

INDIA'S RED TIDE: THE NAXALITE MOVEMENT

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Introduction

India's transformation in the past two decades as an emerging global democratic power, with a robust economy and a strong military has been a remarkable achievement. However, in the midst of the 'India shining' dreams, the country is facing increasing schism between the rich and poor and between urban and rural areas. The rampant inequality and mounting number of suicides by the indigent and indebted farmers and the ever-growing terrorist activities reflect an acute sense of isolation of the people involved. The Indian government's failure in addressing the grievances of these classes and groups, coupled with its hard-hitting policies, have further aggravated the divide.

India has had its share of insurgencies. Of these, the Naxalite/Maoist Movement has become its most violent insurgency in the past decade. The Naxalites have established themselves as a rival political faction capable of gaining a great deal of support of the people it maintains it represents. By 2006, the Naxalite insurgency was so successful in exerting its influence in central parts of India that it was attested to by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh himself as "India's gravest security threat."⁽¹⁾ The Naxalite insurgency or 'people's war' is manifest in large parts of India's poorest, tribally inhabited, forest and natural resource rich states like Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand as well as in smaller pockets in states like Karnataka, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and West Bengal. These nine Maoist affected regions are also known as the Red Corridor. The revolt originated in 1967 from Naxalbari, a village in West Bengal. The first wave of violence was curbed by the Indian government by the start of the 1970s. However, the insurgency went ablaze after the merger of two left-wing groups — the People's War Group and the Maoist

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Communist Centre — into the Communist Party of India–Maoist (CPI–Maoist) in 2004.

The Naxalites claim to be supported by the poorest rural populations, particularly Adivasis (aboriginal Indians). The movement symbolizes the fact that majority of India's poor do not enjoy the trickledown effects of the India shining claim. Moreover, the grabbing of land, water, and mineral resources by corporations chaperoned and sanctioned by the state has made the situation shoddier in these areas. The current Naxalite insurgency has emerged as the most dangerous threat mainly due to the movement's aggressive and violent activism and its growing support base in tribal and backward areas along with advanced fighting capabilities.

The paper is divided into four parts. The *first* section offers a theoretical perspective on mass movements. The *second* provides a brief history of the Naxalite movement in India — the factors responsible for the formation and persistence of the insurgency. The *third* discusses the current Naxal rebellion, its key objectives and reasons behind the violence directed against the Indian State. It also focuses on the increased role of women cadres in the uprising. The *fourth* part sheds light on the Indian State (both central and state governments) response to the Naxalite insurgency and the impact achieved thus far. And the *final* section focuses on the policy issues, threats that the movement poses to the long-term development of the country followed by some suggestions and conclusion.

A theoretical perspective of mass movements

Political scientists and sociologists have developed a variety of themes and concepts on social movements. According to Johnson and Freeman, “It (social movement) is not a political party or interest group, which are stable political entities that have regular access to political power and political elites; nor is it a mass fad or trend, which are unorganized, fleeting and without goals. Instead they are somewhere in between.”⁽²⁾

For De la Porta and Diani, some characteristics of social movements are that they are “involved in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents; are linked by dense informal networks; [and they] share a distinct collective identity.”⁽³⁾

There are two schools of thought on the root cause of social movements. First, who think that structural imbalances⁽⁴⁾ (poverty and social injustice) are the driving force behind the upheaval. Second, who attribute the movement to human motivations (psychological factors). However, both of these theories have inherent deficiencies. For example, the claim of the structuralist theorists that there is a connection between factors of social structural imbalance and rebellion suffers from the fact that the cross-national statistical studies have often reflected puny co-relation between the structural factors and political violence.⁽⁵⁾ Besides, in many societies, the existence of social injustice did not generate main movements. One can say that widespread poverty and social injustice produced the French and the Russian revolutions, yet a far worse situation obtaining among the oppressed *dalits* (untouchables)

produced no such movement until the Communist Party provided the leadership in the post- independence India.⁽⁶⁾

Human motivation theorists also face logical riddle. Self-interest cannot explain or reflect the collective action. Since the fruition of a collective action mellows down while costs remaining specific to the areas who opted to participate in the attainment of a public good.⁽⁷⁾

In a nutshell, the structural theories fail to explicate why mass movements do not take place despite widespread frustration and inequalities, while the rational-choice theories (Human Motivation theorists) fall short of providing basis for their occurrence.

Gupta has proposed that we must, in order to resolve the problem, expand the human motivation (rational choice) hypothesis to include factors of group motivations. It is not enough to have widespread frustration and anger. Group motivations are shaped by an actor's collective identity. "Collective action takes place when political entrepreneurs give shape to a collective identity. When a large number of people accept the leader's version of what constitutes a community and who the enemies are, a collective action is born."⁽⁸⁾

Collective identities based on ethnicity, language, religion, or national origin can be seen as ascriptive (birth characteristics). And when groups are formed on the basis of environmental or economic causes, they are called adopting groups. Marxist revolutionaries hold that people are often unaware of their class identities. It is the job of the revolutionary leadership to enlighten them on this point.⁽⁹⁾

Gupta further argues that the rise and fall of a mass movement depends on the interaction of the two factors (self and the group) of motivation. "At individual level, each person operates from a mixed motive of selfish pursuit of love, pecuniary gains, moral uprightness, power and distinction and an essentially altruistic motivation of enhancing the welfare of the group." The relative strength of these two motivations determines whether a person is an opportunist or an altruist. What is true for an individual is also true for a group.⁽¹⁰⁾ A mass movement is the final result of frustration and anger felt by a group and channelized by the leadership into a specific action. Nevertheless, groups vary in the commitment to ideology; and some after having started off with a strong ideological commitment, transform into criminal organizations.⁽¹¹⁾ A mass movement, however, declines when it, inter alia, is divorced from its political base.

Historical context of the Communist Movement in India

In order to understand the contemporary phase of Naxalism, it is important to step back into different characteristics of organizational transformations that have occurred within the Naxal movement, as the origin and current phase of the movement is a manifestation of continuity and change.

