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Naxalism: The Left-Wing Extremist Movement in India

Abstract: After 200 years of bondage, India gained freedom from the British through numerous revolutionary movements in 1947. But, within 20 years of the independence, insurgent movements had started arising against the Indian Government as well. In 1967, the Naxalite insurgency was initiated as a radical protest by the oppressed peasants against the colonial tenancy system retained by the feudal landowners even after the British had left the country for good. The uprising got pinpointed as Naxalism and the rebels as Naxals, as it all started at Naxalbari, a village in the Indian state of West Bengal. Spanning over 50 years, this ongoing movement initially acquired the respect of the general population of India with its radical ideologies of fighting against the oppressor imperialists but soon mutated into a source of terror. A qualitative assessment of the instances taken from secondary sources, such as context-related online journals and blog articles, will help this paper to explain the formation of the contemporary perception of Naxalism as an extreme radical armed revolution and one of the biggest security challenges against the Indian Government.

Keywords: *armed struggle, India, Maoism, Naxalism, radical movement, terrorism*

Introduction

Social and economic grievances have always been dominant in radicalising a broad segment of society and galvanising insurgent activities. Nationalism merged with several socio-political revolutionary or reforming ideologies and populism inflicted anti-landlord ideology of landless peasants and poor tenant farmers often function as the driving force behind an insurgency (Kecskemeti, 1967), which is prominent in the root causes lying behind the Naxalite uprising in India.

A peasant uprising in May 1967 in a small village in the north-eastern tip of West Bengal, called Naxalbari, triggered a movement haunting the Indian state for the last 50 years (Banerjee, 2017). It is the most significant political movement since India's independence,

which might be dispersed in nature. However, a persistent thread of ideology, strategy, and mobilisation tactics have galvanised the insurgent groups from different periods to keep them consolidated and existing. Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has described the movement as the “single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by our country” (Ramesh, 2006). The term “Naxalite” refers to “all forms of armed struggle that have taken up the cause of socio-economic development of the downtrodden rural masses” (DeBlicek, 2006). A series of prevailing social and economic issues in post-independence India instigated the Naxalite movement. While conducting an enquiry into the uprising, the then West Bengal State Secretariat of the CPI(M) stated, “Behind the peasant unrest in Naxalbari lies a deep social malady – malafide transfers, evictions and other anti-people actions of tea gardeners and jotedars” (Saharia, 2014). The plausibility of his statement lies in the fact that the oppressed peasants initiated the Naxalite movement as a radical protest against the feudal landowners who were retaining the colonial tenancy system even though India was free from the British.

Under this tenancy system, the landlords used to be responsible for a piece of land in return for the collection of tax revenue, and they used to employ sharecroppers to cultivate the land for a small share of crops. According to the 1971 census, about 60% of the population was landless, and the major share of land was in the hands of the 4% richest people (Zutshi, 1974). The exploitations of the sharecroppers in the hands of the landlords formed the feeling of bitter injustice against the government and the reason behind their initiation of the Naxalite movement (Sknoor, 2017; 2023). The ideological apparatus for this movement can be traced back to the formation of the Communist Party of India in 1925, who, following the Marxist-Leninism ideology and taking the success of the October Revolution in Russia as an inspiration, organised the peasant movement in Telangana in 1946 (Efsas, 2023). This movement was planned to liberate the peasantry from the dominance of oppressive landlords and redistribute the land amongst the landless. Though the CPI had established a strong presence in Telangana, but following the meeting with Stalin in February 1951 in Moscow and his advice to dismiss the armed revolution, CPI aborted the Telangana movement. It led to a schism in the party, and the party got divided into CPI and CPI-M in 1964 (Efsas, 2023).

