Article

The Enduring Challenge of Naxalism in India: Roots, Realities, and Responses

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Abstract

Naxalism remains one of India's most pressing internal security challenges. Emerging from the Naxalbari uprising in 1967, it has developed into a multifaceted insurgency driven by radical ideology, entrenched socioeconomic inequalities, and governance failures. This study examines the historical roots, ideological underpinnings, geographic spread, and structural conditions sustaining the movement. It also evaluates state responses, including counterinsurgency operations, development programs, and attempts to address underlying grievances. Despite prolonged efforts, Naxalism continues to undermine India's democratic institutions and socioeconomic stability by occupying the developmental vacuum in affected areas. While the state's approach has been predominantly security-focused, recent initiatives—such as those in Andhra Pradesh—indicate a possible shift toward more inclusive strategies. This paper argues for a comprehensive national policy that integrates security, development, and political dialogue to achieve sustainable peace and avoid the consequences of excessive militarization.

Keywords

Naxalism, Maoist insurgency, left-wing extremism, Red Corridor, armed struggle, guerrilla warfare

Introduction

For over five decades, the Naxalite movement—also known as Maoism or Naxalism—has posed a persistent threat to India's internal security. Originating in the town of Naxalbari, West Bengal, in 1967,

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the movement draws ideological inspiration from Mao Zedong's revolutionary theories. Since its inception, it has spread across central and eastern India, particularly in states such as Andhra Pradesh (now bifurcated into Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, and Odisha. Rooted in deep-seated socio-economic inequality, the exploitation of marginalized communities, and perceived injustices by the state and corporate entities, Naxalism has evolved into a complex insurgency. Operating largely in remote, forested regions, various armed factions have emerged, aiming to establish a communist state through violent resistance. These groups frequently target state institutions, security forces, and civilians. The Indian government has employed a dual strategy in response—military operations alongside development initiatives and programs aimed at addressing the underlying socio-economic grievances. Nevertheless, the insurgency endures, sustained by a dynamic mix of political, economic, and social factors.

This study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of Naxalism in India by examining its historical development, ideological foundations, geographic spread, socio-economic drivers, and the effectiveness of government responses. It aims to offer insights for policymakers, scholars, and the general public by highlighting the enduring challenges the movement poses to India's democratic governance and socio-economic development.

Currently, 12 known Naxalite groups operate across nine Indian states. Among the most organized and active are the People's War Group (PWG) and the Maoist Coordination Committee (MCC). The PWG is believed to have approximately 1,000 full-time underground cadres and around 5,000 overground militants. The MCC reportedly maintains over 300 trained revolutionaries and 50 armed squads, each comprising about 20 members. These groups possess a substantial arsenal of weapons—many seized from government forces—and are known to conduct military exercises focused on ambush tactics and jungle warfare. Additionally, reports suggest that Naxalite organizations have forged links with international

left-wing insurgent groups such as the Kurdistan Workers' Party, the Liberation Army of Peru, and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), particularly for training and arms procurement. In 2001, several Indian Naxalite factions—including the PWG and MCC—joined forces with Maoist groups in Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka to form the Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA), aimed at regional coordination and ideological solidarity (Ahuja & Ganguly 2007).

Recent research on Naxalism in India indicates that scholars have extensively examined its historical roots, ideological foundations, and socio-economic drivers. Studies show that the movement continues to pose a significant threat to India's internal security, with its influence extending across the so-called "Red Corridor," from Bihar to Tamil Nadu, affecting numerous districts and local communities (Kumar 2020; Harnetiaux 2008). The Naxalite movement originated from the deep-seated dissatisfaction of marginalized communities, driven by persistent socio-economic injustices and the failure of institutional mechanisms to address their grievances (Chopra 2012). Its ideological core is rooted in Maoist thought, advocating armed struggle as a means to achieve socio-economic justice and confront entrenched inequalities (Kumar 2020). Recent analyses suggest that Naxalism has grown in both scale and intensity, presenting escalating challenges to national security (Harnetiaux 2008). Despite multiple counterinsurgency efforts, the Indian government's response has often been criticized as inadequate and ineffective in preventing the resurgence of the movement.

Despite a substantial body of literature, research on Naxalism still lacks comprehensive analysis of the movement's adaptability and the influence of globalization on its strategies (Shah and Jain 2017). Significant gaps remain in understanding how the insurgency has evolved over time in response to shifting political, economic, and technological contexts. These gaps hinder a full appreciation of the dynamic and resilient nature of the Naxalite movement.

While existing studies offer valuable insights into the historical, ideological, and socio-economic dimensions of Naxalism, they often overlook the complex local dynamics that sustain the movement. Furthermore, the predominant focus on militarized state responses has led to a neglect of alternative, nonviolent conflict resolution approaches that address the root causes of the insurgency.