During the periods from 1783-1900, due to wide disparities in the ownership and control of land in the rural societies, more than one hundred cases of violent peasant uprisings took place in the rural areas of what

constitutes today's India.⁽¹²⁾ The unrest and frustration obtaining among peasants in rural India has all along been a classic case of "too much land concentrated in too few hands."⁽¹³⁾ The highly distorted pattern of ownership of agricultural lands, lack of land tenure reforms along with minimal wages for the rural labour force marginalized the poor farmers in these areas. The tiny land holdings forced the small farmers to borrow money from moneylenders and rich farmers, who charged exorbitant interest rates on loans given to deprived farmers. As a result, small farmers had little choice but to mortgage their meager holdings and eventually sell them off in order to pay the debt.⁽¹⁴⁾ This trend turned the small farmers and their families into bonded labourers.

One of the major factors responsible for such a state of affairs was the "Zamindari System" introduced by the British. The zamindars (landowners) were authorized by them to extract agricultural surpluses, which were the main source of revenue for the East India Company.⁽¹⁵⁾ This way landownership was made permanent and inheritable in return of fixed revenues to the government.

Despite the fact that the zamindari system was abolished by the Indian government after independence, the legacy of the colonial land lease system continued to generate extreme discrimination in the distribution of arable land. In addition, those populations which were most marginalised by India's uneven caste system continued to face prejudices even after the eradication of the caste of untouchables as a legal classification.⁽¹⁶⁾ Therefore, during the 1950s, nearly 60 per cent of the rural households constituted of the landless, marginal holders and sharecropping lessees.⁽¹⁷⁾

Although the first major revolt in independent India took place in 1967 in Naxalbari, its origins could be traced back to two major peasant struggles that took place from 1947-51 — Tebhaga Movement in Bengal and, Telengana struggle in Andhra Pradesh.⁽¹⁸⁾ These movements provided the impetus for modern left-oriented revolution in the name of social justice and agrarian reform in India. The Telengana movement in particular was a successful manifestation of the organized use of the Maoist-Marxist-Leninist inspired left-wing ideologies to politically mobilize peasant insurgencies in India. The Telengana struggle was a revolt by peasant farmers, led by the Communist Party of India, against the feudal landlords of the Telengana region. These landlords virtually ruled over all the communities in the village and managed the revenues and owned almost all the land in that area.

The movement made its mark fighting for five years during which it was able to establish control over 3000 villages.⁽¹⁹⁾ However, the movement later became a fight against the Nizam of Hyderabad whose favourable treatment towards the local landlords had given them enough liberty to fleece the peasantry. The princely state was attacked and annexed by India in 1948 and was made part of today's Andhra Pradesh in 1956.⁽²⁰⁾

The Andhra Pradesh government set up a credit finance department in 1956 particularly for the tribal people but it could not produce the desired results due to the greed and corruption by the state officials. During the 1960s, in an attempt to tackle the problem of persistent food shortages in the country, the Indian Government introduced a strategy known as the 'Green Revolution.'

Nevertheless, the strategy proved detrimental to the small farmers since it increased agricultural land value thus raising rents to be paid by tenants. Moreover, it restricted the small farmers for whom advanced mechanized farming was too expensive to be affordable.⁽²¹⁾ Therefore, the Green Revolution served to add up to the existing disparities between the rich landlords and poor or landless farmers.

Phases of Naxalbari Movement

The frustration of the aborted movement in Telengana and the perpetual failure of the state's agrarian policies in the *adivasi* regions generated immense resentment. This was also the time when the changing global and regional politics started affecting the communist parties in India. The history of Naxalite movement started taking shape during this period. In the early 1960s, the relations between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the Communist Party of China (CPC) broke up. Simultaneously, the CPC began criticizing the CPSU for turning revisionist and shunning the path of Marxism-Leninism. At the same time, Sino-Indian relations also deteriorated, as border disputes between the two countries erupted into the Sino-Indian war of 1962. It was here when the Sino-Soviet ideological split led to a difference of opinion in the Communist Party of India (CPI). The so-called 'right wing' inside the party followed the Soviet path and put forward the idea of joining hands with the then ruling party – the Indian National Congress, whereas, the younger faction of the CPI termed this a revisionist approach of class collaboration. It was this ideological rift which later intensified and ultimately gave birth to the Communist Party of India (Marxist).⁽²²⁾

However, when in the 1967, CPI(M) decided to enter electoral politics and joined a coalition United Front government in West Bengal with the Bangla Congress, it alienated a faction of its cadres who strongly believed in revolutionary politics. This section of the CPI(M), led by Kanu Sanyal and Charu Mazumdar, initiated the Naxalbari rebellion of 1967 in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal after a tribal youth, who had a judicial order to plough his land, was attacked by thugs of local landlords. Local tribals reacted and forcefully started capturing their lands back.⁽²³⁾ This revolt constituted the *first phase* of the movement's history.

The CPI (M)-led United Front government cracked down on the uprising. In 72 days of the rebellion, a police sub-inspector and nine tribals were killed. The Congress government at the centre supported the state-led onslaught.⁽²⁴⁾ However, the uprising in Naxalbari increased the pressure on the United Front, which was already beset with numerous other tribulations including a food crisis. Soon the failure to solve the law-and-order problems led the governor to dissolve the elected government in West Bengal. This incident resonated throughout India and Naxalism was born.

Principally influenced by the ideology of Mao Zedong, this group advocated that the peasants and lower classes must drive out the government and upper classes that follow a capitalistic culture in India, putting the proletariat in a predicament.⁽²⁵⁾ The practitioners of Marxist revolutionary ideology — Mao,

Lenin and Ho Chi Minh — strongly believed that “class consciousness must be painstakingly taught to the peasants and the workers through active leadership of the Communist Party.” The hardliners like Sanyal and Mazumdar, after working with the poor peasants for years, were convinced that the “objective conditions” in India were ripe for a mass-level rebellion against an oppressive social-political system.⁽²⁶⁾ He and other like-minded communists saw this uprising as the “spark” that would ignite the Indian revolution. Mazumdar furthered the Naxalite ideology through his writings, particularly the *Historic Eight Documents*⁽²⁷⁾ that attracted a large number of urban middle class and elites to the ideology.

