

# Indian State Terrorism in Perspective: The Case of Naxalite/

## Maoist Movement<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*While terrorism studies have extensively addressed non-state and sub-state terrorism, the issue of state terrorism remains notably under-explored. Although this bias has been critically addressed within the field, there remains a significant gap in the study of state terrorism perpetrated by developing democracies against their own citizens in the context of insurgent movements. This paper employs a qualitative research method to examine the questionable counter-insurgency tactics used by the Indian state against the Naxalite/Maoist movement. The analysis shows that the Indian state's counter-insurgency measures largely rely on extra-judicial killings, sexual violence against tribal women, extensive village destruction, widespread displacement, and dispossession of tribal communities from their ancestral lands. The study also uncovers the enactment of laws that offer impunity to state agents such as police and paramilitary forces, and the deployment of heavy-handed force through state-sponsored vigilante groups. Given their nature, the state's counter-insurgency measures can be reasonably classified as acts of state terrorism. These acts are executed by state agents, inherently violent, and incite fear among the unarmed tribal population. Importantly, they send a message to a broader tribal audience beyond the immediate victims of violence. This paper thus aims to provide an insight into state terrorism within the context of a developing democracy, using the Indian state's response to the Naxalite/Maoist movement as a case study.*

**Key words:** Adivasis, Insurgency, Maoist, Naxalite, State Terrorism.

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## **1. Introduction**

Terrorism, in spite of its somewhat receding influence, continues to draw attention all over the world. However, much of the focus thus far has been on the threat posed by non-state groups, while state terrorism (an arguably more severe threat) continues to be conveniently overlooked. This bias results in a common misconception that ends up equating terrorism exclusively with non-state entities. This is an inaccurate representation, given the potential scale of destruction that can be orchestrated by states. Renowned scholar Paul Wilkinson has also strongly underscored this verity. Citing the historical instances of Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia, Wilkinson has demonstrated that state-initiated terror can result in a significantly higher degree of death and suffering than that inflicted by rebel factions.<sup>1</sup> This largely stems from the fact that states possess more extensive and powerful coercive apparatuses that significantly surpasses the destructive and propaganda capacities of non-state terrorist organizations.

Regrettably, the field of terrorism studies has largely overlooked state terrorism. Instead, the focus, insofar as terrorism is concerned, has primarily been on acts committed by non-state actors. In fact, many scholars equate terrorism solely with non-state activities that further obscures the reality of state terrorism. The issue is compounded by the fact that states have a legitimate monopoly over the use of force within their own territory, as articulated by Max Weber's "means of violence" <sup>2</sup> concept. Illegitimate acts of violence against their citizens are often dismissed as internal affairs. Furthermore, states can introduce emergency legislation, essentially legal shields that grant impunity to state actors (military,

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Wilkinson, "Can a State be 'Terrorist?'" *International Affairs*, 57(3) (1981): 468. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2619580>.

<sup>2</sup> John Torpey, "Coming and going: On the state monopolization of the legitimate "means of movement"." *Sociological theory*, 16(3) (1998): 239. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0735-2751.00055>

police, paramilitary) for their actions, thereby providing a veneer of legitimacy to their acts of state terrorism against citizens.

The definitional problem of terrorism has further complicated the matter. There is much disparity and confusion over the definitions proposed for the word *terrorism*. To begin with, most of these definitions are typically actor-centric. They set out to describe terrorism, first and foremost, as a non-state activity. States have been excluded as possible perpetrators of terrorism. The result of this exclusion of states from such definitions is that states have been granted complete impunity from being held responsible for their controversial acts that can otherwise be deemed terroristic. Emerging in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Critical Studies on Terrorism journal (CST) has launched a serious criticism of the mainstream terrorism discourse for not acknowledging the acts of terrorism on the part of states. Critical scholars also take a serious note of the severity and moral abhorrence with which the orthodox scholars treat non-state terrorism. The blanket impunity that has been provided to states for their acts of political violence (which would otherwise fall in the purview of terrorism), is one of the most substantial issues highlighted by the critical scholars (See e.g. Dexter, 2008; Jackson, 2011).

Critical scholarship thus vehemently insists that all such acts committed by states should duly be termed as acts of state terrorism. However, it is worth pointing out here that the critical scholars have largely been content with launching this criticism only and have not actually made a serious attempt to study state terrorism *per se*. They have not, in other words, earnestly put into practice what they have been so passionately professing. This paper seeks to address this shortcoming. It will demonstrate how states themselves can be involved in acts of terrorism while claiming to fight insurgencies and political insurrections within their territories. India has been taken as a case study since it is home to several insurgent and rebellious movements including the ongoing insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir, the Naxalite/Maoist movement and several other insurgencies in its North-eastern

parts. Since the spotlight is often taken by Jammu & Kashmir, this article will therefore analyze the understudied Naxalite/Maoist movement and the Indian state's questionable counter-insurgency measures against it.

### ***1.1. Research Methodology***

Qualitative approach will be used in this paper, which will be based on descriptive, historical and analytical methods. Data has essentially been gathered from secondary sources i.e. books, electronic articles, articles in journals, newspaper articles, online government reports and observations of human rights organizations.

### ***1.2. The Naxalite/Maoist Insurgency***

The Naxalite movement in India is often referred to as an internal security threat of alarming proportions. The Indian state's response to this movement has largely been a militant one. It is precisely this response, which has led to Indian failure to deal with the Naxalite movement in any meaningful way. The alienation, large-scale displacements and dispossession of the rural poor from what has been their own in the first place, is at the heart of this movement. This has made the Naxalite movement one of the longest surviving left-wing movements in recent history.