But in 1967, when the CPI-M formed a coalition United Front government in West Bengal with Bangla Congress, they decided to forsake their revolutionary goals, leading to frustration in the party with younger cadres. Charu Mazumdar, who is known as the “Father of Naxalism”, one of the leading members of CPI-M, denounced the CPI-M and, following the Chinese Revolution example, organised the already infuriated sharecroppers and the tribal people of the northern part of West Bengal to launch the Naxalbari uprising against the landlords. Though both the Telangana revolution and the Naxalbari movement were peasant movements in nature but, firstly, the Naxalbari or Naxalite movement was founded upon Charu Mazumdar’s Mao-influenced ideology and his nine essays. In contrast, the Telangana movement strictly followed the Marxism-Leninism ideology and the October

Revolution by CPI. Secondly, the Naxalbari uprising was sparked by the United Front's inability to implement effective land reforms and the grievances that upsurged the poor peasants because of the UF's inability (Vijay, 2010).

This Naxalite peasant uprising originated at a small village in West Bengal called 'Naxalbari' and eventually became the epicentre of armed protest against the government for the rights of the poorest of the poor. A fraction of the communist (Marxist) Party of India (CPI-M) led by Kanu Sanyal and the Siliguri Kishan Sabha¹, led by Jangal Santhal, declared an armed confrontation to redistribute land to the landless on May 18, 1967 (Saharia, 2014). The first stroke of the movement was an incident of a sharecropper, Bigul Kishan, who got beaten up by a landlord's henchmen over a land dispute near Naxalbari village. The incident in Bigul Kishan's own words,

"The landowner's henchmen beat me with sticks, and I fell on the field. As soon as the news got spread, hundreds of peasants, under the leadership of Jangal Santhal, unleashed an attack on the henchmen with stakes" (The Ajjal, May 25, 1992; Mitra, 2017).

The second stroke was when a police inspector was shot to death in a rain of arrows during an armed struggle between the Police and the tribal Peasant leaders, and the final blow was when 11 people died in police firing, including seven women and two children, gathered at Prasadjote in Naxalbari for a Peasants' meeting (Gupta, 2015). Infuriated by this incident, many Santhal tribals and other poor people from nearby villages joined the movement led by the CPI-M, the Chinese Media, showing their support for the movement, addressed it as the Spring Thunder (Banerjee, 2017).

Radio Peking termed the Naxalite movement as the "spring thunder in India". (Sinha, 2014). Hence, reports of clashes between the rebel peasants and landlords kept pouring out from Naxalbari. On June 12, the West Bengal chief minister declared that a "reign of terror" had been created in Darjeeling, which instigated a major police intervention at Naxalbari to round up the rebels and by July 20, 1967, most of the Naxalbari leaders, along with Jangal Santhal got arrested. With that, the movement at Naxalbari region was crushed by the state machinery within months but having found sympathisers outside of North Bengal, particularly in the state capital of Calcutta (now Kolkata), its ideas kept sweeping to other parts of the country.

Historian Sumanta Banerjee has mentioned, "The first post-independence land movement emphasised the protest of the landless peasants in a way that has shaken up the then oppressive Indian political scenario". It is widespread that this movement has strongly mobilised the urban youth, especially the students from the country's top universities (Karmakar, 2020).

Hence the dream of a Maoist revolution of peasants and workers started to spread far beyond this one hamlet (Banerjee, 2020). It ignited a revolutionary flame in other parts of

¹ All India Kisan Sabha is *the peasant or farmers' wing of the Communist Party of India*, an important peasant movement formed by Sahajanand Saraswati in 1936.

the country, and by 1980, around 30 different armed Naxalite groups were believed to be active in India, with a combined membership of over 30,000 (Geelani, 2013).