The *second phase* of the movement started in 1968, when the supporters of the ‘Naxalbari path’ formed the All-India Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCR). As more and more organised communists sided with the rebel faction in the Bengal unit, a separate party, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) - CPI(ML) was founded in 1969, which was supported by leaders from different regions.⁽²⁸⁾

The *third phase* was characterized by the expansionist attempts made by CPI(ML) to form red bases in rural areas, and by adoption of Mazumdar’s “annihilation line” — a motto that promoted assassination of individual “class enemies” — such as landlords, businessmen, university teachers, police officers, politicians of the right and left and others — as the only tactical line for revolution. By 1970s, “entire state units of CPI (M) in Uttar Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir and some sections in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh”⁽²⁹⁾ got attached to the struggle. Following the path of Naxalbari, another peasant agitation took place in the Srikakulam District of Andhra Pradesh. A small contingent of disgruntled revolutionaries of the Communist Party joined hands with the hill tribes to go on a war path. For some time, the Naxals established an alternative administrative apparatus in Srikakulam and declared “liberated zones” in the remote forested areas, started eradicating the local landlords and moneylenders, embarked upon collecting “taxes” and set up “revolutionary courts.”⁽³⁰⁾

In pockets of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the Naxalites successfully mobilized the peasantry to regain lands they had lost to the landlords whom they had mortgaged their properties in lieu of money. In Punjab, rich landlords and policemen remained their preferred targets. In Midnapur and Birbhum of West Bengal,⁽³¹⁾ a number of armed peasants’ struggles broke out.

In the *fourth phase*, the Naxalites took their struggle to urban areas. While campaigns to engage landless labourers and peasants proceeded in rural Bengal, Calcutta became the stage for urban Maoist activities and guerrilla warfare.⁽³²⁾ Hundreds of students joined the CPI(ML) under the leadership of Charu Mazumdar.

The *fifth phase* began when the popularity and stronghold of Naxalbari Movement alarmed the government of India into setting up a committee for looking into the matter. The committee report exposed weaknesses in the implementation of laws enacted by the state to protect the interests of the poor farmers and tribals. Instead of addressing the problems of farmers and tribals

and restoring their confidence in the state, the government, perturbed over the law and order situation in the Naxal areas, took high-handed measures such as launching strong police action against the Naxalites.⁽³³⁾ This policy succeeded in checking their influence in many areas.

The government's success was mainly due to the increasing friction among the Naxal factions primarily against Mazumdar's "annihilation line". In seeking to strictly adhere to the Chinese model, Mazumdar failed to take into account the fact that Mao's revolution did not provide the model for a winning revolution to be imitated in the circumstances of the 1970s India. Although the CPI (ML) under Mazumdar professed to be fighting against the orthodox feudal system that undermined the rights and freedoms of the tribals, they were themselves could be blamed for using the tribals for their own ideological ends. While many Naxalites at the time would justify their strategy as a necessary measure for the achievement of a revolution, it had an alienating affect within tribal areas, a fact that many Naxal leaders like Kanu Sanyal understood well.⁽³⁴⁾

Moreover, the shift in the organization's area of operation from rural to urban aggravated the divide. Cashing in on the decentralised structure of the movement, the local police successfully established intelligence gathering mechanisms through the young students joining the movement. In 1971, the CPI (ML) was split. Satyanarayan Singh revolted against Mazumdar's brazen policies and formed a new party, CPI (ML) Liberation.⁽³⁵⁾ Thus, the movement was scattered into several competing factions, operating in various regions.

In July 1972, Charu Mazumdar was captured from a Calcutta hideout and died after 12 days of his arrest due to alleged ill treatment in police custody.⁽³⁶⁾ Many left-oriented thinkers and writers wrote about the mysterious death of Mazumdar. The imposition of emergency in India in 1975 resulted in mass arrests of the top leaders as well as grassroots-level leaders and members of the movement. In many areas, Maoist veterans went underground to evade arrest.

At that point in time, it was widely believed that the Indian government had successfully suppressed the threat posed by the Naxalites. Nevertheless, the reality was different. The movement, after a tangible pause, began to revive in the late 1970s. It entered a new phase when post-Emergency new government came into power at the centre after the 1977 general elections.⁽³⁷⁾ The fresh and first non-congress government released Naxal leaders from jails following a nationwide movement organized by various human rights groups in the country and abroad. All these developments proved to be catalyst in carrying the Naxal message to the people at the grassroots' level of Indian society.

Despite many divisions in the ranks of Naxalism, almost all the groups committed to the ideas of the movement traced their origin to the common political forum — the CPI (ML) which was not directly involved in armed rebellion but in disseminating the ideology of Naxalbari movement and mobilizing the people in its favour. The various splits during the 1970s, 80s and 90s generated a process whereby each fragmented bloc sought to increase its individual base of support, thus leading to a growth in organizational development with focus on winning over local populations at grassroots level.⁽³⁸⁾

Therefore, the Maoists sought to institute control over areas that were extremely poor and were segregated and ignored by state's development and security initiatives. Moreover, these areas were mostly located in hilly or forested terrains, which provided safe havens to the Maoists against the state's security networks.

Naxalite movement: A new beginning

The shortcomings of Indian democracy to deliver the promises of the Constitution to its marginalised populations provided space for an opposing ideology which was able to fill the void created by the failures of the State.

By early 2000, there were more than 30 groups in India which are loosely called Maoists or Naxalites.⁽³⁹⁾ Of these, the People's War Group (PWG) in Andhra Pradesh and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) in Bihar were the most significant ones. Believing in guerilla warfare, these two diverse lines of Naxalism, since the 1980s, continued armed rebellion in their respective zones against police force, administration, landlords and business communities.