### ***1.3. The Background of the Naxalite/Maoist Insurgency***

The Naxalite insurgency is one of the major insurgencies going on in India. According to Morrison, the Western scholars have largely overlooked this left-wing extremist (LWE) insurgency, which has survived for so long in many states of India.<sup>3</sup> In comparison with the Naxalite insurgency, the Maoist movement in Nepal lasted for only a decade (1996-2006) and the Nepalese government reached a peace accord with the insurgents of the movement. Given the number of Indian

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<sup>3</sup> Chas Morrison, "Grievance, Mobilisation and State Response: An Examination of the Naxalite Insurgency in India." *Journal of Conflict Transformation and Security* 2, no. 1 (2012): 53-75. <http://cesran.org/grievance-mobilisation-and-state-response-an-examination-of-the-naxalite-insurgency-in-india.html>

states affected by the Naxalite movement and the magnitude of Indian military might utilized in countering this insurgency, it has been chosen to analyze if the Indian state's measures to counter the movement fall in the domain of state terrorism or not. The Naxalite insurgency is present in the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and West Bengal. Dalits (Scheduled Castes) and Adivasis (Scheduled Tribes) are primarily the mass support base of this insurgency. Chiarotti and Monnet believe that from 2006 to 2018, the insurgency has resulted in the death of around 8,000 people and the displacement of thousands other.<sup>4</sup>

The literal meaning of the word *Adivasi* in Sanskrit language is "original inhabitant".<sup>5</sup> The word is used to refer to Scheduled Tribes living in Central India. They consist of one-fourth of India's population and primarily make up the main support base of this movement. The majority of these people live in rural areas close to hills and forests or what is generally referred to as the tribal belt.<sup>6</sup> Today the world's second largest tribal population (84 million) lives in India with a total number of 461 tribal groups.<sup>7</sup> Their distinct culture is based on their deep association with nature. The reliance on the conventional agricultural methods results in low agricultural yields for them and consequently, during a considerable period of a year, they have to live on forest produce. The tribal community in India

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<sup>4</sup> Edoardo Chiarotti and Nathalie Monnet, *Hit them in the wallet!: An analysis of the Indian demonetization as a counter-insurgency policy*. No. 03-2019. Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies Working Paper, 2019.

<https://ideas.repec.org/p/gii/gihei/heidwp03-2019.html>

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Kennedy and Lawrence King, "Adivasis, Maoists and Insurgency in the Central Indian Tribal Belt," *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 54, no. 1 (2013): 2. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975613000015>

<sup>6</sup> Tribal belt is a "hill and forest belt that extends across the states of Gujrat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar and West Bengal". Ramachandra Guha, "Adivasis, Naxalites and Indian Democracy," *Economic and Political Weekly* (2007): 3305. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4419895>

<sup>7</sup> Ramdas Rupavath, "Tribal Alienation and Conflict in India: A Perspective from Below," *Contemporary Voice of Dalit* 11, no. 2 (2019): 194-209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2455328X18822907>

is well behind the development that is taking place in other parts of the country. Their abysmal poverty, lack of access to the basic needs of life such as clean drinking water, health and legal facilities coupled with depressingly high child mortality rate and startlingly low literacy rate speak volumes about the neglect they have long faced at the hands of the government. The socio-economic and political alienation of the Adivasis coupled with the state's neglect of their grievances has resulted in a continuation of the colonial mode of subjugation of these people in the post-colonial independent Indian state. For these people, the transition from colonialism to independence has meant little practically. Kennedy and Purushotham maintain that though theoretically speaking, the Indian Constitution and other acts of the Parliament sought to provide protection to the Adivasis, their poor implementation and Adivasis lack of success in getting their rights primarily led them to support the insurgent Maoists revolutionaries who stood by them.<sup>8</sup>

It would be pertinent to mention here that world's largest forest-dependent population lives in India. Over 275 million rural people in the country are in one way or another dependent on forestlands for their survival.<sup>9</sup> The poor forest-dwelling tribal people are exploited by the forest department, the timber mafia and moneylenders. In times of dire need, the tribals accept loans from the moneylenders at a staggering 120% interest rate annually.<sup>10</sup> Kennedy and King hold that the colonial era's exploitive Forest Act of 1927 is still operative in India.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Kennedy and Sunil Purushotham, "Beyond Naxalbari: A Comparative Analysis of Maoist Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Independent India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 4 (2012): 832-862. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417512000436>

<sup>9</sup> Kundan Kumar, Neera M. Singh, and John M. Kerr, "Decentralisation and Democratic Forest Reforms in India: Moving to a Rights-based Approach," *Forest Policy and Economics* 51 (2015): 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forpol.2014.09.018>

<sup>10</sup> Rajesh Kumar Meher, "Politics of Maoism, Adivasi Human Rights Issues and the State: A Study of Chhattisgarh," in *Shifting Perspectives in Tribal Studies: From an Anthropological Approach to Interdisciplinarity and Consilience*, ed. Maguni Charan Behera (Singapore: Springer, 2019), 133-148. DOI: 10.1007/978-981-13-8090-7\_7

<sup>11</sup> Kennedy and King, "Adivasis, Maoists and insurgency," 1-32.

*Indian State Terrorism in Perspective: The Case of Naxalite/ Maoist*

The Forest Department largely owns and controls forestlands. The forest officials in Andhra Pradesh have the legal authority to raze houses that were built with wood from trees that the villagers allegedly cut illegally. The forest officials have been authorized to do so under the Forest Rights Act of 2002.<sup>12</sup> Roy asserts that they can even stop the villagers from ploughing their lands, gathering firewood and picking fruit.<sup>13</sup> Even the most junior forest official can coerce and threaten the rural poor. In 2006, a new Forest Rights Act was passed which became operative in January 2008. This Act aimed at recognizing tribal people's birthrights over forests.<sup>14</sup> However, the proper implementation of this Act never truly materialized. Apart from the accesses of the Forest Department against the tribals, another act (reminiscent of the colonial period) i.e. the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 is also still in place. The Act provides provisions to confiscate Adivasis' lands for large development projects.