Future research would benefit from deeper engagement with local narratives and the specific socio-political conditions that enable the persistence of Naxalism (Shah and Jain 2017). By centring the voices and lived experiences of affected communities, scholars may uncover critical, yet underexplored, factors that contribute to the movement's continued relevance and appeal.

In response to these research gaps, this study offers a comprehensive analysis of the Naxalite movement's historical trajectory, ideological foundations, geographic spread, and socio-economic underpinnings. It also evaluates state responses, including military operations, development programs, and root-cause-oriented interventions. The findings reveal that Naxalism continues to threaten India's democratic institutions and socio-economic stability, not only as a violent insurgency but also by filling governance voids in marginalized regions. Although state responses have largely relied on coercive measures, recent developments—such as peace initiatives in Andhra Pradesh—suggest a potential shift toward dialogue. This study underscores the urgent need for a holistic national policy that simultaneously addresses both the immediate manifestations and the deeper structural causes of the insurgency, in order to build lasting peace and avoid counterproductive cycles of repression and resistance.

Philosophical Background of Naxalism

The ideological foundation of Naxalism is rooted in Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism. It draws upon Marxist interpretations of class conflict and the role of the proletariat in overthrowing bourgeois capitalism, emphasizing the need for a revolutionary transformation

to establish a classless, stateless communist society. Naxalism also incorporates Leninist principles, particularly the concept of a vanguard party that leads the revolutionary struggle. The party is viewed as the primary instrument for unifying and mobilizing the masses toward rebellion.

Mao Zedong's theory of protracted people's war has had a profound influence on Naxalite ideology. It emphasizes mobilizing rural peasants and marginalized communities as the base of the revolution. Maoism advocates mass mobilization and armed conflict as strategies to encircle urban centres from the countryside and to raise revolutionary consciousness among the people. The Maoist slogan, "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun," encapsulates this militant approach.

Naxalism strongly criticizes mainstream communist parties in India for abandoning revolutionary ideals in favour of parliamentary democracy, labelling them as revisionist. Instead, it prioritizes armed struggle and grassroots mobilization over electoral politics. It views capitalism, feudalism, and imperialism as interconnected systems of exploitation and oppression. Through violent revolution, Naxalism seeks to dismantle these structures and build a socialist society based on egalitarian principles.

Naxalism closely follows Mao Zedong's strategy of "Protracted People's War," which involves mobilizing tribal communities and rural peasants to gradually encircle and destabilize state institutions through mass mobilization and guerrilla warfare. The ultimate aim of this strategy is to overthrow the existing government and establish a communist society. Maoist ideology emphasizes aligning the revolutionary struggle with the needs and aspirations of the oppressed, fostering strong ties between the revolutionary party and the people. Naxalism, accordingly, seeks to build a deep connection between the party and the masses to ensure that the movement genuinely represents and advances their interests. Additionally, Mao's Cultural Revolution—aimed at combating bourgeois influence and ideological revisionism within the Communist Party and broader

society—serves as a key source of inspiration for Naxalism (Kumar and Vipul 2015).

To prevent the rise of capitalist tendencies within the revolutionary movement, Naxalites advocate for continuous ideological struggle and widespread mobilization. Central to Maoist philosophy—and by extension, Naxalism—is the agrarian revolution, which is viewed as a vital component of the broader struggle for systemic change. Naxalism places strong emphasis on mobilizing tribal communities and rural peasants against perceived oppression by the state, capitalist interests, and feudal landowners. This mobilization is aimed at addressing deep-rooted socioeconomic inequalities and establishing a solid revolutionary base in the countryside.

According to Naxalite strategy, certain regions—typically rural and forested areas inhabited by historically marginalized populations—serve as critical launching points for revolutionary activity. These regions, collectively known as the "Red Corridor," function as strongholds for both the consolidation of revolutionary forces and ongoing Naxalite operations. Overall, Maoist ideology provides the foundational framework for Naxalism, shaping its objectives, strategies, and methods in its pursuit of a socialist society through revolutionary transformation.

The Rise and Development of Naxal Movement

The rise and development of Naxalism in India can be broadly divided into three key phases: the Formative Phase (1967–1973), the Expansion and Consolidation Phase (1970s to late 1990s), and the Contemporary Phase (2004–present), characterized by a relative decline following a brief resurgence.

Phase 1: Formative Phase (1967–1973)

The origins of the Naxalite movement can be traced to May 1967 in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, particularly in the areas under the Naxalbari, Khoribari, and Phansidewa police stations. The village

of Naxalbari became the epicentre of a peasant uprising against the entrenched landlord system, led by radical communist leaders. What began as a local dispute escalated when several indigenous tribes and backward-caste farmers revolted against the exploitative feudal structure (Jaiswal 2020).

On May 25, 1967, three key figures—Charu Majumdar, Jangal Santal, and Kanu Sanyal—led a demonstration demanding that upper-caste landlords distribute a fair share of agricultural produce and pay just wages to labourers (Picture 1). The protest was violently suppressed when police opened fire on the demonstrators. This incident marked the beginning of the Naxalite movement, a radical left-wing insurgency that sought to dismantle the feudal order and establish socioeconomic justice.

