

INDIA

Some 140 schools were attacked by militants in 2009-2012, and there was widespread use of schools as barracks or bases by government forces, mostly in the east of the country.

CONTEXT

Most attacks on education occurred in states affected by a long-running insurgency led by Maoists and other left-wing armed groups – also referred to as ‘Naxalites’ – operating in at least 83730 of India’s 600 districts, mainly in the east.⁷³¹

While the Maoists claim they are fighting on behalf of the poorest rural communities in each state, national authorities say they are obstructing desperately needed development initiatives. The exploitation of natural resources and how the profits are distributed are key issues of contention.⁷³²

Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Orissa were among the states most affected by the conflict in 2008. As part of their insurgency, Maoists attacked government infrastructure, including schools, police stations and armouries, and used landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to launch attacks.⁷³³

Maoist attacks on schools and teachers and security forces’ use of school premises in operations against the militants have led to falling attendance and increased drop-out rates, particularly among girls. They have also reduced the quality of education provided to some of the country’s most disadvantaged children.⁷³⁴

Pockets of tension fuelled by Hindu and Christian extremists in some areas, particularly in the north-east, and low-level insurgency by separatists or

terror groups in several states, including in Jammu and Kashmir, have also led to attacks on education.

Net primary enrolment was 93 per cent, gross secondary enrolment was 69 per cent and gross tertiary enrolment was 23 per cent (2011). The adult literacy rate was 63 per cent (2006).⁷³⁵

ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS

The number of attacks by Maoists on schools declined steeply over the 2009-2012 period from a peak in 2009.⁷³⁶ Human Rights Watch documented attacks by Maoists on at least 36 schools in Jharkhand and 23 schools in Bihar during 2009.⁷³⁷ The number of attacks appeared to increase in the run-up to Lok Sabha (House of Representatives) elections from April to May 2009.⁷³⁸ The Home Ministry, in a 2011 report, cited a total of 71 school attacks in 2009, 39 in 2010 and 27 in 2011 across Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Maharashtra and Jharkhand.⁷³⁹ It reported only three incidents in 2012⁷⁴⁰ but the perceived risk of attack remained – for example, a school in Balangir, Orissa, was closed for 12 days in September 2012 after a Maoist poster was found pasted on the school, triggering fear among parents and teachers that Maoists would attack.⁷⁴¹

Maoists frequently cited use of school buildings by security forces as the reason for attacking schools, claiming them to be legitimate military targets. However, Human Rights Watch research found that Maoists had damaged or destroyed numerous schools that were not actually occupied by security forces at the time of attack.⁷⁴² Some Maoists justified attacking newly built schools because they believed they would be used to house police carrying out operations against them. In many reported cases, Maoists also claimed to have attacked a

school because it was previously rather than currently used by police.⁷⁴³

Maoists tended to attack at night, often using cans packed with explosives – though, in at least one case, insurgents set fire to a school's two generators.⁷⁴⁴ Destruction from these explosions ranged from minor structural damage to the collapse of entire structures.⁷⁴⁵

For example, in one incident on 9 April 2009, Maoists blew up Belhara High School in Jharkhand. They triggered two dynamite blasts in the evening, leaving holes in the walls of two classrooms, a hole in the first floor and cracks around the building, making it unsafe. It was the tenth government building destroyed in a week during the run-up to elections on 16 April.⁷⁴⁶ Following the attack, one or two dozen fewer students attended the school and some classes had to be taken on the school verandas because of the damage.⁷⁴⁷ In another incident, on 14 April 2009, a witness told Human Rights Watch that Maoists planted mines in Gosain-Pesra Middle School, Bihar, and blew them up remotely, causing half of the two-storey structure to collapse to the ground.⁷⁴⁸

Seven incidents targeting Christian schools were also reported, primarily by Christian sources, five of them allegedly perpetrated by Hindu militants.⁷⁴⁹ For example, on 26 January 2009, a group of Hindutva activists attacked St Mary's School at Kadiri in Andhra Pradesh, destroying the furniture and injuring several of the nuns, purportedly because the school had not hoisted the national flag on Republic Day.⁷⁵⁰ Others were attacked, apparently by Muslim protesters. On 16 September 2010, it was reported that one Christian school in Jammu and Kashmir, the Tangmarg branch of Tyndale Biscoe school, was razed to the ground,⁷⁵¹ and another, the Roman Catholic Good Shepherd High School at Pulwama,

was burned down during protests over alleged desecrations of the Koran in the United States.⁷⁵²

ATTACKS ON SCHOOL STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND OTHER EDUCATION PERSONNEL

A tally of incidents reported by media and human rights groups indicates that at least 13 teachers,⁷⁵³ one catering staff member⁷⁵⁴ and four students⁷⁵⁵ were killed from 2009 to 2012. At least 73 teachers⁷⁵⁶ and 11 students⁷⁵⁷ were injured. Seven teachers were abducted, five of whom were subsequently found dead,⁷⁵⁸ and at least two students were kidnapped.⁷⁵⁹