The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act of 1996 could have been a step in the right direction as it provided for the assent of the Gram Sabha (village meeting) for initiating such development projects in the rural areas however the poor villagers are often coerced into agreeing to what the goons of the powerful elite dictate them. Furthermore, the minutes of the Gram Sabha meeting are also allegedly manipulated and at times even fake Gram Sabhas are called in for the approval of projects.<sup>15</sup> In this way, the rural poor are coerced and threatened to dare not veto any project, which consequently deprives them of their lands and rights.

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<sup>12</sup> Jason Miklian, *The Purification Hunt: the Salwa Judum Counterinsurgency in Chhattisgarh*. In *Windows into a Revolution* (Routledge, 2017), 282-308. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-009-9138-1>

<sup>13</sup> Arundhati Roy, "Walking with the Comrades," *Outlook*, 29 Mar. 29, 2010. <http://www.outlookindia.com/printarticle.aspx?264738>

<sup>14</sup> Kumar, Singh and Kerr, "Decentralisation and Democratic Forest Reforms," 1-8.

<sup>15</sup> Kennedy and King, "Adivasis, Maoists and insurgency," 1-32.

Furthermore, attracted by the presence of abundant mineral resources in the Adivasis' lands and forests, large multi-national companies lately have also entered the scene. Consequently, large-scale dislocations and displacements of Adivasi population from their lands with the support of a capitalist-oriented state have ensued. The discovery of huge deposits of iron ore, bauxite, coal, aluminum, mica, uranium and other minerals in the mountains and forests of Adivasis, led the advocates of the *India shining* slogan to regard the Adivasis as an unnecessary obstacle in the way of progress. In fact, the so-called neoliberals of Indian democracy, in their zeal to "liberate the mineral wealth beneath the ground on which the tribals stand"<sup>16</sup> fail to understand that the tribals have owned this land for centuries and given their unique culture, it is not only a means of livelihood for them but also something that they revere like a god.

The people of Kondh tribe living in the hills of south Orissa experienced this capitalist onslaught when their hills, containing bauxite, were sold to a large mining corporation. The Kondh worshipped those hills like god and desecration of the mountains was blasphemous for the tribe. Forced expulsion and displacement of tribes for the sake of mineral extraction has happened to numerous other tribes as well.<sup>17</sup> Though the Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution has granted protection to the Adivasis as regards to their rights to land but the law has never been implemented practically.<sup>18</sup> During the colonial period, the British had regarded the tribal people as barbaric, savage, lowly humans or what Hunter termed as "rude

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<sup>16</sup>Judith Vidal-Hall, "Long Walk in a Deep Forest," *Index on Censorship* 35, no. 4 (2006): 75. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03064220601092894>

<sup>17</sup> Arundhati Roy, "The Heart of India is Under Attack," *The Guardian*, Oct. 30, 2009. <http://www.bannedthought.net/India/MilitaryCampaigns/Condemnation/ArundhatiRoy-HeartOfIndia-091030.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Swati Parashar, "Colonial Legacies, Armed Revolts and State Violence: The Maoist Movement in India," *Third World Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (2019): 337-354. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1576517>



racess of India".<sup>19</sup> Not much has substantially changed for these people even after India's independence. The colonialism of the British has been replaced by the neo-colonialism of the Indian state and it is exercising control over the Adivasis' lands thereby blatantly bypassing the constitutional safeguards provided to these tribal people.

The rural people are the biggest victim of such displacements i.e. "the enforced eviction of people from their lands and natural habitats"<sup>20</sup> due to the development projects launched by the Indian state. To put it in perspective, it has been estimated that the Adivasis constitute "about 40% of all the people displaced by dams in India in the last sixty years".<sup>21</sup> Scanlon puts this number at forty-five percent and further asserts that out of this huge percentage, only about twenty-five percent were adequately compensated.<sup>22</sup> Among other projects, building of dams has been one which has adversely affected the poor rural people of India. "Narmada Valley Development Project (NVDP)", which aimed to build more than 3000 dams in India, is one such example.<sup>23</sup> The people who were going to be displaced by the project launched a campaign against it in mid 1980s named as "Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA)" which means "Save the Narmada Movement".<sup>24</sup> The movement particularly opposed the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) through which irrigation water and electricity was to be provided to the central part of the Indian state of Gujarat. It is appropriate to mention here that the central Gujarat is a fairly prosperous area.

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<sup>19</sup> Meena Radhakrishna, "Of Apes and Ancestors: Evolutionary Science and Colonial Ethnography," *Indian Historical Review* 33, no. 1 (2006): 14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/037698360603300102>

<sup>20</sup> Meher, *Politics of Maoism*, 137.

<sup>21</sup> Meher, *Politics of Maoism*, 137.

<sup>22</sup> Eric Scanlon, "Fifty-one Years of Naxalite-Maoist Insurgency in India: Examining the Factors that have Influenced the Longevity of the Conflict," *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 6, no. 2 (2018): 335-351. <https://doi.org/10.18588/201811.00a038>

<sup>23</sup> Alf Gunvald Nilsen, "Against the Current, from Below: Resisting Dispossession in the Narmada Valley, India," *Journal of poverty* 17, no. 4 (2013): 461. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10875549.2013.804482>

<sup>24</sup> Nilsen, "Against the Current," 462.

The campaign did not succeed as the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the completion of project. Thus, the powerful and the rich have prospered more while the poor tribals had to pay the price in the form of displacement from their ancestral lands and loss of intangible cultural heritage.