Charu Majumdar, inspired by the Chinese Revolution of 1949, envisioned a similar protracted people's war in India. In 1967, he authored the *Historic Eight Documents*, which laid the ideological foundation for the Naxalite movement. Under the leadership of Majumdar, Sanyal, and Santal, the movement rapidly spread across the rural areas of West Bengal (Kumar and Vipul 2015).

Later that year, left-wing extremists from across India convened in Calcutta and established the All India Coordination Committee, which was renamed the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) in May 1968 (Kumar and Vipul 2015). The AICCCR declared four central ideological goals: 1) Launching a protracted people's war in line with Maoist principles; 2) Employing guerrilla warfare tactics; 3) Establishing revolutionary base areas in rural regions; and 4) Encircling urban centres while boycotting parliamentary elections. This period marked the ideological and organizational consolidation of the Naxalite movement, laying the groundwork for its future expansion across various parts of India.

Based on Maoist doctrine, the Marxist-Leninist All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) was established in 1969 by a revolutionary faction of the Communist

Party of India (CPI). The Naxalite movement rapidly spread across the country, particularly in West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh. Its main support base consisted of tribal communities and peasants, who often faced systemic discrimination and exploitation by state authorities. The movement also attracted a significant number of unemployed youth and students who resonated with its radical ideology.

The peak of Naxalite violence occurred between 1970 and 1971. In 1971, most of the movement's key leaders were either arrested or killed during joint operations by police and the army in the most affected areas of West Bengal, Bihar, and Odisha. Three prominent leaders were arrested for their extremist activities. In 1972, Charu Majumdar died in police custody. Santal was imprisoned for over a decade before dying in 1981, while Kanu Sanyal remained the sole surviving leader. After serving a seven-year prison sentence, Sanyal continued his involvement in various leftist political activities in his hometown near Naxalbari (Jaiswal 2020). The movement suffered a severe blow during the Emergency of 1975, when approximately 40,000 Naxalite workers were imprisoned, significantly weakening the cause.

Picture 1. From left: Kanu Sanyal, Jangal Santhal, and Charu Mazumdar

Source: https://images.app.goo.gl/6Hbu6MA5F4zKuH7UA.

In July 1971, acting on a presidential executive order, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi deployed the Indian Army to suppress the Naxalite insurgency. This large-scale counter-insurgency effort,

known as “Operation Steeplechase”, led to the deaths of hundreds of Naxalites and the arrest of over 20,000 individuals, including several senior leaders. The operation involved a brigade of para commandos as well as paramilitary forces and had originally been planned in October 1969. According to reports, India’s Home Secretary Govind Narain instructed Lt. General J.F.R. Jacob that “there should be no publicity and no records” regarding the mission. General Sam Manekshaw also refused to issue written orders, emphasizing the covert nature of the operation.

By the early 1970s, the government had launched several crackdowns on the movement. By 1973, most of the Naxalite leadership had either been killed or imprisoned. The movement subsequently fragmented into nearly 40 small factions. As a result, the focus of Naxalite activity shifted from large-scale rural insurgency to acts of individual terrorism, particularly in urban areas like Calcutta.

Phase 2: The Expansion and Consolidation (1970s to late 1990s)

After the Emergency, the Naxalite movement resurfaced in a more aggressive form. By the early 1970s, with the exception of Western India, Naxalism had spread to nearly every state across the country. During this period, the movement fragmented into numerous competing factions. By 1980, it was estimated that around thirty Naxalite groups were active, with a combined membership of approximately 30,000.

Although the initial wave of insurgency ended in tragedy for the movement, the socio-economic conditions that had fuelled its rise—and the communities willing to support it—persisted. The renewed insurgency took root primarily in South India, especially in the state of Andhra Pradesh, where it has maintained a continuous presence. Adopting a “protracted people’s war” strategy, the movement gradually expanded its base from West Bengal to Bihar, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh.

Despite fluctuations, the movement experienced a significant reorganization in 1980 with the formation of the Communist Party of

India (Marxist-Leninist). One of the key offshoots was the People's War Group (PWG), founded by Kondapalli Seetharamaiah, a close associate of Charu Majumdar. Operating primarily under Maoist principles, the PWG was supported by leftist factions in eastern India, particularly in Andhra Pradesh (Kumar and Vipul 2015). Even after the Andhra Pradesh government banned the PWG in 1992, the group continued its operations underground.

Simultaneously, the Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI) grew stronger in Bihar, launching large-scale confrontations against upper-caste militias and landlords. In many parts of the country, the Naxalite movement continued its steady expansion.