The Indian Police force snuffed out the Naxalites from every little pocket of the country, marking an end to the first phase of the movement in 1975. However, establishing the United Front government at the centre following the general elections of 1977 sanctioned the liberation of Naxal leaders and activists, instigating the movement's second phase (Banerjee, 2017). During this second phase, the movement's rudimentary ideology and objectives assumed a terrorising character following the strengthening of the People's War Group (PWG) in the late 1990s (Saharia, 2014). To retain their intense militarised disposition, the Naxalites have allegedly joined the organised criminal network as well as several international terrorist associations (A.J., 2011), and their methods of extortion money, looting shopkeepers, destroying schools, executing people on suspicion of being "police informer", etc. have created a "reign of terror" in the Red Corridor² (Ramana, 2003). In 2015–2020, more than 10,000 civilians and security personnel lost their lives to the Naxalite insurgency. Hence, the people in the Naxalite areas fearfully live at the insurgents' mercy (Singh, 2020). Some scholars claim that the reason for the Naxalite movement's escalation to one of the longest and most aggressive home-grown insurgencies (IAS EXPRESS, 2019) can be ascribed to the ideological and systematic flaws of the Naxalite leaders. The initial ambition of social liberation and revolution has taken a backseat to offensive military actions (Banerjee, 2002).

Dipankar Bhattacharya, one of the leaders of CPI-ML, spoke in a tone of despair, "Our Maoist friends, who are still active in some areas in the name of an armed revolution, have also moved away from Naxalbari traditions. You will notice that Naxalbari movement was influenced by the China Revolution or Mao ideology, but the party that was formed then was named as CPI-Marxist Leninist, Mao's name was not in there. As a result, today's Maoists have had to change their party name. They are stuck in one place and causing many blunders. The government has put them in a trap, in which there is an all-out war" (Ghosh, 2017).

This paper proposes to emphasise the deflection of the Naxalite movement from a modest agrarian revolution to the greatest internal security threat in India. The key point that the paper is going to determine is whether the Naxalite-Maoists have endorsed extreme insurgency strategies merely to replace the democracy in India with a "people's government" through the "people's war" (Satp.org, 2023) and if it has, then to what degree it has availed terrorist activities. The introduction has briefly described the emergence of the Naxalite

² Red Corridor comprises of the central, eastern, and southern part of India that has experienced Maoist insurgency the most. It is spread over 11 states with the concentration in Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha. This area is highly undeveloped with people deprived of even the basic amenities. The whole area, especially West Bengal, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh are rich in minerals. There are a number of big multinationals operating in this area. Heavy extortion in the name of protection used to be the Maoist order of the day. It has been estimated the insurgents extorted INR 14 billion per year in the corridor from corporate and rich landlords.

movement, the left-wing political ideologies as its backdrop, and its transition to date. The literature review presents the concept of radicalisation and extremism as well as the Marxism-Leninism-Maoism ideology in a concise manner. Following a qualitative analysis of the four phases of the Naxalite movement, the concluding chapter summarises the findings to determine its deflection from their primary MLM doctrine as well as recommend potential measures to ensure a long-lasting solution to demotivate the movement instead of the hard counter-terrorism strategies.

Literature Review

Researchers and scholars have defined the theory of radicalisation from diverse perspectives. Amongst them, McCauley and Moskaleiko (2008) have referred to radicalisation as a change in beliefs, feelings, and behaviours that justify intergroup violence as well as the demand for sacrifice in defending the own group. Borum (2011) has defined radicalisation as a process by which people develop extremist ideologies and beliefs. Extremist beliefs or, to be precise, extremism refers to the profound convictions that oppose the fundamental values of society, the laws of democracy and universal human rights by advocating the supremacy of a particular group (racial, religious, political, economic, social etc.) (Trip et al., 2019). The Centre for the Prevention of Radicalisation Leading to Violence³ (CPRLV) has also mentioned that there are four types of radicalisation, and one of them is Left Wing Extremism (*LWE*). *LWE* radicalisation focuses primarily on anti-capitalist demands and calls for the transformation of political systems that seem to be responsible for producing social inequalities and may employ violent means to further its cause. This category includes anarchist, Maoist, Trotskyist and Marxist-Leninist groups that use violence to advocate for their cause (Info-radical.org, 2023). Throughout history, the peasant class has mostly inflicted aggression against the ruling elite class, motivated by leftist ideologies (Upscwithnikhil, 2023). *LWE* emerged in India in the form of the Naxalite movement in 1967 and eventually became a major security threat faced by the country. The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), following the Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-tung ideology, instigated this movement (Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) New Democracy, 1992).