Human Rights Watch has reported that “Tribal communities remained vulnerable to displacement because of mining, dams, and other huge infrastructure projects”.<sup>25</sup> Further, it has not reported any improvement in the marginalized status of Dalits (Scheduled Castes) and observes that “There was increased violence against Dalits, in part as a reaction to their more organized and vocal demands for social progress and to narrow historical caste differences”.<sup>26</sup>

## **2. The Insurgency**

The tribal people in India have been standing up for their rights since long. They actively rebelled during the British imperial rule as well. Nevertheless, it was the Naxalbari peasant rebellion in March 1967 that was a watershed incident in this regard which had a significant impact on the future course of events. In the village of Naxalbari in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal along the Indo-Nepal border, the tribal peasants rose against the landlords, thereby setting in motion the popular Naxalite movement. They took control of landlords' granaries and burnt all records of debts. Charu Mazumdar along with some revolutionary activists belonging to the CPI (M) led this peasant uprising.<sup>27</sup> It is noteworthy that the peasants were not the leaders in this uprising rather it were the educated middle class and upper middle-class led the movement. The ideological underpinnings of this uprising can be traced to the Marxist-Leninist thought which later on manifested itself in the

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<sup>25</sup> Human Rights Watch, *India Events of 2018*, (Human Rights Watch Report: 2019). <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/india#b81764>

<sup>26</sup> Human Rights Watch, *India Events of 2018*.

<sup>27</sup> Amit Bhattacharyya, *Storming the Gates of Heaven: The Maoist Movement in India: A Critical Study, 1972-2014* (Kolkata, India: Setu Prakashani, 2016). <https://readersend.com/product/storming-the-gates>

form of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) henceforth referred to as the CPI (M-L).

The Maoist revolutionaries are also termed as the *Naxalites* against the name of the village of Naxalbari, which was the birthplace of this movement.<sup>28</sup> In this paper also, the two words of *Naxalites* and *Maoists* have been used interchangeably. Vidal-Hall observes that the later part of the 1960s witnessed a huge bulk of educated young men from the middle classes joining the movement.<sup>29</sup> Their fiery idealism and the youthful energy kindled the hope in many that the suppressed and marginalized classes of the tribal people and the rural poor will succeed in getting their rights. The early 1970s saw the movement flourish with the establishment of “guerrilla zones ... in West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh”.<sup>30</sup> The government regarded it as an ordinary law and order problem and embarked on a policy of suppressing the movement, displaying total disregard for the deep socio-economic schisms underlining its origin. Hence, a large-scale police and paramilitary operation namely Operation Crossbow followed, killing several and putting those leading the Naxalite uprising behind the bars.<sup>31</sup> Within no time, the government of West Bengal armed a police force with a strength of 18,000 members, which had not been armed traditionally to suppress the uprising.<sup>32</sup> The government of West Bengal further responded by passing the West Bengal (Prevention of Violent Activities) Act 1970 to further deal with the movement.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Morrison, "Grievance, mobilisation and state response," 53-75.

<sup>29</sup> Vidal-Hall, "Long Walk in a Deep Forest," 73-75.

<sup>30</sup> Vidal-Hall, "Long Walk in a Deep Forest," 74.

<sup>31</sup> Bernard D'Mello, *India After Naxalbari: Unfinished History* (NYU Press, 2018).  
[https://books.google.com/books/about/India\\_after](https://books.google.com/books/about/India_after).

<sup>32</sup> Chris Brown, "The Battle of the Story: Contesting the Indian Government's Narratives on the 'Maoist Menace'," *Global Change, Peace & Security* 31, no. 3 (2019): 245-262.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14781158.2019.1538116>

<sup>33</sup> Raman Dixit, "Naxalite Movement in India: The State's Response," *Journal of Defense Studies* 4, no. 2 (2010): 21-35. [https://www.idsa.in/system/files/jds\\_4\\_2\\_rdixit.pdf](https://www.idsa.in/system/files/jds_4_2_rdixit.pdf)

*Indian State Terrorism in Perspective: The Case of Naxalite/ Maoist*

A joint operation of the paramilitary and the army named as the “Operation Steeplechase” was also launched in July and August of 1971 to quell the Naxalite insurgency in West Bengal.<sup>34</sup> Lynch further maintains that by 1973, the government largely succeeded in putting the insurgency down and its leading figured had either been killed or detained.<sup>35</sup> The imposition of emergency in India (1975-1977) by the government of Indira Gandhi (the then Prime Minister of India) provided a further cover to the law enforcement agencies in an iron-fist handling of Naxalism. Mohanty notes that about twenty-seven Marxist-Leninist groups were outlawed and around 40,000 people were detained.<sup>36</sup> However, this policy largely remained unsuccessful as it failed to break the strength and spirit of the movement.

The Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) and the People’s War Group (PWG) were the two most prominent Maoist groups throughout the 1980s. They were active in the Indian states of Bihar and Andhra Pradesh respectively.<sup>37</sup> The Indian state suppressed the People’s War Group (PWG) with brute force when it first started working in South Bastar and Godchiroli. Roy has mentioned an incident in her essay when in November 1980, in Godchiroli, the police ruthlessly killed a whole squad of PWG during a village meeting.<sup>38</sup> This forced the Maoists to retreat across the Godavari and return to Adilabad. But in 1981, they came back again. In 2004, under the amended Act of Unlawful Activities Prevention (UAPA), the government outlawed the CPI-ML, People’s War Group (PWG), the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) and its affiliated organizations.<sup>39</sup> The heavy-handed

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas Francis Lynch, *India's Naxalite Insurgency: History, Trajectory, and Implications for US-India Security Cooperation on Domestic Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2016), 10. <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article>.