In response to increasing violence, including ambushes on police forces by Naxalite rebels starting in 1985, the Greyhounds, an elite anti-Naxalite task force, was established. The governments of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha employed a combination of counterinsurgency tactics, including special legislation, rival mass organizations, rehabilitation programs, and informant networks. These efforts led to the surrender of nearly 9,000 Naxalites by 1994. Following further modernization of police forces in 2003, Naxalite activity in many states significantly declined during the early 2000s.

Phase 3: Relative Decline after Brief Fightback (2004 – Present)

In 2004, the Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI), active in Bihar and surrounding areas, merged with the People's War Group (PWG), which operated in Andhra Pradesh, to form the Communist Party of India (Maoist) or CPI (Maoist). As of 2015, approximately 13 left-wing extremist (LWE) organizations were still active across India (Kumar and Vipul 2015). Among these, CPI (Maoist) is considered the most prominent and is primarily responsible for the majority of violence and killings targeting civilians and security personnel.

Since its formation, Naxalite violence has escalated significantly. In 2006, the Prime Minister of India declared that Naxalism had become the country's greatest internal security threat. CPI (Maoist)

activities have put substantial pressure on national security forces and hindered development in the so-called 'Red Corridor', a mineral-rich region spanning several eastern and central Indian states.

During the height of the Maoist movement in Nepal, Naxalite influence was observed across a vast region, metaphorically described as stretching "from Tirupati to Pashupati." At its peak, Naxalites claimed control over approximately 30% of India's land area. Their operations have recently expanded further. Out of 223 districts across 20 Indian states that report some Maoist presence, 23 districts—primarily in Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar, and West Bengal—are considered severely affected.

One of the deadliest attacks occurred in April 2010, when Maoists ambushed and killed 76 members of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in Dantewada, Chhattisgarh. The movement again drew national and international attention in May 2013, following the massacre of 27 individuals in Sukma district, including prominent political leaders such as Mahendra Karma, Nandan Patel, and Vidya Charan Shukla (Kumar and Vipul 2015).

Further consolidation of Maoist forces occurred on May 1, 2014 (May Day), when the Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist) Naxalbari merged with CPI (Maoist). Today, CPI (Maoist) remains active in the forest belts of Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Odisha, and remote areas of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The group has carried out several high-profile attacks, including 1) February 15, 2010: Killing of 24 Eastern Frontier Rifles personnel along with Maoist commanders; 2) April 6, 2010: Ambush in Dantewada resulting in the deaths of 76 paramilitary personnel; 3) May 25, 2013: Attack on an Indian National Congress convoy in Bastar, killing 27 people, including senior politicians; and 4) April 3, 2021: Maoist assault near the Sukma–Bijapur border, killing 22 security personnel.

In September 2009, the Indian government launched a comprehensive counterinsurgency campaign known in the media as

"Operation Green Hunt." This joint effort by paramilitary and state police forces led to the killing of 2,266 Maoists, the arrest of 10,181, and the surrender of 9,714 insurgents.

Despite these efforts, Maoist activity has seen a resurgence in recent years. In 2020, renewed Naxal operations were reported in Telangana and neighbouring areas. By 2022, authorities in West Bengal acknowledged a Maoist comeback, particularly in Jhargram, Purulia, Bankura, West Midnapore, and Nadia districts. In response, the West Bengal Police Special Task Force launched a dedicated "Maoist Suppression Branch" in May 2022. The 2020s have also witnessed the spread of Naxal influence into new regions, notably Madhya Pradesh, where Maoists reportedly gained a foothold in parts of the Kanha Tiger Reserve by 2022.

Factors Contributing to the Rise of Naxalism

Many scholars and observers attribute the emergence of the Naxalite movement to the failure of comprehensive agrarian reforms. Widespread poverty, systemic exploitation of landless cultivators—many of whom belong to Dalit and tribal communities—and the persistent denial of social justice by administrative institutions fostered deep-seated discontent among the marginalized and among leaders of the Left movement. Although the Indian government formally abolished the *zamindari* system following independence as part of its agrarian reform agenda, the actual redistribution of land was significantly impeded by resistance from entrenched interest groups.

During this period, agricultural development initiatives did lead to rising farm incomes and modernization in agricultural practices. However, the benefits of these reforms disproportionately favoured a newly emergent class of affluent peasants. These groups, often resistant to sharing their economic gains, remained reluctant to support or uplift agricultural labourers and landless peasants. Consequently, while landowners experienced substantial economic advancement, the condition of the landless population remained precarious. In several agrarian regions, poverty rates exceeded

95 percent, exacerbating social and economic inequalities. The Naxalbari uprising in 1967, in this context, served as a catalyst that intensified existing socio-economic grievances.