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, two German philosophers, proposed the Marxism theory in 1848 to explain the class conflict between capitalists (Bourgeois) and labourers (Proletariat). Marxism is a social, economic, and political theory that examines the causes and effects of capitalism and promotes communism as an alternative (Marszałek-Kawa &

³ The Centre for the Prevention of Radicalisation Leading to Violence (CPRLV), which was created in March 2015 by the City of Montréal with the support of the Quebec Government, and the active involvement of community and institutional partners, is a pioneer in Canada and North America. It is the first independent non-profit organization aimed at preventing violent radicalisation and providing support to individuals affected by the phenomenon.

Górnikiewicz, 2019; Wallstreetmojo Team, 2023). Engels (1847) has defined communism as the “doctrine of the prerequisites for the emancipation of the proletariat”. According to Stalin, “Marxism is the science of the laws governing the development of nature and society, the science of the revolution of the oppressed and exploited masses, the science of the victory of socialism in all countries, the science of building a communist society”. Leninism, first developed by Lenin during the Russian Revolution, is Marxism in the era of imperialism and the proletarian revolution. Maoism is an extension of Marxism-Leninism established by Mao during socialist construction while rebelling against modern revisionism during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (Foreign Languages Press, 2019). The doctrine of Maoism advocates for armed insurgency, military strategies based on guerrilla war tactics, mass participation of the lower classes, enclosing the cities from the countryside and strategic alliances to seize state power (Upscwithnikhil, 2023). Charu Majumdar, the father of Naxalism, and his famous *Historic Eight Documents* inspired by the Mao Tse-Tung influenced version of Marxism-Leninism doctrine formed the basis of Naxalism. But the strengthening of the People’s War Group (PWG) in the late 90s influenced the radical deviation in the fundamental ideology and objectives of the movement, “In our agenda for a new democratic revolution, there are two aspects—the agrarian revolution and fight for nationality” (Saharia, 2014).

Methodological Assumptions

This paper’s focal point is to emphasise the transformation of the Naxalite movement from a modest pro-peasant uprising to an extreme home-grown insurgency that has become a terror to the common people and the biggest internal security threat in India (Kaur, 2016). The core question that the paper analyses is whether the Naxalite Maoists have resorted to guerrilla tactics and extreme revolutionary strategies solely to ensure the annihilation of the democratic institutions in India through a protracted “*people’s war*”. If it has, then to what extent is the movement allegedly associated with organised crime and the “power struggle” over the Indigenous groups of the rural areas? The introductory chapter has given a brief context on the foundation of the Naxalite movement and its liaison with left-wing political ideologies. Following a qualitative approach, the source analysis delves into secondary sources, and the source corpus includes published journals and blog articles related to the history of the Naxalite movement and its modern transition, reported narratives of their insurgencies and news-reports about the counter-insurgency approaches taken by the Indian government. The concluding chapter summarises the findings following an in-depth assessment of the Naxalite movement to determine its derailments from their original Maoist doctrine. It also recommends probable measures to ensure a long-lasting solution to demotivate the movement instead of hard counter-terrorism strategies.