<sup>35</sup> Lynch, *India's Naxalite Insurgency*.

<sup>36</sup> Manoranjan Mohanty, "Challenges of Revolutionary Violence: The Naxalite Movement in Perspective," *Economic and Political Weekly* (2006): 3163-3168. <https://www.econbiz.de/Record/maoist-movement-in>.

<sup>37</sup> Kennedy and King, "Adivasis, Maoists and insurgency,"

<sup>38</sup> Roy, "Walking with the comrades,"

<sup>39</sup> Dixit, "Naxalite Movement in India,"

police tactics of “extra-judicial killings and extortions, misappropriation and harassment of the Naxal support base”<sup>40</sup> proved to be rather short-sighted measures and reflected the inability of the Indian state to understand the sharp socio-economic disparities affecting the rural poor who provided mass support to the uprising. Nevertheless, this trend continued and sweeping powers were granted to the District Magistrate under the Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act of 2006. Under the Act, the District Magistrate had the powers to mark places being used for unlawful activities, real or perceived, without providing any evidence.<sup>41</sup> According to this Act, the police could detain people indefinitely and extra-judicially.

### **3. The Communist Party of India**

The history of the Communist Party of India is marked with splits, mergers and difference of opinion regarding tactics and modus operandi. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) also known as the CPI (Marxist) first emerged in 1964. The party split into two when some members decided to embrace the system of parliamentary democracy via contesting elections. The hard-core ideologues in the party duly dismayed, took it as a total deviation from the revolutionary ideology of Marxism. Vidal-Hall notes that the split culminated in the formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) known as the CPI (M-L) in April 1969.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the Naxalite uprising of 1967 also played its part in this regard. In fact, D’ Mello regards it as a testimony to the strength of the Naxalite movement that among other things, it resulted in the creation of this revolutionary political party.<sup>43</sup>

There exist 30 different variants of the CPI (M-L) and all of them reiterate their commitment to a New Democratic Revolution. The routes to achieve their

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<sup>40</sup> Dixit, "Naxalite Movement in India," 22.

<sup>41</sup> Dixit, "Naxalite Movement in India,".

<sup>42</sup> Vidal-Hall, "Long Walk in a Deep Forest."

<sup>43</sup> D'Mello, *India After Naxalbari*.

objective may be different such as purely armed or a combination of armed and unarmed, depending on their own analysis and interpretation of both the situation and their guiding ideology. Nevertheless, the goal is the same i.e. to launch a people's protracted war, focus "on annihilation of its class enemies" and to bring about an armed revolution.<sup>44</sup> This would be done by following the model of the Chinese Revolution thereby organizing the peasants, building rural base areas to encircle and eventually take over the cities.<sup>45</sup> The poor tribals and Dalits constitute the mass support base of the Maoists. The Maoists profess to safeguard the rights of these marginalized rural communities who exist on the periphery of the Indian state, remarkably alienated from the development taking place in the rest of the country. The Maoists claim to fight against the stark inequality and injustices meted out to the Adivasis and other segments of the rural poor in the country. This is primarily the reason the rural poor extend support to these rebel groups.

In 2004, the CPI (Maoist) was established, following the merger of the People's War Group (PWG) and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC).<sup>46</sup> It is remarkably well organized in comparison with its previous variants. Prior to it, the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA), which later on became the armed wing of the CPI (Maoist), was also established in 2000 to intensify the guerrilla warfare. PLGA has a great resemblance with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka in terms of its organizational structure and tactics as both have "people's militias, some of which are headed by female commanders".<sup>47</sup> Parashar maintains that PLGA has around 40,000 members and the number of its sympathizers is well over a million.<sup>48</sup> The Indian government sources claim that

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<sup>44</sup> Lynch, *India's Naxalite Insurgency*, 9

<sup>45</sup> Tanweer Fazal, "Peace Talks' as Strategic Deployment: the State, Maoists and Political Violence in India," *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 26, no. 1 (2015): 39-51. <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/423/article/810223/summary>

<sup>46</sup> Morrison, "Grievance, mobilisation and state response,".

<sup>47</sup> Morrison, "Grievance, mobilisation and state response," 57.

<sup>48</sup> Parashar, "Colonial Legacies, Armed Revolts,".

the Maoists have “AK series assault rifles, carbines, 7.62 [millimeter] self-loading rifles, grenade launchers, mines, improvised explosive devices and mortars”.<sup>49</sup> They further claim that the Maoists acquire weapons from China and Sri Lanka, apart from manufacturing weapons on their own as well. The Maoists in India, since 1995 have reportedly also established ties with the Maoist groups operating in other countries such as Philippines, Turkey, Germany, France, Holland, Italy, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Nevertheless, Fazal observes that regardless of the fact that the Maoists have declared a people’s war against the Indian state, they have no comparison with the military might of the Indian state, its propaganda machinery and the corporate media at its disposal.<sup>50</sup> The Maoists arsenal mainly consists of weapons snatched from the police, landmines and some crude rocket launchers.

While making a comparison between the Maoists and other insurgent groups in the Indian North-East and Kashmir, Fazal observes that the Maoists do not negate the Indian Constitution as the other insurgent groups typically do.<sup>51</sup> The Maoists in fact, claim to fight the Indian ruling classes for betraying the true spirit of the Indian Constitution. While it is true that they carry out violence against non-combatants, but as a counter argument, they refer to the brutal killings of their Maoist leaders by the state in fake encounters and the rape and massive killings of tribal people on the pretext of them being Maoists or Maoists’ sympathizers.