The PWG emerged during the post-Emergency period in retaliation to the authoritarian repression of the Communist and Naxal leaders by state forces and to the gradual acceptance of the parliamentary methods conceded by the CPI (M-L) Liberation. On the other hand, the MCC was formed in 1969 under the name of Dakshin Desh⁽⁴⁰⁾ in opposition to Mazumdar's line of action.

During the late 1970s, the PWG first established itself in Telengana, but later successfully spread its influence across the borders of Andhra Pradesh and into Orissa and the Chhattisgarh region of Madhya Pradesh as early as 1982. Simultaneously, the MCC gained influence when its military line of action became popular among tribals in the central regions of Bihar. These groups set up committees in many areas to assess and address the grievances of the local people. They would identify people like moneylenders and landlords and would kill those responsible for the plight of the poor in these zones. However, unlike Mazumdar's class annihilation policy, these groups used violence as an empowering instrument, and not an end in itself.⁽⁴¹⁾ Naxalite groups were able to gain influence by providing an analogous government apparatus in the forest areas of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Bihar and Jharkhand. Over time, these parallel governments were able to achieve a high level of sophistication and organization. As armed groups steadily held an area, they went about coordinating economic, political and social reforms based on the needs of the local population.⁽⁴²⁾ In 2000, the People's War Group established the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) while smaller scale militias formed in 1980s continued to flourish.

Since 2000, these groups have greatly extended their influence zone, therefore, the Naxal movement in India is now considered as a part of the global Maoist activism. In 2001, organizations like the PWG, MCC etc. established a network with ideologically similar organizations in Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Sri Lanka under the aegis of the Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA). This South Asia Maoist

network also became a member of an international organization called the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM).⁽⁴³⁾

The emergence of CCOMPOSA saw a series of mergers between Indian Maoist groups. In 2004, CPI (ML) and its factions — Party Union, MCC and PWG — merged to form a unified command structure under the title of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) or CPI (Maoist).⁽⁴⁴⁾ After the merger, the CPI (Maoist) announced that the newly formed party would follow Marxism-Leninism-Maoism as its "ideological basis guiding its thinking in all spheres of its activities." Included in this ideology was a dedication to "protracted armed struggle" to emasculate the State and seize power. The strategy also incorporated building up bases in rural and remote areas and converting them first into guerrilla zones, and then into "liberated zones", in addition to encircling cities.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Under the new unification, PWG's armed group PGA was renamed PLGA. Muppala Lakshmana Rao alias Ganapathy was named the general secretary of the organization.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Since then, the Naxalite Movement has unleashed its power to become the most dangerous internal security threat to India.

In a comprehensive 2004 document entitled *Strategy and Tactics*, CPI (Maoist) has recognized major contradictions in the Indian society:

- "The contradiction between imperialism and the Indian people;
- The contradiction between feudalism and the broad masses;
- The contradiction between capital and labour; and
- The internal contradictions among the ruling classes."⁽⁴⁷⁾

They argue that these inconsistencies are "a result of India being a semi-feudal, semi colonial country, under neo-colonial form of indirect rule, exploitation and control."⁽⁴⁸⁾ The organization contends that the "comprador bureaucratic capitalist classes of India are tools in the hands of imperialists". With the "introduction of liberalization, privatization, globalization" (LPG) in the 1990s, these classes increasingly shape national policies that synchronize with the interests of their imperialist masters. Furthermore, the party considers the Indian caste system as "obnoxious" and holds that the allegiance to and the role of other left wing parties in the government is nothing but mockery. The organization contends:

Support of the so-called Left parties to the present Congress government with the fake posture of opposing its economic policies is a new fraud (on) the Indian people...Dalit question is essentially a class question. Hence, the Maoist forces should carry on the struggle against caste oppression as a part of the NDR [New Democratic Revolution] and also fight for their equal place in society in all spheres by abolishing the caste system. They should also fight for equal rights and special privileges, including, reservations for Dalits and other backward castes, while exposing the hollowness of the ruling class politics in this regard. The struggle against casteism and

untouchability should also be carried on in the ideological, political and cultural spheres.⁽⁴⁹⁾

What makes the Naxalite insurgency different from others in India is that rather than seeking to challenge the power of the Indian government to exercise its sovereignty over a given area based on racial, religious, or territorial claims, the movement seeks to defy the sovereignty of the democratic state by undermining the basic principles, such as justice, governance and monopoly of violence, which underscore its authority.⁽⁵⁰⁾

Since the merger, Naxalites have fused their front organizations into 'Revolution Democratic Front' (RDF) to strengthen their mass contact programme. In 2007, it was estimated that Naxalites were active across roughly "half of India's 28 states" which accounts for about 40 per cent of its geographical area.⁽⁵¹⁾ In 2011, 83 districts⁽⁵²⁾ across nine states of the Red Corridor were declared as Naxalite-hit areas, out of which Chattisgarh is the most-affected one.⁽⁵³⁾

Throughout the "liberated zones," the Naxalites have been able to establish their own system of governance and justice and have made a determined effort to straighten out law and order issues. They have successfully instituted *jana adalats* or people's courts and systems of "tax" collection. They are very well organized with a military-like chain of command that has leaders at the national, regional and local levels.⁽⁵⁴⁾ They have established different zonal committees with efficient coordination mechanism. For instance, "they have three zonal committees in Orissa like Andhra-Orissa Border Special Zonal Committee (AOBSZC), Jharkhand-Bihar-Orissa Special Zonal Committee (JBOBSZC) and Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee (DSZC). In Andhra Pradesh, three special zonal committees look after the Maoist operations."⁽⁵⁵⁾

The Maoist movement has identified three steps of warfare — organization stage, the guerrilla warfare stage and finally the mobile warfare stage. All these stages can be witnessed at different levels with varying intensity all over India.⁽⁵⁶⁾ During the organizational phase of the movement, the rebels do not resort to violence in order to institute a popular support base. The nature of their activities usually remains peaceful, and essentially political (strategic defensive). Once they achieve a firm hold in their targeted areas, they enter the guerilla warfare phase, wherein they confront the state on equal footing by targeting police forces, police informants, and civil and political leaders. As a result of targeted killings and intimidation by the Naxals, a power vacuum is created in these areas. The space is then filled in by the insurgents through a parallel system of government in the form of 'gram rajya' and 'gram raksha' committess. The Naxals then enter into a more open conflict with security forces, called mobile warfare phase.⁽⁵⁷⁾

For example, if Dantewada and Bastar are going almost into the mobile warfare stage, Delhi is perhaps at the organization stage.