Four Phases of Naxalite Movement

The Naxalites have been supported by the poor and tribal population living in the rural part of India, as the lack of human development has caused anger and grievances among them. The spread of Naxalism shows the extensive alienation and discontent felt by these large, marginalised parts of the country. Dr Subramanian, a former Director-General of the National Security Guard and Central Reserve Police Force, has stated that “Naxalism exists in the tribal areas because of the dissatisfaction of the people against the government and big businesses, the terrain is suitable for guerrilla tactics, and there is no existence of a proper and effective local administration mechanism. Even if Naxalites are simply exploiting the tribal situation for their own ends, their popularity indicates the power of the root causes to create such an environment for insecurity and violence.” The Naxalites and their extreme left ideology exploit these rural people’s economic situation. On the one hand, India has experienced fast economic growth, increasing the national wealth level, yet, on the other hand, this economic growth has been inconsistent among regions and has broadened the disparity between the rich and the poor. Given this socio-economic alienation, it is easy to see why Naxalite’s ideology is popular among the rural poor segments. These people do not get the assurance from any political power to voice their grievances legitimately, and hence the alternative of subversive, illegal groups of Naxalites seem more attractive and accessible to them (Ali, 2015).

So, the survival of the Naxalite movement over 50 years has found its catalysts lying in the pretexts they rebel for, which are i) inefficient forest management; ii) poorly implemented tribal policies; iii) increasing inter-regional and intra-regional disparities; iv) lack of adequate industrialisation and lack of land reform; v) favourable geographical terrain; vi) working class and unemployed youth; vii) tribal resentment and viii) gaps in the nation’s socio-economic system. (Balaji, 2023). The popularity of their agenda for the proletariat reignited the spark in the Naxalite movement whenever it started to get dimmed, leading it to bolster the insurgency more vigorously. The evolution of the Naxalite-Maoist movement has happened in four distinct phases (Journals of India, 2018).

Phase I: Pre-1967

The creation of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in 1925 consolidated the presence of communist ideology in the country. Incipiently, the CPI was imbued with the idea of a Marxist-inspired mass revolution (Ghosh, 1953). Nevertheless, CPI’s inherent allegiance towards foreign communist leaders, such as Stalin, intimidated them to forsake the ideology of armed revolution in February 1951, which paved the way for the emergence of more radical communist parties (Singh, 2023). A radical faction of CPI separated from the party and formed the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M) at the Seventh Congress of the Communist Party of India in Calcutta in late 1964. The older members of CPI stood

by the USSR, following their democratic institutions, whereas the younger generation of CPI-M, influenced by Chinese idealism, passionately glided through the route of violent revolution (Efsas.org, 2023).

Phase II (1967–1973) – The Formative Phase

Due to ideological differences, CPI-M also started to have conflicts in their party. While imprisoned in the mid-1960s, one of their elite comrades, Charu Mazumdar, during his imprisonment in mid-1960s, wrote a set of nine essays that functioned as the foundation of Naxalite ideology. Influenced by the Chinese Communist doctrine, he strongly believed that, rather than the working class, it should be the rural peasants to flare up the revolution in India, like the Chinese rebellion under the leadership of Mao Zedong had happened (Mazumdar, 1968). In 1967, a small group of CPI-M members, led by Charu Mazumdar, Kanu Sanyal, and Jangal Santhal, resolved to forcibly snatch away the lands from the rich landlords through an armed struggle and reassigned them to the landless. Jangal Santhal, the then President of Siliguri Kisan Sabha, called for support to the armed struggle, which eventually erupted as the Naxalite upsurge (C, D., 2015).

At that moment, the CPI(M), being a part of the ruling United Front government, opposed the concept of armed struggle. Hence, several party dissidents, showing defiance to their party's high commands, rebelled and broke away from CPI(M). They, the Left-wing Extremism (LWE) from the whole country, formed the All-India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) in November 1967 to pursue the armed struggle against the ruling class (C, D.).

AICCCR transformed into the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI-ML) on the birth anniversary of Lenin, April 22, 1969, committing itself to applying Marxism-Leninism in Indian conditions (Cpiml.net, 2023). All subsequent groups believing in the far left and armed struggle were offshoots of CPI-ML. The Naxalite revolutionaries supported by CPI (ML) were violently active in West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala in 1967–1972, later moved to Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and Odisha as well (Jaaved, 2021).