Although the Naxalbari movement was eventually suppressed within a few years, many analysts argue that its ideological and historical relevance persists even after more than five decades. The movement marked a radical turning point in the trajectory of political resistance in post-independence India and has since become a significant theme in Indian cultural and literary discourse. Numerous works of literature—novels, songs, poems, and films—have drawn upon the Naxalite movement for inspiration. For instance, the four protagonists in Samaresh Majumdar's *Inheritance* are rooted in Naxalite ideology. A character in Arundhati Roy's Booker Prize-winning novel *The God of Small Things* is portrayed as joining the Naxalite movement. Similarly, Mahasweta Devi's *Hajar Churashir Maa* (Mother of 1084), which was later adapted into a film, explores the emotional and political landscape of the movement. The theme of Naxalism also recurs in the writings of Jhumpa Lahiri, Anurag Mishra, Sunil Gangopadhyay, and several others, indicating the movement's enduring impact on Indian socio-political thought and artistic expression.

Naxalite Organizations in India

Naxalite or Maoist insurgency in India has been spearheaded by several organizations over the years, each with distinct origins, ideological orientations, and areas of operation. The following are some of the major Naxalite organizations that have played a significant role in the movement.

Communist Party of India (Maoist)

The Communist Party of India (Maoist), or CPI (Maoist), is the most prominent Naxalite organization currently operating in India. It was established in 2004 through the merger of two major insurgent groups: the People's War Group (PWG) and the Maoist Communist

Centre of India (MCCI). The CPI (Maoist) adheres to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and seeks to overthrow the Indian state through armed revolution, aiming to establish a classless, communist society.

The organization maintains a strong presence in several states, particularly in forested and tribal-dominated regions of central and eastern India. It is involved in a range of violent activities, including attacks on security forces, sabotage of infrastructure, extortion, and political assassinations. CPI (Maoist) also engages in mass mobilization efforts, particularly among marginalized communities, by exploiting long-standing grievances related to land rights, social exclusion, and state neglect. Designated a terrorist organization by the Government of India, the CPI (Maoist) remains a major internal security threat, prompting continuous counterinsurgency operations.

People's Liberation Front of India (PLFI)

The People's Liberation Front of India (PLFI) is a breakaway faction of the CPI (Maoist), formed in 2007 by Dinesh Gope, a former Maoist leader. Primarily active in Jharkhand, with some operations extending into Bihar and Odisha, PLFI functions independently and has developed its own strategic objectives.

Though originally rooted in Maoist ideology, the PLFI has increasingly been involved in criminal enterprises such as extortion, kidnapping for ransom, illegal mining, and arms trafficking. It has also been accused of exploiting local tribal populations and businesses for financial gain. The Indian government has designated the PLFI as a terrorist organization, and ongoing security operations have sought to dismantle its networks, though the group continues to pose a serious law enforcement challenge in mineral-rich areas.

Tritiya Prastuti Committee (TPC)

The Tritiya Prastuti Committee (TPC) emerged in 2002 as another splinter faction from the CPI (Maoist), formed due to ideological disagreements and leadership disputes. The group operates primarily

in Jharkhand and parts of Bihar, especially in mineral-rich districts. Like the PLFI, the TPC has distanced itself from mainstream Maoist ideology and has been accused of involvement in criminal activities, often competing violently with other Naxalite groups for territorial control. Despite its diminished ideological commitment, the TPC remains active and continues to disrupt local governance and development.

Maoist Communist Centre (MCC)

The Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) was one of the key Naxalite organizations prior to its merger with the PWG in 2004 to form the CPI (Maoist). Formed in the late 1960s, the MCC was deeply influenced by Mao Zedong's revolutionary ideology and operated mainly in Bihar, Jharkhand, and parts of West Bengal. It focused on mobilizing marginalized groups—particularly tribal communities and landless peasants—against landlords and the state through armed rebellion.

The 2004 merger with the PWG marked a significant consolidation of Maoist forces in India, resulting in a more unified and structured insurgency under the CPI (Maoist). Though the MCC no longer exists as an independent entity, its ideological and organizational legacy lives on within the broader framework of the CPI (Maoist).

Other Notable Naxalite Organizations

In addition to the groups discussed above, several other Naxalite and Maoist factions operate across India. These include People's Guerrilla Army (PGA), Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Red Star - CPI (ML) Red Star, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Naxalbari - CPI (ML) Naxalbari, People's War Group (PWG) - Now merged with CPI (Maoist), Jharkhand Janmukti Parishad (JJMP), Jharkhand Liberation Tigers (JLT), Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI), Eastern Regional Bureau of CPI (ML) (ERB), and Revolutionary Communist Centre (RCC).

These organizations are active in different regions across India, particularly in underdeveloped and tribal areas. They are frequently engaged in armed conflict with the state, challenging its authority through insurgent and violent means.

Links with Other Terrorist Organizations and Foreign Entities

The Communist Party of India (Maoist) [CPI (Maoist)] has established fraternal ties with several insurgent groups in India's northeastern region, most notably the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) [NSCN-IM] and the Revolutionary People's Front/ People's Liberation Army (RPF/PLA) of Manipur. These affiliations are part of a broader alliance with forces hostile to the Indian state. CPI (Maoist) has also expressed ideological solidarity with terrorist organizations operating in Jammu and Kashmir. These relationships are viewed as components of a "strategic united front" against the Indian government.