#### **4. The Indian State’s Response**

The Indian state has responded to the Maoist movement in the form of what it terms as a two-pronged strategy of employing a law and order and security approach

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<sup>49</sup> Nandini Sundar, "Insurgency, Counter-insurgency, and Democracy in Central India," *More than Maoism: Politics, Policies and Insurgencies in South Asia* (2012): 158.  
<http://burawoy.berkeley.edu/Public%20Sociology,%20Live/Sundar/Insurgency,%20Counter-insurgency%20&%20Democracy.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> Fazal, "Peace Talks' as Strategic Deployment,".

<sup>51</sup> Fazal, "Peace Talks' as Strategic Deployment,".

along with launching the development projects in the Naxal- affected areas. The development-centric approach allegedly consists of building roads, dispensaries, hospitals, skill development centers, police stations, telephone lines hostels and schools for the tribal children. Furthermore, laying supply lines for drinking water and electricity have also been planned in the tribal areas. However, Kujur maintains that the gap between planning and actual implementation of the proposed plans desperately needs to be matched.<sup>52</sup> The security-centric approach has led the Indian state to employ repressive measures not only to counter the Naxalite insurgency but also the rural poor who are its mass support base or are alleged to have any connection with the Maoists. Swati Parashar holds that the War on Terror in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack has had its impact on the Indian counter-insurgency measures as well.<sup>53</sup> The global rhetoric of fighting terrorism led to a further toughening of the Indian state's response to the Maoist insurgency. Indian counter-insurgency measures against the Maoist movement have primarily depended upon modernizing, training and strengthening its police and paramilitary forces rather than direct involvement of its Armed forces.<sup>54</sup> In its counter- insurgency drive to fight the Maoists, the Indian state over the years has undertaken a number of controversial military initiatives. Some of the most standout initiatives are:

#### **4.1. The Greyhounds**

The Indian state of Andhra Pradesh established "an elite anti-Naxalite commando unit" named as the "Greyhounds" in the mid-1980s.<sup>55</sup> The aim of this elite unit was to fight the Naxalites in the seven districts of Andhra Pradesh, which were

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<sup>52</sup> Rajat Kujur, "Contemporary Naxal Movement in India," *IPCS Research Paper*, 27 (2013). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep33635.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> Parashar, "Colonial Legacies, Armed Revolts,"

<sup>54</sup> Paul Staniland, "Internal Security Strategy in India," *India Review* 17, no. 1 (2018): 142-158. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14736489.2018.1415287>

<sup>55</sup> Lynch, "India's Naxalite Insurgency," 11.



markedly under their control. This special unit, largely comprising the police forces of Andhra Pradesh, had 2,000 members in 2015. This “no-holds-barred” police operation killed a lot of Maoists “in extra-judicial encounters”<sup>56</sup> and targeted prominent Maoist leaders. This special anti-guerrilla force was trained to replicate the way the Maoist armed squads used to operate. No legal procedure could be initiated against any accesses committed by the Greyhounds as their actions were deemed outside the jurisdiction of ordinary state laws.

#### **4.2. *The Salwa Judum (The Purification Hunt)***

It was a counter-insurgency operation, which the Indian state launched in 2005 in the state of Chhattisgarh against the Maoists. Dantewada or the South Bastar district was the place where this operation originated for the first time. Tribal mercenaries were recruited to launch attacks on the Maoists and their sympathizers (both real and perceived). Jason Miklian observes that the Salwa Judum recruits included “victims of Maoist violence, opportunists who wish to profit from security services, aspiring politicians, criminals, conscripts and residents of IDP camps who have no other job opportunities”.<sup>57</sup> The Indian state used its media to portray the Salwa Judum as a people’s inspired rebellion against the Maoists. Nevertheless, it was a state-sponsored vigilante group that was involved in large-scale extra-judicial killings, rapes, looting, torturing and burning of villages. Roy terms the Salwa Judum as “the dreaded, government-sponsored vigilante group responsible for rapes, killings, burning down villages and driving hundreds of thousands of people from their homes”.<sup>58</sup> Nandini Sundar observes that even after several years after the inception of this counter-insurgency operation, the Indian state refuses to

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<sup>56</sup> Sundar, “Insurgency, Counter-insurgency, and Democracy,” 155.

<sup>57</sup> Miklian, *The Purification Hunt*, 9.

<sup>58</sup> Roy, “Walking with the comrades,” 7.

admit that it was the brainchild of the coercive state machinery and had no roots in any popular outburst against the Maoists.<sup>59</sup>

The politicians belonging to both the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the opposition party of Congress actively organized public rallies (Jan Jagran Abhiyans or Public Awakening Campaigns) against the Naxalites. The Congress leader Mahendra Karma was particularly active in this regard.<sup>60</sup> In a graphic account of how the armed men of the Salwa Judum ransacked mud houses and then set the whole village (comprising of seventy mud houses) on fire in Dandakaranyain February 2006, Sundar asserts that after murdering the poor villagers, the armed squads of the Salwa Judum dressed them in the olive green uniform of the Naxalites and reported these as faked encounters.<sup>61</sup> The actual number of people killed by the Salwa Judum is neither reported by the media nor openly acknowledged by the government. The actual nature of “state terror” against the civilians is therefore largely based on secondary sources and eyewitness accounts.<sup>62</sup> There were also widespread reports of sexual violence against women in the Salwa Judum camps. The Central Reserve Police Force had reportedly gang-raped women in areas where the Salwa Judum was operating.<sup>63</sup>

In February 2016, there were many paramilitary camps near the villages. These were set up with the aim of torturing and killing villagers accused of being Maoists. Furthermore, Salwa Judum *relief camps* which according to Vidal-Hall, had a marked resemblance to “the US ‘camps’ in Vietnam”,<sup>64</sup> were also set up to settle the captured villagers there, faking them as refugees from the Maoist affected

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<sup>59</sup> Nandini Sundar, *The Burning Forest: India's War Against the Maoists* (Verso Books, 2019).