The Maoists keep on creating new fronts and continue merging the groups into their fold in order to escape from police action and political antagonism. This has made the situation more complex for the police and the governments, who find it difficult to curb the growing problem of insurgency.

The Maoist military machine, PLGA, continues to remain a potent defence against the state militia. According to Dr, P.V. Ramana:

“PLGA consists of three types of forces, viz. primary force (platoons), secondary force (guerrilla squads) and base force (people’s militia). The people’s militia comprises of people who otherwise have a vocation in life and are imparted rudimentary military training for barely a fortnight.”⁽⁵⁸⁾

Under new banners, the PLGA and other small Naxal groups are making regular recruitment of cadres as “armed naxals, techie cadres, informers, etc., on salary basis”. News sources claim that “an armed cadre joins at a monthly remuneration between 6000 and 10000 rupees whereas a qualified techie cadre starts at a salary between 8000 and 15000 per month depending on their qualification, expertise and area of operation. Unlike other regular jobs, they have set an effective and lucrative system of incentives and cadre promotion based on the performance and capability in handling different operations.”⁽⁵⁹⁾

According to estimates, the PLGA since its inception has trained around ten to twenty thousand professional cadres, armed with around 7,300 highly sophisticated weapons. Its informal militia, which is numbered 50,000 approximately, spreads across villages under Maoist control, comprising of tribals equipped with traditional arsenal.⁽⁶⁰⁾ This wide collection of weapons include “home-made *tapancha*, the older .302, SBBL and, DBBDL rifles, SLRs, LMGs, AK series assault rifles, INSAS rifles, mortar and lethal IEDS such as claymore and directional mines.”⁽⁶¹⁾

These armed cadres and militia are supported by a large number of women and children. The PLGA is also involved in “propaganda war and providing assistance to the people in establishing and smooth running of ‘janta sarkars’ (people’s governments) established by the Maoists in their areas of domination like in the areas of Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee (DKSZC).”⁽⁶²⁾

The government alleges that Naxals have gradually come to harbour an extortion economy in the guise of a popular revolution, wringing huge amounts of money from local branches of mining companies and other businesses. They have been involved in several cases of destroying public property by blowing up schools and railway tracks. They are known for staging dreadful attacks against police and the tribals as well as dalits who either oppose the Naxalites or favour the police and government. Moreover, they have been accused of keeping the areas under their control away from modernity and development, so they can impose their will on the uneducated rural populace.⁽⁶³⁾

Keeping pace with the technological advancements, the PLGA has been acquiring hi-tech weapons and ammunition through their links with the insurgent groups from India’s Northeast, Nepal and Myanmar. In their areas of control, they have established “specialized technical wings, which employ IT experts on monthly payment, to draw up plans to develop more potent explosives, tap governmental messages and get the latest on techniques on guerrilla warfare. The experts also draw maps of different government

installations and sketches of jails. The Maoists have developed technology to prepare dangerous landmines.”⁽⁶⁴⁾ Their presence in the rural suburbs of urban centres, industrial hubs, sections of Northeast India and even in Punjab has increased tangibly.⁽⁶⁵⁾

Naxalism and the women revolutionaries

The involvement of women in Maoist activities has been there since the Naxalbari Movement of 1967. In 1986, the PLGA formed a women’s wing — Adivasi Mahila Sangathan (AMS) — which evolved into the Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangathan (Revolutionary Indigenous Women Association) — KAMS and now has 90,000 enrolled members, nearly 45 per cent of PLGA’s armed cadres. Many women have joined KAMS to escape the discrimination against women in their own patriarchal societies. It is so because KAMS very presence has brought a fundamental change in the traditional attitudes of people by eliminating many of the conventional forms of discrimination against women.⁽⁶⁶⁾ Then there are those who join the Naxalites due to the continued physical and economic exploitation of women and the rest of the adivasi community at the hands of police and other outside forces. The commitment of the Maoists towards the ideology and understanding about new feminine concepts is also one of the motivational factors behind the increase in the number of women in the movement.

Many of the Maoist squads operating in jungle areas have women as their commanders. There is no gender bias with respect to the military struggle. Like men, the women *dalams* (armed squads) are trained for the field, with the same exercise and diet routine. It is obligatory for all new Maoist recruits to “take a nine-point oath that declares, inter alia, that he or she would not discriminate on the basis of religion, caste, gender, race, or ethnicity.”⁽⁶⁷⁾

Women are active in almost all the Naxal-influenced regions. For example, in a survey conducted in Maharashtra, “74 women are part of the approximately 290 hardcore Maoists operating in the worst affected areas.” Besides, being soldiers, women take up the roles of “doctors, propagandists and tutors.” Each day, they teach Maoist philosophy in their communities, informing them how the “imperialist forces have oppressed them, looted their forests and destroyed their way of life.”⁽⁶⁸⁾ There are women who have not only vowed to give their lives to the movement, but have also pledged their children to serve the organization following their footsteps.