In 1971, the movement encountered a grave turn when the government launched “*Operation Steeplechase*”, engaging the army and members of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in West Bengal to crush the Naxalites (Singh, 2016). Following the retaliation by State forces and the death of founder Charu Mazumdar, the Naxalite activities were at a low ebb for the next two decades (Harnetiaux, 2008). However, in the 1990s, the liberalisation of the Indian economy, which resulted from the government granting licenses to private and multinational mining corporations, instigated the insurgency to resurface in a more structured fashion (Efsas.org, 2023).

Phase III (the late 1990s)

During this more structured phase of the movement, the Naxalites got divided into two different divisions. One prioritised participation in parliamentary elections, trade union activities and mass agitations, whereas the other, claiming to be the rightful carriers of the legacy of Naxalbari, represented mainly by the CPI(Marxist–Leninist) (People’s War) [CPI(ML)(PW)] and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC), resorted to the old path of peasant-based guerrilla warfare (Banerjee, 2017).

In the decade spanning 1990 and 2000, the CPI(ML)(PW) was the one to come out as a terror threat to the Indian government. Primarily based in Andhra Pradesh and led by a charismatic Communist revolutionary, Kondapally Seetharamaiah, the PW expanded its control over a large terrain bordering Odisha and parts of Maharashtra. The CPI(ML)(PW) guerrillas have kidnapped local feudal oppressors and commercial exploiters, forced them to confess crimes and apologise to villagers, and ostracised them from their lands. They also have introduced alternative governance mechanisms to ensure equitable distribution of resources and social justice (Banerjee, 2017).

The increasing rural-population support for aggressive rebels against economic conditions made scope for the fragmented Naxalite groups to create a united front. The People’s War, Party Unity, and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) combined to form the People’s War Group (PWG), which became India’s frontier of terror activities. From 1999 to 2002, the PWG accelerated attacks on state government locations in Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, and Chhattisgarh. By 2000, an estimated 3,000-armed Naxalite rebels were reportedly active in India’s east (Lynch III, 2016).

In July 2001, the Naxalite groups all over South Asia formed a Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA), which is said to be the first such an international coalition. PWG and MCC were part of it as well. *The Intelligence also reported that the MCC and PWG had established links with LTTE, Nepali Maoists, and Pakistan’s Inter-Service Intelligence to receive arms and training* (Goodpal, 2010).

Phase IV (2004–Current)

The merging of the Communist Party of India (Maoist–Leninist), the PWG, the Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI) and 40 other armed factions into the Communist Party of India (Maoist) in 2004 turned out to be an advantageous leap for the insurgents, causing an upsurge in LWE related violence (Sahoo, 2019). The People’s Liberation Guerrilla Army (PGLA), the armed wing of CPI (Maoist), nurtured 20,000 regular cadres, of which 10,000 are hardcore fighters. They were armed with automatic weapons, shoulder rocket launchers, mines, and other explosive devices, light machine guns, mortars, self-loading guns, AK-47s, and grenades, as well as getting trained in manufacturing crude but effective improvised explosive devices (IEDs) (Sahoo, 2019). Their terror campaigns included the murder of local

politicians, sudden ambushes on local police stations, shanghaiing of child soldiers, enforced violent activities to scare away outside investors, attacking the prisons to free their cadets, and captivating the members of anti-Naxalite groups to punish them (Lynch III, 2016). The deadliest Naxalite Maoist attacks exclusively have preyed on the police and paramilitary forces to tyrannise the people from joining the police forces in districts notorious for Maoist activities, curbing the State counter-insurgency power in advance. However, it is the civilians who pay the price. Between 1980 and 2015, the Naxalite insurgency caused 20,012 casualties, of which 4,761 were Naxalites, 3,105 were members of the security forces, and 12,146 were civilians (Sanelywritten, 2021). Moreover, a report published by the Indian Home Ministry (2019) has revealed that in the period between 2010 and 2019, an average of 417 civilians have been massacred yearly in 1,200 terror actions perpetrated by the Naxalite-Maoists (Efsas.org, 2023). Exploiting the civilians as scapegoats to reimburse their depleting reign in the *Red Corridor* territory has made the common people horrified enough not to collaborate with the police. Consecutively, in 2018, 61 and in 2019 (by June), 22 civilians were executed for being suspected as “*police informants*” (Efsas.org, 2023). It demonstrates that the civilians, for whom the Maoists are supposedly fighting the so-called revolution, are the ones who have been destroyed the most.