CPI (Maoist) maintains international connections with several Maoist organizations, including the Communist Party of the Philippines and similar entities in Turkey and other countries (Kumar & Vipul, 2015). The group is a founding member of the Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA), which includes Maoist factions from Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and India. CCOMPOSA's stated objectives include resisting U.S. imperialism, opposing globalization, and challenging what it describes as the Indian state's centralized authority and repression of minorities. At its Fourth Conference held in Nepal in 2006, CCOMPOSA reaffirmed its commitment to a protracted people's war across South Asia to capture state power through armed revolution (Kumar and Vipul 2015).

Additional evidence of external support and collaboration emerged with the arrest of Syed Abdul Karim Tunda, a wanted terrorist, on August 16, 2013, near the India-Nepal border. Tunda was implicated in over 40 terror attacks, including the 1993 Mumbai

blasts that killed 257 people. Investigations into bombings in Delhi and other cities in the late 1990s linked him to a broader terror network. Dr. Ajay Sahni, a security expert at the Institute for Conflict Management, emphasized that Tunda remained an active threat. His capture was significant not only for ongoing counterterrorism efforts but also for understanding the linkages between Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and the Naxalite movement. During interrogation, Tunda acknowledged connections between the Pakistan-based Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)-backed LeT and Maoist insurgents, though he did not provide detailed evidence regarding the extent or structure of this alliance.

Previous disclosures reinforce this link. In 2009, Lashkar operative Mohammad Omar Madani admitted that he entered India with the intent to establish ISI support for Maoist insurgents. Although apprehended by Delhi Police before initiating further action, Madani's diary contained detailed accounts of ISI plans to exploit the Maoist movement to destabilize India. It was also revealed that both LeT and Maoist factions sought to establish a joint operational base in South India. A classified Intelligence Bureau report indicated that around 500 Maoist cadres received training alongside members of the banned Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) in the Bhagaman Hills, near the Idukki-Kottayam border in Kerala in 2008 (Nayak 2014).

The CPI (Maoist) has also maintained close ties with the Maoist movement in Nepal and is reported to have cooperated with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka. Small arms have reportedly been procured from China via Nepalese intermediaries. Forensic examination of approximately 300 rounds of ammunition used by Maoists during a 2005 encounter with Indian security forces revealed that several matched the specifications of Pakistani-manufactured arms. Some were identical to those used in the ISI-supported terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament on December 13, 2001 (Nayak 2014).

In October 2012, West Bengal Director General of Police Naparajit Mukherjee publicly accused the ISI of assisting Maoists in anti-government operations. While SIMI had already been banned in West Bengal, Mukherjee alleged continued cooperation between the ISI and underground Naxalite factions aimed at inciting violence and destabilizing the state. Further, on May 25, 2013, a deadly Maoist ambush in Chhattisgarh claimed the lives of 30 individuals, including senior Congress leader Mahendra Karma. Then Chief Minister Raman Singh suggested possible links between the attackers and Lashkar-e-Taiba, underscoring the suspected nexus between domestic Maoist groups and transnational terrorist networks.

Insurgency or 'Red Terror'

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh once described Naxalism as the "single biggest internal security threat" to India. At the second meeting of the Standing Committee of Chief Ministers of Naxalite-affected states on April 13, 2006, he called for a unified command structure and better inter-state coordination in intelligence, information sharing, and law enforcement. Namrata Goswami observes that the group's tactics—such as raiding police stations and looting armouries—are deeply rooted in the socio-political realities of Naxal-affected areas. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs (2005–06), 509 police stations across 11 states reported Naxalite-related violence, indicating the scale of the threat (Singh 2020).

These incidents reflect the scale and persistence of the Maoist insurgency, which continues to claim the lives of both security personnel and civilians (see Tables 1 and 2). Despite ongoing operations and intergovernmental collaboration, Naxalism remains a severe challenge to India's internal security. The central and state governments are actively engaged in multi-pronged strategies to counter the insurgency and address its socio-economic roots.

Table 1. Casualties in Naxal Attacks since 2005-2011

Year	Security Personnel Killed	Civilians Killed	Maoist Attacks	Maoist Killed
2005	153	524	1608	NA
2006	157	521	1509	274
2007	236	460	1565	141
2008	231	660	1591	199
2009	317	591	1130	217
2010	285	713	NA	171
2011	142	447	NA	NA

Source: Jaiswal 2020: 81-91

Government's Responses: Operation Green Hunt

Historically, various Indian governments have marginalized and persecuted groups resisting capitalist expansion, particularly Adivasis and Dalits, from colonial times through the post-1967 Naxalite uprising. In 2005, the government launched a counterinsurgency campaign in Chhattisgarh aimed at "eliminating" Naxalite influence, which later expanded to several other states by 2009. In parallel, the 2014 "Make in India" campaign promoted economic development in resource-rich areas, often criminalizing opposition—whether peaceful or militant. Alongside this, the state has increasingly targeted religious minorities, especially Muslims, in the name of nationalism and Hindutva ideology, to which Prime Minister Narendra Modi subscribes. Protesters advocating for self-determination in regions like Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur, or Assam have often been labelled "anti-national" (Fernández 2020).

