

NAXALISM AS A MULTIDIMENSIONAL CHALLENGE: ADDRESSING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC, DEVELOPMENTAL, AND SECURITY ASPECTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Naxalism as a multidimensional challenge that encompasses socio-economic, developmental, and security issues. Naxalism, rooted in Maoist ideology, poses a severe threat to India's internal security, particularly in marginalized and underdeveloped regions. The insurgency's rise is traced to historical grievances, land rights issues, and socio-economic inequalities, which have left tribal and rural communities alienated. Despite significant reductions in violence over the past decade due to coordinated security efforts, the movement remains persistent due to unresolved grievances related to land ownership, unemployment, and poor governance. This paper emphasizes the need for a balanced approach that combines military measures with robust socio-economic development, improved governance, and greater political inclusion to sustainably address Naxalism. It highlights that while security operations can suppress insurgency temporarily, long-term peace can only be achieved through addressing the root causes of poverty, land rights, and tribal welfare. The paper also stresses the importance of infrastructure development, land reforms, and social services in Naxal-affected areas to restore trust between the state and local communities and foster sustainable peace.

Keywords: Naxalism, Maoist, Socio-Economic, Insurgency

INTRODUCTION

India, a rapidly expanding economy and the most populous democratic nation globally, faces numerous security risks due to the Naxalite menace. The government has long recognized the threat to India's internal security, citing its complex causes and vulnerabilities in governance, political institutions, and socio-economic framework. Naxalism impacts various domains, including the economy, security, international relations, citizen welfare, and the rule of law. Addressing these issues is crucial for India's future power.¹

Naxalite violence poses a significant threat to the nation's internal security, particularly in marginalized and economically disadvantaged regions. The Naxals claim to represent the impoverished and landless population, but their violence primarily affects the underprivileged. Maoists have created parallel administrations in various regions, advocating swift trials, deliberate killings, and extortion. The ideological alignment between Indian and Nepalese Maoists is challenging, as they sometimes promote the phrase "From Pashupatinath to Tirupati." The Central government has classified the Maoist movement as a terrorist organization due to its intensity and severity.²

¹ Hussain, Mohammad Samir. "The Naxal Problem: Understanding the Issue, Challenges and Diagnostic Approach." SSIS (2022), 289.

² Singh, Anil Kumar. "Naxalism: Biggest Security Threat to Indian State." The Indian Journal of Political Science 76, no. 3 (2015), 374-378.

The Maoists (Naxalites) pose a significant threat to India due to their extensive spread, mobilization capabilities, organizational structure, and tactical sophistication. They have established parallel government systems in nearly 40% of the nation's area and have maintained their fundamental aim of capturing political power or state authority. The Naxalites' true objective transcends economic interests and governmental well-being, aiming for the acquisition of governmental power. Charu Majumdar emphasized that militant fights should be conducted for state power, and supporters believed that the "new sun and a new moon" promised by Kanu Sanyal would illuminate the Indian sky. The contemporary Naxalites are similarly explicit and assertive in this matter. In 2004, the CPI-Maoist, led by Ganapathy and Kishan, stated that the immediate objective of the Maoist party is to perpetuate and conclude the New Democratic Revolution, which will be executed through an extended people's war, with military acquisition of power as its primary objective.³

Naxalism presents a challenge to India's democratic governance and rule of law, constituting an ideological threat that undermines the legitimacy of the Indian State. The violent actions of Naxalites have significantly increased. The Naxalites are progressively transitioning from rural and forest activities to urban centers. They have been targeting police officers and citizens, resorting to abductions and the murder of innocent individuals, as well as the damage of public assets such as railway rails, trains, public transit, and government buildings and institutions.

The Prime Minister of India said, "Left-wing extremism represents one of the most severe internal security threats, and despite efforts, the incidence of violence in the affected states continues to escalate."⁴ Antinational forces provide significant impediments to national growth and, therefore, must not be let to thrive inside a democracy. It is opportune to concentrate on our security circumstances rather than allocating excessive attention to other matters. The government's foremost challenge now is the complete eradication of the Naxal terror network.

RISE OF NAXALISM IN INDIA

The Maoist movement in India, originating in Naxalbari, has become a significant internal security issue. The movement began in 1967 to resist landlords by well-armed tribal people using violence to achieve their dreams of Independent India. The Santhal tribes used force to evict kulaks from land and cultivate it, leading to house-to-house searches and raids against grain holders. This situation worsened as the Maoist concept of violence became more prevalent.⁵

On April 22, 1969, the Naxalites established the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), aiming to mobilize peasant masses in rural areas to engage in guerrilla warfare, initiate an agricultural revolution, establish a rural foundation, besiege cities, and ultimately seize the cities to liberate the entire nation. The Chinese Communist Party, along with Marxist-Leninist factions from countries such as the UK, Albania, and Sri Lanka, supported the establishment of the CPI(ML).⁶

The Maoist doctrine of people's war prioritized the improvement of social and economic conditions by creating a classless society via armed revolution. It was founded on the anti-imperialist struggle and endorsed the armed revolution to achieve political transition. The Naxalite movement reached

³ Kumar, Sanjay. "Naxal Issues in India Present Trends." (2023).