<https://books.google.com.pk/books/publisher/content?id=zc6MDwAAQBAJ&pg=PR4&img=1&zoom=3&hl=en&sig=ACfU3UICMinpCzMAAAu1kcHRn88E8eXNsQ&w=1280>

<sup>60</sup> Sundar, *The Burning Forest*.

<sup>61</sup> Sundar, *The Burning Forest*.

<sup>62</sup> Nandini Sundar, "Bastar, Maoism and Salwa Judum," *Economic and Political Weekly* (2006): 3188. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4418469>

<sup>63</sup> Sundar, "Bastar, Maoism and Salwa Judum,"

<sup>64</sup> Vidal-Hall, "Long Walk in a Deep Forest," 75.

areas who were rescued by the security forces and provided police protection from the Maoist atrocities.<sup>65</sup> This is what Roy has described as “Strategic Hamleting” which “was devised by General Sir Harold Briggs in 1950 when the British were at war against the communists in Malaya”.<sup>66</sup> Later on, “Strategic Hamlet Program” was initiated in 1962 by the US “to separate and protect the rural population of South Vietnam from the Viet Cong”.<sup>67</sup>

The aim of this strategy was to break the support base of the insurgents. Brown asserts that the Salwa Judum forced some 50,000 people to live in camps set up on the roadside.<sup>68</sup> The people who could not be coerced into living in those camps, were brazenly killed by the Salwa Judum. Furthermore, “5,000 ... Special Police Officers (SPOs)” were appointed from among the Salwa Judum recruits.<sup>69</sup> Their job was to protect the relief camps and target the Maoists indiscriminately. The Indian Supreme Court later on banned the Salwa Judum in July, 2011 for its grave excesses against the citizens.<sup>70</sup> Chris Brown further contends that notwithstanding the terror unleashed by the Salwa Judum and its consequent banning by the Supreme Court, another vigilante group was reportedly created to fight the Maoists in 2016 named as the Samajik Ekta Mach (SEM).<sup>71</sup> It was later on disbanded after the revelation that it was formed on the same lines the Salwa Judum and had the covert support of the local police force as well.

### ***4.3. Operation Green Hunt***

The central government launched this counter-insurgency operation in the forests of Central India in March 2009. From here, it spread across many other Indian states as well. Under this operation, a further 20,000 paramilitary troops, mainly

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<sup>65</sup> Sundar, *The Burning Forest*.

<sup>66</sup> Roy, "Walking with the comrades," 22.

<sup>67</sup> "Strategic Hamlet Program", n.d.

<sup>68</sup> Brown, "The Battle of the Story,".

<sup>69</sup> Kennedy and King, "Adivasis, Maoists and insurgency," 23.<sup>70</sup>

Morrison, "Grievance, Mobilisation and State Response,".<sup>71</sup>

Brown, "The Battle of the Story,".

drawn from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), were sent to the Maoist-affected areas.<sup>72</sup> This counter-insurgency force is also popularly known as COBRA.<sup>73</sup> Roy observes that Operation Green Hunt was not the first time the Maoists and the paramilitary forces were fighting each other. They had in fact fought on a number of occasions in Telengana in the 1950s, West Bengal, Bihar, Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh in the late 1960s and 1970s and again in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Maharashtra from the 1980s to the present.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, the adversaries in this war had no comparison with each other. Poor villagers armed with traditional weapons and backed by an immensely motivated Maoist guerrillas were pitted against a massively superior armed paramilitary force that had staggering financial resources, modern weapons and the power of state media at its disposal.

Israel's Mossad had also reportedly been training Indian high-ranking police officers in the sophisticated methods of targeted assassinations. The move was aimed at enabling police officers to eliminate Maoist leadership in particular. Apart from this, modern gadgets of warfare such as latest laser range finders, thermal imaging equipment and unmanned drones had also been purchased from Israel to fight the Maoists.<sup>75</sup>

#### ***4.4. Counter Terrorism and Jungle Warfare Training School***

This school, set up in Kanker, aims to train policemen in guerrilla warfare and the combat techniques of the Maoist guerrillas. These policemen are trained here "to run, slither, jump on and off air-borne helicopters, ride horses (for some reason), eat snakes and live off the jungle".<sup>76</sup> The school trains eight hundred policemen every six weeks. It has been planned that twenty more schools on the same pattern

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<sup>72</sup> Lynch, *India's Naxalite Insurgency*.<sup>73</sup>

Miklian, *The Purification Hunt*, 24. <sup>74</sup> Roy, "Walking with the comrades,". <sup>75</sup> Roy, "Walking with the comrades,".

<sup>76</sup> Roy, "Walking with the comrades," 6.

*Indian State Terrorism in Perspective: The Case of Naxalite/ Maoist*

would be set up all over India. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the policeforce is being transformed into a paramilitary guerilla force.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Roy, "Walking with the comrades,".