There also have been intel about the Naxalites being aligned with deeper organised crime networks. In 2018, Indian police seized an amount of crude heroin equivalent to INR 700 million (approximately 8,8 million Euros) from Naxal areas (Nigam, 2018). The Indian state of Jharkhand is one of the major hubs of the Maoist insurgency. Thus, the Maoists have been misusing Jharkhand for opium cultivation as a source of revenue since 2007 (Efsas.org, 2023). It is like hitting multiple birds with one stone for the Maoists, ensuring the loyalty of the isolated inhabitants of Naxalite-controlled areas by assuring them of protection in exchange for opium farming; further marginalising them from the State; and, most importantly, securing a large share of the profits from the drug trafficking (a kilogram of opium could sell for up to 450 euros in Mumbai) (Verma, 2018). The Naxalites are also accused of cannabis trade from the Indian state of Odisha to other parts of the country and the region (Dasgupta, 2017). In 2010, the Bengaluru police of India got wind of a meeting between Chhota Shakeel⁴'s men and Naxalite leaders, which hinted that the ISI could encourage the Naxalite-D-Company partnership to prolong the insurgency, hence another proxy war. Though the meeting got busted by the Bengaluru Police, nevertheless, the constant hints of an expected ISI-Naxalite link formation have kept the Indian authorities worried constantly (TNN, 2010). The intelligence-data has revealed the Maoists have received logistical support and training from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the mid-2000s, they also have drawn support from several Maoist fringe Organizations located in Germany, France,

⁴ Chhota Shakeel is an Indian crime boss, and a high-ranking member of the D-Company, Dawood Ibrahim's notorious organised crime gang. The D-Company has ties to the Pakistani spy agency, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

Turkey, Italy, etc., inputs have also indicated that some senior cadres of the Communist Party of Philippines imparted training to the cadres of CPI (Maoist) in 2005 and 2011 (Jaaved, 2021), nearly 500 Maoists have also allegedly undergone training with the Student Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) in 2008 (Billore, 2022), the members of the notorious ISI-backed Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) have reportedly met with Naxalite leaders in 2010 (West, 2010), there have been reports about joint operations and trainings between the CPI-Maoists and the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-Maoists) as well as the Indian Maoists have been procuring arms from China through the Nepalese Maoists and such ostensible alliances could jeopardise India's security to a grave extent (Nayak, 2008). Maoists also have allegedly solicited cooperation from the Assam and Jammu & Kashmir insurgencies to make joint attacks of overthrowing the central Indian government which contradicts its own objective of installing a communist regime in the whole country (Goodpal, 2010). In 2018, the US Country Report on Terrorism ranked the Communist Party of India – Maoist (hereafter CPI-M) as the deadliest terror organisation globally after the Taliban, Islamic State, Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram and the Communist Party of the Philippines (WION Web Team, 2019).

Concluding Remarks

Surpassing the insurgent activities in the J&K and Northeast India, the Naxalites have dominated in more than 200 districts across the country at their peak, provoking the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to acknowledge the Maoist movement as the “single biggest internal-security challenge ever faced by our country” in April 2006 (PTI, 2006). In 2009, the Indian government launched Operation Green Hunt, a large military operation whose aggressive strategies shrank down the number of districts controlled by the Maoists from 200 to 106 districts across 10 states by 2015 (Satp.org, 2016).