State’s counter-Naxal strategy

In September 2009, India’s Prime Minister Manmohan Singh while talking to the mediapersons said:

“I have consistently held that in many ways the left-wing extremism poses perhaps the gravest internal security threat that our country’s faces... I would like to state frankly that we have not achieved as much success as we would have liked in containing this menace. It is a matter of concern that despite our efforts the level of violence in the effected states continues to rise.”⁽⁶⁹⁾

In 2009, India's United Progressive Alliance-led government banned the CPI (Maoist) under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) as a terrorist organisation. However, since 2004, as the Naxalite movement's influence multiplied, the government took stern measures to curb it. In comparison to the Naxalite movement, the state has vast resources and enjoys greater legitimacy to deal with the Naxal issue, but they consider the insurgency solely as a law and order problem. With this approach, the State has adopted a policy of extensive use of force and is only focused on targeting insurgents who they consider the principal obstacle in the way of restoration of law and order and a threat to the writ of the State.⁽⁷⁰⁾ This tug-of-war between the State and the Naxalites has isolated the tribals and the general public living in these areas. In addition, it has resulted in deterioration of public rights and welfare programmes.

The first grand initiative secretly sponsored and armed by a state government against the Naxalites was *Salwa Judum* (Purification Hunt). The central government fully supported the programme. Chhattisgarh has been the heart of Maoist activities since 1980s. The idea of forming Salwa Judum was presented by Mahendra Karma, the opposition leader in the Chhattisgarh Legislative Assembly, in summer 2005. During the same year, due to the state's crackdown against the Maoists in the state of Andhra Pradesh, a lot of Naxal members had fled to Chhattisgarh. The Salwa Judum was a ground-clearing operation wherein the local people were moved out of their villages into roadside camps, where they could be policed and controlled. The Indian government used the military tactics of "strategic hamleting" that the US had used during the Vietnam War.⁽⁷¹⁾

Salwa judum is primarily an informal organization comprising around 10,000 members. The Chhattisgarh state government appointed thousands of young men, some of them still teenagers, as special police officers, supplied them with weapons and pushed them to fight the Maoists. The state's rationale for doing so was that it would be a back-up to the military, make the mineral-rich areas safer for big industrial corporations, and allow for official deniability of any violence committed against civilians and the alleged Naxals in the name of restoring control.⁽⁷²⁾

Many people and social activists believe that the cause of contention between the two warring sides is the control over the mineral-rich region of India which is abundant in limestone, iron ore, coal, magnesium and bauxite deposits. In an interview given to Awi Lewis of Al-Jazeera TV, famous writer Arundhati Roy observed:

"Why did the Maoists suddenly become internal security threat? Because, in 2005, a few things happened simultaneously. In April, the BJP government in Chhattisgarh signed two MoUs to set up integrated steel plants (the terms of which are secret). One for Rs 7,000 crore with Essar Steel in Bailadila, and the other for Rs 10,000 crore with Tata Steel in Lohandiguda. That same month, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh made his famous statement about the Maoists being the 'Gravest Internal Security Threat' to India."⁽⁷³⁾

The conflict's epicenter is the heavily forested and underdeveloped district of Dantewara. Salwa Judum herded villagers and tribals in makeshift camps, where human rights abuses were rife. Salwa Judum became increasingly violent and out of control. Reportedly, since 2005, Salwa Judum burnt and evacuated 644 or more villages.⁽⁷⁴⁾ For instance, the village of Kortrapal caught special media attention because it was "burnt 22 times for refusing to surrender."⁽⁷⁵⁾ With the rise in the conflict, Human Rights Watch in 2008 reported atrocities at both ends. In a report, the HRW highlighted large-scale displacement of the civilian population caught in the conflict between the Naxalites and Salwa Judum militia with at least 100,000 people moving to various camps in southern Chhattisgarh or fleeing to neighbouring Andhra Pradesh as of early 2008. That is why, in the absence of access to employment or land, lack of food, water and shelter, people resorted to raiding nearby villages. There were also extensive reports of rape and other abuses against women by the Salwa Judum.⁽⁷⁶⁾

On their part, the Maoists continued with their attacks specifically targeting Salwa Judum leaders and security personnel. By early 2009, Salwa Judum as a counterinsurgency measure was largely seen by most analysts and security experts as a failure. The number of people living in the camps dropped from former 50,000 to 13,000 and public support for the Judum dwindled away.⁽⁷⁷⁾ On 5 July 2011, the Supreme Court of India declared the militia as illegal and unconstitutional. The court directed the Chhattisgarh government to recover all the firearms given to Judum members along with the ammunition and accessories. It also ordered the government to look into all cases of alleged criminal activities of Salwa Judum.⁽⁷⁸⁾

Along with the state government-led Salwa Judum operations the central government started a paramilitary offensive against the Naxalite rebels in November 2009 along the borders of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, known as 'Operation Green Hunt' OGH. Most operations conducted by the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) have targeted Sanghams, the village-level bodies installed by the Naxals in areas under their control. Sangham members are considered to be sympathetic to the Naxal cause but are not necessarily armed. In such a state of affairs, the loyalties of local tribesmen stand divided between the Maoists and the state. Drawn into a web of complexities, the state adheres to use of violence as the only tool to draw maximum number of native people on its side. In this context, quoting an example of Chhattisgarh, *The Hindu* reported:

Chhattisgarh does not keep any record of civilians killed by the security forces. Police sources cite this as validation of the state's efforts to minimise civilian casualties, but sceptics see this as tautology where all those killed by the police are retrospectively termed Naxals.⁽⁷⁹⁾

In the process, the government forces have also suffered a series of devastating losses as a result of Maoist counterattacks against 'Operation Green Hunt.' The deadliest among these has been a Dantewada ambush that saw 76

jawans die at the hands of the Maoists.⁽⁸⁰⁾ The OGH attacks were greatly criticized by the Indian public.

On the whole, the government's counter-insurgency operations have led to estrangement and disillusionment towards the state amongst both the populations affected by the uprising and the state's own security forces. Despite the fact that the Maoists' increased recourse to violence has damaged their own political targets, the reality remains that their work in most of the tribal areas during the past three decades have consolidated their support and control over these regions.⁽⁸¹⁾ On the contrary, the government's excessive use of force has done little to reinstate its control.

What is most tragic in this fight for legitimacy and authority between the two sides is the increased number of civilian casualties in the past years. As shown in the Table below, since 2005 the number of civilian casualties outnumbered the deaths of security personnel and Naxalites.