## **5. The Insurgency Today**

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has shown its interest in a multi-dimensional strategy to counter the Maoist insurgency. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), of which the BJP is the political wing, has adopted a somewhat cautious approach towards Maoist insurgency unlike its hardline approach towards insurgency in the Jammu and Kashmir and its policies towards the Muslims in general. The government sources have reported a 43.4 percent decline in Naxal-based violent incidents. Furthermore, the government has announced to allocate Rs 1,000 crore annually to build infrastructure and public services in the areas affected by the Maoist insurgency.<sup>78</sup> According to the Amnesty International's report on India, the accesses of Indian state authorities against the Adivasis continue unabated. On 28 June, 2022, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change passed the Forest Conservation Rules, permitting private businesses to cut down forest without obtaining prior consent from forest-dwellers, including Adivasis. Unlawful detention of these indigenous people is still the norm as more than 60 forest dwellers, and Adivasis were arrested during 2022 when they launched protest against a steel project by Jindal Steel Works in the village of Dinkia, Odisha state.<sup>79</sup> Despite going through many ebbs and flows, the Naxalite insurgency has not shown any signs of waning completely. The counter-insurgency approach of the Indian state has been a complex and paradoxical combination of employing repressive measures on the one hand and initiating developmental projects for the tribal areas on the other hand. Given the poor implementation of these development plans, no marked improvement in the status of the Adivasis, Dalits and other

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<sup>78</sup> Prabhash K Dutta, "Are Naxals Amit Shah's Next Target?," *India Today*, Aug. 27, 2019. <https://www.indiatoday.in/news-analysis/story/are-naxals-amit-shah-s-next-target-1592135-2019-08-27>

<sup>79</sup> Amnesty International, *Annual Report on India, 2022*. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/asia-and-the-pacific/south-asia/india/report-india/> Accessed on April 6, 2023.

marginalized sections of the Indian society that provide mass support to the Maoists, can be observed. As a result, their grievances and the sense of being exploited remains largely unchanged. Another fact that remains unchanged is the Indian state's belief that the movement can be countered with the excessive use of force, an essentially flawed strategy, which among other things is responsible for the longevity and continuity of the Maoist movement in India.

The preceding discussion of the Indian state's response towards the Naxalite/Maoist insurgency sufficiently illustrates that it largely involves a routine employment of torture, illegal detentions, mass killing of young activists, ransacking, burning of villages, sexual violence against their women, killing villagers in fake police encounters through branding them as Maoists, damaging drinking water wells and fields and registering fake criminal cases against the rural poor on a massive scale.<sup>80</sup> Most notably perhaps, is the systemic and deliberate deployment of an atmosphere of fear (the most standout hallmark of terrorism) against the Adivasis and Naxalite/Maoist sympathizers. Many of these acts can therefore reasonably be termed as acts of terrorism (state terrorism to be precise, since they are committed by the agents of state i.e. the police and the paramilitary forces). The actions of the Indian state against the Naxalite/Maoists, by any yardstick imaginable, are essentially terroristic. To call them otherwise would be counter-intuitive and imprecise. The state actions under the guise of counter- insurgency are violent, coercive, generate fear in the unarmed tribal people and seek to communicate a message to the wider tribal audience than the immediate victims of violence.

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<sup>80</sup> Parashar, "Colonial Legacies, Armed Revolts,".

## **6. Conclusion**

Analysis of the Naxalite/Maoist insurgency reveals that it is a combination of longstanding economic, political and social factors. The socio-economic and political marginalization of the tribal people, Dalits and other rural poor has provided the foundation on which the Maoists have rested their objective of a new democratic revolution and the subsequent overthrowing of the existing political setup. The Maoists insurgency is not a secessionist movement, as it does not seek thesecession of those Indian states where it is being carried out, from the Indian Union. Rather it intends to bring about a new democratic/socialist revolution by challenging and ultimately overthrowing the existing status quo.

The counter-insurgency measures employed against the Maoist insurgency are essentially different from the ones employed in Kashmir and elsewhere. Firstly, overt involvement of Indian army cannot be observed against the Maoists though it might have played a covert role in training the forces that have launched various anti-Maoist operations over the years. Secondly, the primary agents of the Indian state countering the Maoist movement are its police and different paramilitary forces. There has been change of tactics such as the use of police and paramilitary forces and at times, using local people as mercenaries against the Maoists and their alleged sympathizers (the Salwa Judum counter-insurgency operation against the Maoists). Strategic hamleting has been another tactic to break the Maoist support base during the Salwa Judum. The Indian state has been using a two-dimensional strategy to counter the Maoist insurgency. One is the use of violence and the other is to launch development projects for the uplift of the tribal people. Though it must be pointed out that there has not been any noteworthy improvement in the status of the rural poor, whereas the use of objectionable violent tactics is rampant and widespread. Thus, even though the Indian state claims to have a two-prong strategy, its actions on ground demonstrate a strong preference for violent militaristic response.



The tactic of killing the tribals in fake police encounters, branding them as Maoists is a routinized form of violence in the areas where the Maoists insurgency is present. The Indian security forces are not held accountable for such killings. Attacking villages and burning them down has been a normal occurrence during the Salwa Judum. Fear is created through systematic targeting of the unarmed rural poor who are mostly Adivasis and Dalits. Existing on the lowest rung of the social hierarchy in the caste-based Indian society, these people are particularly vulnerable to the accesses of the security forces in the name of fighting the Maoists. Sexual violence against the tribal women serves the purpose of humiliating the whole family along with sending a strong message to the entire community that such a fate can befall any one of them. The Indian security forces arbitrarily detain the rural poor on the pretext of labeling them as Maoist sympathizers. Torture is routinely employed as a fear-creating tactic on the detainees. In many cases, this employment of torture results in the death of the victims. The nature of these acts on the part of the police and the paramilitary forces that operate as agents of Indian state, is both political and violent. Violence is employed many a times to communicate a message to the wider tribal population beyond the immediate victims.

The counter-insurgency strategy of the Indian state against the Maoist movement contains many components that can reasonably be termed as state terrorism. It is violent, coercive, generates fear in the tribal people and communicates a message to the wider tribal audience than the immediate victims of violence. The Indian state commits these acts of state terrorism by the use of its agents i.e. its police and the paramilitary forces. The unarmed tribal people and other sections of the rural poor that are not involved in any violence but may sympathize with the insurgents are its regular victims. As long as our definition of terrorism is not agent or actor centric, such actions by the state, any state, will always be deemed terroristic.