As an aftermath of the relentless implementation of the National Policy and Action Plan to address Left wing Extremism-2015⁵, a consistent decline in the Naxal violence could also be seen. In its agenda to curb the expansion plan of CPI (Maoist), the Union Ministry has been successful in casting away LWE influence from 8 “districts of concern”⁶

⁵ The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has been implementing the ‘National Policy and Action Plan’ since 2015 to combat Left Wing Extremism (LWE). This envisages a multi-pronged strategy involving security and development related measures. The crucial features of the new policy were zero tolerance towards violence coupled with a big push to developmental activities so that benefits of development reached the poor and vulnerable in the Left-Wing Extremism affected 106 districts in 10 states.

⁶ Under the ‘National Policy & Action Plan’ is being implemented to combat Left Wing Extremism (LWE), a new category of the ‘Districts of Concern’ was added to counter Maoists’ spread to new areas and to stop resurgence in the areas where LWE influence is waning.

in 6 Indian states as well as has put efforts to restrict the Maoist from bouncing back in the areas (Kaur, 2016).

In May 2017, the then Union Home Minister announced a new strategy against the Maoists called SAMADHAN (solution). The acronym expanded thus: **S**: Smart leadership, **A**: Aggressive strategy, **M**: Motivation and training, **A**: Actionable intelligence, **D**: Dashboard-based KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and KRAs (Key Result Areas), **H**: Harnessing technology, **A**: Action Plan for each theatre and **N**: No access to financing (Mukherjee, 2021), which have yielded great results so far. The restrictions compelled by the Coronavirus pandemic also seem to facilitate the decline in Naxal activities. According to the Home Ministry, the acts of violence have reduced from 2,258 in 2009 to 349 in August 2020, and the number of deaths has reduced from 908 to 110 (Singh, 2021). However, the drawback is, even though the Maoists' activities have been curbed to a low ebb, unfortunately, it is the civilians against whom both the Maoists, who have sworn to protect their rights and the Indian government are bound to protect them, have committed vicious crimes as well as severe human rights violations.

To conclude, the key idea that this paper has analysed is whether the agenda of annihilating the democratic institutions in India through a protracted "*people's war*" has provoked the Naxalite-Maoists to transit to extreme revolution or, the feeling of having supremacy in the "power struggle" over the rural-indigenous groups as well as the thrill they might feel by being connected to terrorist activities have influenced them to utilise guerrilla tactics. An extensive study of the Naxalite movement from its emergence to till date has demonstrated that the movement has got deviated from its initial ideology of standing beside the deprived segments of the Indian society while rebelling against the imperialist landlords, industrialists, and the Indian government by becoming a great threat to the civilians at present. During the later phases of the Naxalite insurgency, the civilians paid the highest price as the Maoists, straying away from their original ideology, pummelled their terror tactics against their very own support base, which contrarily have transformed the civilians, from being their former allegiance to their objective to the state of being disenchanted with Maoist ideology. The Naxal insurgents have bolstered the negative economic situation and marginalisation of the rural population by hindering the development of India's economy through their aggressive attacks on development and infrastructure projects. Moreover, determining a clear distinction between the CPI and CPI-M experience, the Maoists' alleged alliance with organised crime indicates that the group has transgressed from its original ideology and become more profit-motivated (Efsas.org, 2023). Nonetheless, the subdued Naxalite insurgency does not guarantee its extinction as insurgencies cannot be dissolved only through military action, but social, economic, and political changes are also necessary to keep it from re-upsurging (Libicki & Connable, 2010). A veteran Indian army officer also opined that the Maoist insurgency would die only when the underprivileged people were convinced that the government effectively addressed their grievances within a suitable time limit (Mukherjee, 2021). So

further research can be performed in exploring more efficient and logical frameworks for efficacious population-centric agendas that the Indian National and State Governments can execute to liberate the civilians of their grievances.

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