Fatalities in Left-wing Extremism in India: 2005-2012
Year-Wise Breakup

Years	Civilians	Security Forces Personnel	LWE/ CPI-Maoists	Total
2005	281	150	286	717
2006	266	128	343	737
2007	240	218	192	650
2008	220	214	214	648
2009	391	312	294	997
2010	626	277	277	1180
2011	275	128	199	602
2012	119	99	90	308
Total*	2418	1526	1895	5839

(State wise incidents and fatalities can be viewed at South Asian Terrorism Portal
Source for this table: <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/data_sheets/fatalitiesnaxal05-11.htm>)

A catch-22 situation for all

While dealing with the Naxalite issue, the Indian government claims to have followed a proactive and calculated approach. However, in reality, its policies have largely remained reactive. It created a power vacuum by ignoring the people of the poorest regions of the country and has failed to recapture its authority. Moreover, the state so far has remained unsuccessful in providing physical and legal protection to those who are affected by the insurgency. In a 2008 report of an expert group set up by the Planning Commission of India, it was noted:

As the responsibility of the State for providing equal social rights recedes in the sphere of policymaking, we have two worlds of education, two worlds of health, two worlds of transport and two worlds of housing, with a gaping divide in between. With globalization of information, awareness of opportunities and possible life styles are spreading but the entitlements are receding. The Constitutional mandate (Article 39) to prevent concentration of wealth in a few hands is

ignored in policy making. The directional shift in Government policies towards modernization and mechanization, export orientation, diversification to produce for the market, withdrawal of various subsidy regimes and exposure to global trade has been an important factor in hurting the poor in several ways.⁽⁸²⁾

On the other hand, the Maoists too have a lot of issues to deal with. Firstly, no matter how remarkable their support base and military capacity is, their goal of overthrowing the Indian government seems to be a distant reality. Besides, it is not in the better interest of the disaffected people they claim to be fighting for. This is because the aim of the Naxalites is to pursue their project of protracted people's war by transforming the guerrilla zones into liberated zones. Nevertheless, once an area under Maoist control is declared liberated, the interests of the tribals become secondary to the Maoist political agenda.⁽⁸³⁾

Secondly, the movement is attracting youth from the poor as well as upper-class families. Some experts think that the inclusion of the middle to upper classes could be one of the reasons that the fundamental aim of defending the rights of the tribal and dalit communities and the peasantry seems to have fallen second in the list of priorities.

Thirdly, in many zones of their influence, the Naxal outfits "have imposed illegal taxes; demanded food and shelter from villagers; abducted and killed 'class enemies' and hindered the delivery and utilization of funds meant for the development of isolated countryside."⁽⁸⁴⁾ In the Naxal areas, those who refuse support to the Naxalites are often harassed and at times killed with brutality. All these actions have adversely affected the lives of the people they claim to stand for.

The road ahead

Over the last 40 years, India has remained unsuccessful in implementing institutional changes at the local level, thus leaving landed proprietors and rich farmers to gain most in rural areas through maximizing short-term profit, disregarding the needs of tribal populations. A study of the whole trend would suggest that the problem is deepening despite all assurances given by the state governments.⁽⁸⁵⁾ It is essential to examine the causes of the continuing economic exploitation and social discrimination in the adivasi and dalit-inhabited areas of India.⁽⁸⁶⁾ Indian government has been focusing on treating the symptoms through arrests or killings. Neither the state nor the army has sincerely tried treating the root cause of the problem, i.e. poverty and inequality.

In most of the Naxalite-affected areas, unbridled corruption is one of the major reasons of state's failure. Unless the state dedicates itself to identify and punish those who are embezzling the money meant for development of these areas, it is not going to be able to deal with the problem.

The use of the Salwa Judum is highly counterproductive and has made things worse. The Supreme Court ruling in July 2011 on the Salwa Judum also

stated that their deployment amounts to a resignation of responsibility on the part of the state.⁽⁸⁷⁾

Counterinsurgency measures in the absence of targeted developmental projects are bound to fail. People will stop supporting violent movements if their primary needs are met. Therefore, only a multipronged policy addressing issues related to security, health, education, agriculture and irrigation, public works, generation of employment opportunities for the masses and formation of a comprehensive task force for the affected areas is required.⁽⁸⁸⁾ Such measures will be able to restore the confidence in the local population regarding dedication of the government in addressing their basic problems. What is immediately needed in Naxal-influenced zones is conceptualization to carry out operations with clarity of aim, strategy and resolve. It is important that the government learns from past mistakes and works towards development rather than just resorting back to use of force.

There is a gap in accountability between the central and state governments affected by Naxalism. While the central government has maintained that Naxalism is a threat to national security, it has frequently reaffirmed that state governments are responsible for their law and order and development matters. This has resulted into uneven strategies and responses across the affected states.⁽⁸⁹⁾ Thus, it is vital for the state governments to coordinate and cooperate with the support from the central government to launch an efficient strategy.

The problem of Naxalism should be understood from the point of the people involved. It is important to understand their perspective of the Naxal movement and its strategy. The government needs to focus on a third aspect of the problem: the ideology in the minds of people. The government should come up with a superior idea that is viable. The counter- ideology should not only appeal to the deprived population in rural areas but also to the urban supporters of Naxalism.⁽⁹⁰⁾

The naxal problem cannot be controlled until the Indian government makes major changes in its policies. The disparity between the laws made and laws enforced has to disappear. In terms of development, the political process and the commercial interests need to be balanced, taking care of the requirements of the local tribal people.⁽⁹¹⁾ It is generally seen that there is a lack of understanding on the part of the government towards local workers. The only way of attaining a common ground would be to make the tribal people part of the entire process.

On the issue of sharing the natural and mineral resource, the government needs to work on a policy wherein the local people and their representatives including the Naxalites are involved. Carving out a policy only to suit the interests of the government or that of the involved or aspiring industrial organizations, will never work. In fact, it will further exacerbate the problem.

