
- **Lack of governance**- The government's development programs have failed to reach the tribals, Maoists have set up their own parallel development programs and have provided basic services to the tribals.

Why PESA is important in Maoism affected regions?

Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act 1996
• **Bhuria Committee, 1995-** It is based on this report, the Parliament enacted the PESA Act, 1996 in 10 states. • **Coverage-** Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan and Telangana. • **Aim-** To empower the tribals to govern their own affairs, in accordance with their culture and traditions. • **Need-** To provide for the extension of the provisions of Part IX of the Constitution relating to the Panchayats to the Scheduled Areas. • **Nodal Ministry**- Ministry of Panchayat Raj Institutions • **Objective-** It empowers gram sabhas to play a key role in approving development plans and controlling all social sectors.

- **Tribal empowerment-** The Act will empower the tribals to govern their own affairs, in accordance with their culture and traditions.
- **People's participation**-The Act could also weaken the Maoist influence and challenge, by restoring the trust and confidence of the tribals in the democratic process.
- **Tribal governance -** If the Act is implemented sincerely and effectively, it could be a powerful tool to mainstream the tribal community, by accommodating their aspirations and rights.
- **Internal security**- It has the potential to address the root causes of the Maoist insurgency and bring peace and development to the tribal regions.
- **Autonomy**- The tribals could safeguard and administer their own natural resources and cultural legacy, which are frequently endangered by the State and corporate intervention.

What lies ahead?

- The Maoists claim to fight for the tribals need to be exposed as they hinder empowerment and development, it should be challenged by the state and the society.
- The solution to the Maoist problem is not only about providing security and development to the tribals, but also about respecting and fulfilling their aspirations and dignity.
- The Maoists' hidden agenda and violence need to be countered by a long-term vision and commitment.

Quick facts

Measures taken to combat Maoism related insurgency
• **Security related expenditure (SRE)** - It is constituted by central government to provide financial support to the states affected by left wing extremisms (LWE). • **Special infrastructure scheme (SIS)** - The scheme is to strengthen local police and intelligence. • **Special central assistance** -It will provide fund to build infrastructure such as roads in LWE districts. • **Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)** -CRPF has been consistently enlarging its footprint by opening new camps deeper in the jungles of Jharkhand. • **Bastariya Battalion** - It is launched by CRPF to recruit the local people to gain the local intelligence about the Maoist. • **Counter-terrorism National Investigation Agency (NIA) and the Enforcement Directorate** - They have been directed to track CPI (Maoist) cadres, leaders and sympathizers with the aim to choke their funding. • **District Reserve Guard (DRG)** - It is constituted primarily in Chhattisgarh to include the local police in neutralizing the Maoists. • **SAMADHAN**- It was launched in 2017.

References

1. The Hindu- Grass root democracy against Maoists
2. MHA- FAQs about Maoism

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