Maoists were suspected in a number of attacks on teachers and the killing of at least four students. Motives were not always clear but often the Maoists alleged that their victims were police informers. In several cases, it appeared that the teachers were targeted after refusing to cooperate in some way: for example, by declining to send their students for Maoist training, refusing to pay levies to the People's Committee against Police Atrocities (PCPA) or removing black flags hoisted outside their schools by Maoists on Republic Day.⁷⁶⁰ In one illustrative incident, the head teacher of Indiraboni primary school in West Bengal was reportedly gunned down by three Maoists on motorcycles amid claims that he had prevented students from taking part in rallies organized by Maoists.⁷⁶¹ A number of teachers also seemed to have been targeted because of their affiliations with the Communist Party of India–Marxist (CPI-M). Many teachers refused to work in areas affected by the Maoist conflict out of fear for their safety.⁷⁶²

In at least two incidents, suspected Maoists were reported to have killed individuals at schools in front of students and teachers. On 14 September 2009, a group of Maoists shot dead a teacher and CPI-M

member in Jamda High School in West Bengal after entering the classroom where he was teaching.⁷⁶³ On 20 March 2009, a Class 9 student, and son of a police officer who had been killed the previous year, was fatally shot and then stabbed by Maoist guerrillas in front of students at his school in Koyalibeda, in Chhattisgarh.⁷⁶⁴

One media outlet said in August 2012 that children in Maoist-affected areas of Jharkhand's East Singhbhum district were carrying bows and arrows to school, fearing attacks from the insurgents. Local people had been training children to defend themselves because the children had to travel two kilometres to school through thick forests.⁷⁶⁵

Several abductions and killings of teachers by militants from separatist groups were reported in Assam, in most cases after teachers refused to give in to demands for money.⁷⁶⁶

In at least six incidents⁷⁶⁷ reported by Christian sources, staff or students at Christian schools were said to have been injured or threatened. For example, on 29 May 2009, Hindu militants allegedly attacked a Christian missionary school in Andhra Pradesh, beating several teachers, telling them not to work in the village and threatening to kill them.⁷⁶⁸

In Jammu and Kashmir, when schools reopened in the Kashmir Valley in late September 2010 after a three-month closure following violence and curfews, separatist leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani reportedly called on parents not to send their children to school and appealed to teachers to stay at home as part of a political protest against alleged civilian deaths during security operations. The chief minister of the state, Omar Abdullah, appealed to separatists not to target schoolchildren for going to school and many students turned up for classes. However, at one school only 100 of the 3,000 pupils turned up amid

threats of further violence,⁷⁶⁹ and when protests began some schools sent children home because they feared for their safety. Supporters of the separatist movement Hurriyat attacked school buses carrying children to schools. For example, on 7 October 2010, at least three students from a private school in Rainawari, Kashmir, were reportedly injured when a school bus was attacked by protesters throwing stones at it. On the same day, protesters pelted a school bus in Soura, but no injuries were reported. In a later incident in December 2010, Hurriyat supporters ordered a driver and student off a school bus and set it on fire.⁷⁷⁰

MILITARY USE OF SCHOOLS

During 2010, more than 129 schools were used as barracks or bases across the country, particularly in Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, but also in the country's north-east, in Tripura, Manipur, Nagaland and Assam, disrupting education for an estimated 20,800 students.⁷⁷¹ In the same year, some security forces began complying with government and Supreme Court directives to vacate schools.⁷⁷² However, security forces continued to use schools into 2012 and 2013.⁷⁷³

According to a 2009 report by Human Rights Watch, police and paramilitary forces occupied school buildings with no prior notification, either temporarily or for extended periods ranging from six months to three years, during their counter-insurgency operations. Some educational facilities had been occupied for over a decade.⁷⁷⁴ In many cases, security forces took over entire school facilities and campuses, completely shutting down schools, while in others, they occupied only a part of the school, forcing classes to continue in crowded quarters and alongside armed men.⁷⁷⁵

ATTACKS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Attacks on higher education occurred during 2009-2012, but they tended to be isolated incidents, most often linked to students' and academics' political affiliation or activism. One professor at Manipur University was shot dead on campus in May 2009, allegedly because he was the leader of a clique trying to usurp power within the university. An ethnic Meitei terrorist group known as Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup, which launched an 'anti-corruption' campaign in 2001 to 'clean up' the education system in the north-eastern state of Manipur, claimed responsibility for the attack.⁷⁷⁶

Two student trade unionists, including the speaker of the Sumi Students' Union and the former president and advisor to Kiphire Sumi Students' Union, were shot and injured by National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang militia in Dimapur on 2 May 2009.⁷⁷⁷

ATTACKS ON EDUCATION IN 2013

There were isolated reports of attacks on schools by suspected Maoist fighters⁷⁷⁸ and of recruitment of schoolchildren to their ranks,⁷⁷⁹ although it was not clear whether this happened on school premises. Minority and marginalized communities continued to suffer violence in education settings. In one incident, at least 20 masked men broke into a Christian school and abducted and raped four girls belonging to the Pahariya tribal group, aged 12 to 14, although it was not clear if the motive was sectarian.⁷⁸⁰ One report highlighted the continued siting of paramilitary camps next to schools, this time in Kashmir, and suspected military use of the school in question.⁷⁸¹

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