As is widely believed, the Naxalite Movement is not all about guerrilla warfare; 70 per cent of it is revolutionary politics. Revolutionary politics is a

combination of info-political warfare. Unless the Indian politicians understand the concept, they cannot hope to defeat the Naxals.

Dialogue is a key to any peaceful settlement; nonetheless, in many circles in India, a lot of negative connotation has been attached to the term regarding Naxalites. For long lasting peace, the representatives of the government and those from the conflict-hit states will have to enter a dialogue with the Maoists.

Conclusion

Naxalism in India has evolved as a strong political ideology over time. India's long history of peasant rebellion can be ascribed to the economic repression and social humiliation that India's poor peasants, tribals and dalits faced for centuries. Even after independence, the Indian State failed to improve the socioeconomic circumstances of the oppressed and ensure that the benefits of its agrarian reform policies were spread more equitably across rural society.

Therefore, Naxalism emerged as an alternative ideology to cater to the needs of the poor masses. Over the years, the negligence of the State, corruption and faulty development policies, which displaced millions of tribals and peasants from their land without giving them proper compensation, only heightened the sense of disaffection that the deprived felt towards the State⁽⁹²⁾ and pushed them further into the fold of the Naxalite Movement.

Cashing in on the power vacuum left by the state and central governments, the Naxalites established a parallel system of government in their areas of operation. They undertook a range of development activities, including infrastructure building, maintenance of law and order and provision of social goods, in these areas. More recently, the Naxalite Movement has established links with regional and international insurgency movements. Today, it is more organized, well-structured and equipped with hi-tech weaponry. The advanced face of the movement and their success in running an analogous system of government has placed a question mark on the legitimacy of the State.

The Naxalite Movement continues to pose a major challenge to India. For some, it is a socio-economic problem, while others describe it as a law and order issue. Though the movement has not reached the point to be able to overthrow the State, yet if the situation continues to aggravate, that would hamper all progress and affect the social fabric and internal cohesion of the country. The root of the problem lies in poverty, inequality and the failure of credible governance in Naxalite-influenced areas.

The strategic intent of the Left-wing movement has been to instigate a revolution to overthrow the state through violence or a protracted people's war. They expect to achieve their stated goal by 2016. The increasing gravity of the Maoist issue in India has been accepted by the top authorities, as the most serious security threat. India's anti-Naxal policy has been criticized by different sections of society. Its counterinsurgency measures like 'Salwa Judum' and 'Operation Green Hunt' have backfired. The lack of comprehensive development planning, delayed and faulty implementation of the schemes, lack of coordination among all Naxal-affected states, deficiency of finances, and

infinite administrative loopholes have complicated the situation in the Red Corridor zone. The combination of the state's malfunctioning and the Naxalites ability to grab the opportunity has produced a situation in which the state and the insurgency are stuck in a violent impasse. Millions of people are caught between the Naxal ideology and the state's response to it. The global economic pressures have forced India to reform its policies in order to tackle the domestic and international interests. Nevertheless, such policies have a negative impact on the tribals, who were never made part of such a process in the first place. If India wishes to limit the Naxalite insurgency, it needs to seriously work towards it. And continuing with the status quo is certainly not the option.

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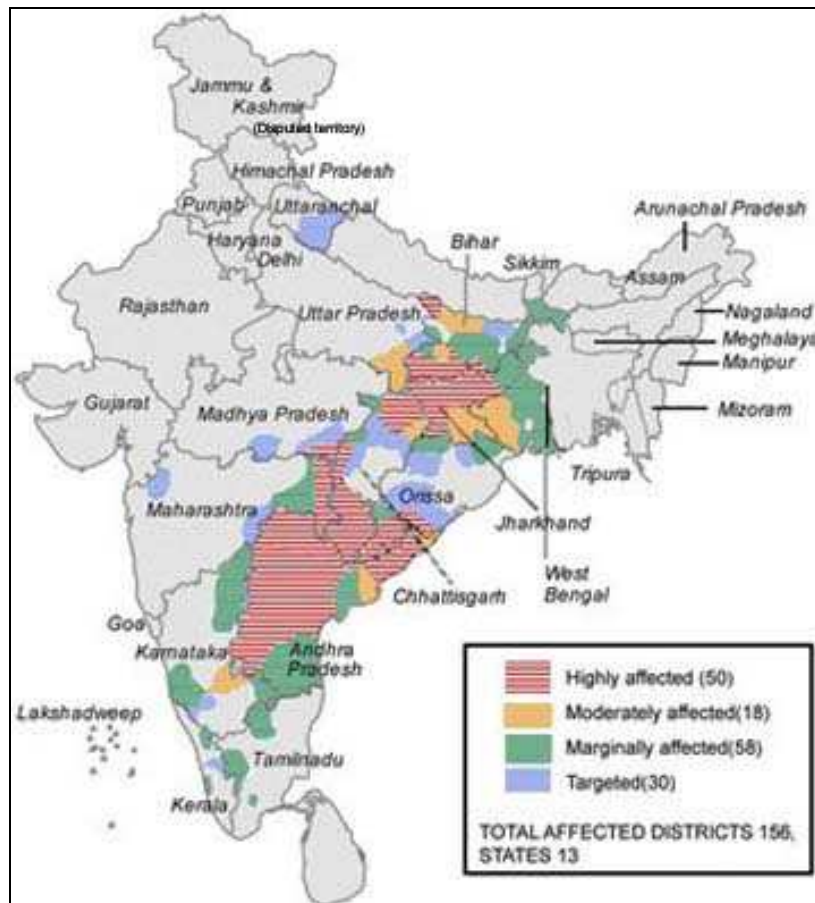
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91. "Developmental Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas," ref.76.

92. Ahuja and Ganguly, ref.13.

Annexure-I



Map showing areas affected by the Naxalite Movement in India
 (Source: <http://pacificempire.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2006/12/naxalite-affected-areas-in-india.jpg>).