In early 2016, student activists at Delhi University and dissenting academics were arrested, part of what critics described as a "witch hunt." Among the most prominent cases was that of Professor G.N. Saibaba, a wheelchair-bound scholar with 90% disability, who was incarcerated for over 14 months before trial. He was branded

a “dangerous Maoist” for opposing Operation Green Hunt and received a life sentence on March 7, 2017, along with five other activists. According to Fernández (2020), leaked U.S. diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks suggest that both the Indian and U.S. governments sought to link the Maoist insurgency with ISIS, aiming to delegitimize the Maoists and justify international counterterrorism support.

Although termed “Operation Green Hunt” by the media, the Indian government does not officially use this label for its anti-Naxalite offensive. The campaign began in late 2009 and involved large-scale troop deployments across Naxalite-affected states including Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal. Several of these regions had already witnessed localized anti-Maoist operations, such as the Lalgarh operation in West Bengal, the activities of the Greyhounds in Andhra Pradesh, Salwa Judum in Chhattisgarh, and COBRA forces in Odisha. The Indian Air Force supported ground operations by providing logistical and aerial assistance.

The first phase of the campaign commenced in Gadchiroli district in November 2009 with the deployment of 18 companies of Central Paramilitary Forces. The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) confirmed that the operation had been approved by the central government, with the elite Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) taking the lead. However, media reports noted that joint operations between CoBRA and Chhattisgarh Police were already underway in Dantewada by September 2009.

By 2009, the government had committed 80,000 paramilitary personnel to anti-Naxalite operations. In 2011, military leadership indicated that an additional 60,000–65,000 troops could be deployed across Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, and West Bengal if necessary. On January 3, 2013, the Home Ministry announced the deployment of 10,000 more personnel in Bastar, Odisha, and Jharkhand. As of May 2013, around 84,000 CRPF personnel were stationed in the

Red Corridor. In total, approximately 200,000 State Armed Police Forces (SAPF), excluding paramilitary units, were engaged in counterinsurgency operations.

To bolster aerial support, the Indian Air Force announced on May 30, 2013, the induction of MI-17V5 helicopters to assist in anti-Naxal missions. Analyst Gautam Navlakha (2014) estimated that 286,200 personnel—including 100,000 from paramilitary units—were involved in operations targeting the CPI (Maoist) across ten states. On June 8, 2014, the Home Ministry approved an additional deployment of 10,000 paramilitary forces to Chhattisgarh.

Table 2. Death Related to Maoist Violence 1989-2012

Period	Civilians	Security forces	Insurgents	Total per period
1989-2001	1,610	432	1,007	3049
2002	382	100	141	623
2003	410	105	216	731
2004	466	100	87	653
2005	524	153	225	902
2006	521	157	274	952
2007	460	236	141	837
2008	399	221	214	834
2009	586	317	217	1,120
2010	713	285	171	1,169
2011	275	128	199	602
2012	89	77	64	230
Total	6,377	2,285	2,913	11,575

Source: carnegieendowment.org

Causes of the Naxal Insurgency's Decline

One of the primary reasons for the decline of the Naxalite insurgency was its overambitious goal of functioning as a nationwide movement. The success of such a revolutionary endeavour required broad-based support across India—a feat difficult to achieve given the country's immense diversity in caste, language, culture, and regional interests. While the movement gained traction in states like Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal, it failed to expand significantly beyond these pockets. Additionally, the lack of developed communication infrastructure at the time—such as limited access to telephones—further impeded coordination and organizational cohesion.

Another major misstep was the adoption of the slogan "China's Chairman Mao is our Chairman", which alienated large segments of the Indian population. Given the lingering resentment from the 1962 Sino-Indian War, many Indians viewed China—and Mao Zedong in particular—with suspicion and hostility. Aligning the movement with a foreign leader, especially one associated with a hostile state, undermined its domestic legitimacy. The violent methods employed under Maoist principles further distanced the movement from public sympathy and support.

The movement also struggled with a lack of ideological clarity among its own ranks. Many of the young, enthusiastic recruits—particularly students—joined the insurgency without a deep understanding of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology. This superficial engagement with the movement's theoretical foundations led to internal inconsistencies and weakened its long-term sustainability.

Leadership challenges exacerbated the decline. Charu Majumdar, one of the central figures of the movement, was reportedly affected by health issues and allegations of alcoholism, which may have impaired his leadership capacity. Internal dissent also fractured the movement; many within the leadership opposed Majumdar's policy of targeting and eliminating so-called "class enemies," creating strategic and moral divisions that hindered organizational unity.

Finally, the theoretical model of revolution adopted by the Naxalites—heavily influenced by Mao Zedong's success in China—proved ill-suited to the Indian context. The socio-political conditions that enabled the Chinese Communist Revolution were not easily replicable in India. While armed land seizures could provoke short-term disruption, such strategies were unsustainable in the long run. Moreover, even within China, Mao's popularity was not universal, and his ideas often failed to translate into effective governance. The disconnect between ideological inspiration and on-the-ground realities in India significantly contributed to the Naxalite movement's eventual decline.

The Potential for Disruption in the Future of Ultra-Leftism

The disorganized and fragmented state of contemporary Naxalism suggests that this strand of ultra-leftism is in decline. Originating in the 1960s amidst growing dissatisfaction with the bourgeois-landlord system and influenced by the sectarian excesses of China's Cultural Revolution, Naxalism has lost much of its ideological vigour following the collapse of its external inspirations. However, one root cause—deep-seated socioeconomic inequality—persists. As Lenin observed, "A petty bourgeois driven to frenzy by the horrors of capitalism… is a social phenomenon… the instability of such revolutionism, its barrenness… is common knowledge." India's vast petty-bourgeois class, still subject to the dual pressures of capitalism and residual feudalism, continues to provide fertile ground for ultra-leftist ideologies to resurface in new forms, despite the collapse of the original Naxalite movement.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPI (M), has made notable strides in combating both ultra-leftist deviation and revisionism. Nevertheless, the party must remain vigilant against the resurgence of ultra-leftist tendencies, regardless of their evolving forms. CPI (M) has been among the few political forces to unequivocally denounce Naxalism as counter-revolutionary and has

consistently waged ideological and political battles against it. The stagnation and fragmentation of Naxalism today reflect the limits of its ideological and strategic framework.

The trajectory of Naxalism's future also hinges on the responsiveness of central and state governments. Addressing the root causes—poverty, marginalization, and underdevelopment—especially among tribal and backward communities, is critical. Nepal offers an illustrative example, where integrating Maoists into mainstream politics significantly diminished insurgent activities. It is essential to recognize Naxalites as Indian citizens entitled to constitutional rights and respond to their grievances through inclusion rather than repression.

Policy measures must be targeted and differentiated: populations in Naxal-affected areas should be categorized as vulnerable, moderately affected, or severely impacted, with tailored development strategies at each level. Prioritizing employment opportunities for youth, upgrading basic infrastructure, and enhancing security coordination are essential to preventing militant recruitment. Local self-governance institutions can play a significant role in implementing and sustaining such interventions.

Importantly, the legitimate concerns raised by Naxalite groups—land rights, exploitation, and development deficits—should not be dismissed. There is potential for meaningful change if economic reforms are executed with accountability and inclusivity. Failures such as inadequate planning, weak investment, poor oversight, and stalled land reform must be urgently addressed. Effective dialogue and negotiation mechanisms should form part of a long-term conflict resolution strategy. As Manmohan Singh noted in 2009:

> The systematic exploitation, social and economic abuse of our tribal communities can no longer be tolerated. There has been a systematic failure in giving tribes a stake in the modern economic processes that inexorably intrude in the living spaces.

Assessing how Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) affects livelihoods

and quality of life in affected areas is crucial. Ultimately, the expansion of LWE is rooted in chronic underdevelopment. Recognizing and responding to these challenges through democratic means remains essential for lasting peace.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that Naxalite groups have enhanced their capacity for armed resistance through alliances with transnational terrorist networks and the acquisition of advanced weaponry. Yet, the greater concern for the Indian state lies not only in this growing militarization, but also in the Naxalites' assumption of developmental functions in the regions under their control—thereby directly challenging the state's legitimacy. The Indian government has primarily relied on coercive responses to contain Naxalite violence, often overlooking the deeper roots of the insurgency rooted in systemic social injustice and uneven development. While some efforts—such as attempts at dialogue—signal a more conciliatory approach, initiatives like the "Gill formula" -named after the former police officer K.P.S. Gill, who employed a harsh strategy to root out extremism in Punjab during the 1980s and 1990s- in Jharkhand reflect a reversion to hardline tactics, risking the collapse of any peace-building progress.

Encouragingly, the Andhra Pradesh government's invitation to banned Naxalite groups for negotiations indicates a potential shift toward addressing the movement's underlying grievances. However, it remains unclear whether this reflects genuine political will or short-term electoral strategy. Given the Naxalite presence across multiple Indian states, a unified national strategy is essential to prevent fragmented and repressive state-level responses that could reignite conflict. The sustainability of peace efforts depends on mutual goodwill, comprehensive engagement, and a serious commitment to resolving the structural issues that fuel left-wing extremism.

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