⁴ Ali, Abid, and Sant Lal. "Naxalite Movement in India: Causes and Solutions." *IJIFR* 2, no. 8 (2015), 2971-2979.

⁵ Tanwar, Navneet. "Is the Employment of Army the Only Solution for Solving the Naxal Problem in India?" PhD diss., School of Advanced Military Studies, Army Command and General Staff College, (2011).

⁶ Singh, Lalima, and Cao Chenrui. "The Problem Of Naxalism With Special Reference To Their Rights." *Voice of Research* (2015), 15.

its zenith from mid-1970 to mid-1971, primarily in West Bengal, and spread throughout underdeveloped regions of rural central and eastern India. Around 4,000 incidents occurred between mid-1970 and mid-1971, with the majority from West Bengal, Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh.⁷

The CPI (Maoist) is India's main Left Wing Extremist Organization, targeting economically backward areas and urban youth. Inspired by communism, the organization's tactics were copied from the Chinese Red Guards. However, the frequency and intensity of Naxal-related attacks have slightly decreased over the past decade. The Red Corridor region, once the main affected area, has seen development and improved security. In 2010, India saw the highest number of LWE violence deaths, totaling 1,005. By 2022, the number had reduced to 98, reducing the mortality rate by 90%. Factors contributing to this reduction include cooperation between central and local governments, improved security measures, and the presence of special forces to combat Naxalites.⁸

The number of violent incidents has also seen a steep decline of 77% since 2010, further illustrating the weakening grip of Naxal forces across the country. This trend is mirrored in the reduction of Naxal-affected districts, from 90 districts in 2010 to 45 districts in 2022. This geographical contraction reflects a diminishing insurgency footprint as developmental programs, infrastructure projects, and welfare initiatives reach previously neglected areas.⁹

Category	2010 (High)	2022	Change (%)
Violent Incidents	High in 2010	77% decrease from 2010	-77%
Districts Affected	90 districts	45 districts	N/A
Deaths (Security Forces & Civilians)	1,005 deaths	98 deaths	-90%

Over a broader timeframe, comparing the periods from 2004–2014 and 2014–2023, a clear decline in Naxal activity is evident. Between 2004 and 2014, there were 17,679 violent incidents and 6,984 deaths. In contrast, from 2014 to mid-2023, there were only 7,649 incidents and 2,020 deaths, a significant decrease that highlights improved security measures and political will.¹⁰

Period	LWE-related Incidents	Deaths
2004–2014	17,679	6,984
2014–2023 (till June 15, 2023)	7,649	2,020

This data-driven success, however, should not lead to complacency. While violence has decreased, addressing the root causes—land rights, tribal welfare, and underdevelopment—remains essential. Continued efforts combining security with socio-economic development will be critical to sustaining peace in the region.

MAIN DRIVERS OF NAXALISM IN INDIA

⁷ Ansuman, Swain, and Sumit Kumar. "Challenges of Healthcare Provision in the Conflict Zone of the 'Red Corridor' in India." *Int J Cur Res Rev* Vol 13, no. 24 (2021), 10.

⁸ Banerjee, Debosree. "Understanding Maoism in India with Socio-Economic Discriminations and Rebel Capabilities." In *Maoist Insurgency, State and People*, pp. 176-194. Routledge India, (2024).

⁹ Iqbal, Rakhshanda. "Indian State Terrorism in Perspective: The Case of Naxalite/Maoist Movement." *PJTR* 5, no. 1 (2023).

¹⁰ Ghosh, Biswajit, ed. "Exploring Social Movements: Theories, Experiences, and Trends." (Taylor & Francis, 2024).

Naxalism in India has roots in historical, socio-political, and economic factors. Its leadership ideology, derived from the Indigo Rebellion (1859-61), Munda Rebellion (1899), and Bhumkal Rebellion (1910), stems from the struggles of the downtrodden. The Tebhaga Movement of 1946 contributed to the contemporary Naxalite uprising, particularly in low socio-economic areas. Naxalists seek to transform the existing order through strategic defense, balance, and offense phases. They oppose parliamentary democracy as a repressive tool, arguing that liberalization, privatization, and globalization deepen inequality and worsen the experiences of the poor and marginalized. They believe that civil disobedience and public uprising can remediate severe economic and social injustice. Violence is considered inevitable to disrupt the current socio-political system, and their leaders maintain the thought to support this cause. They aim to erase state existence in their areas by influencing local government officials and police officers to ignore state authority.¹¹

Socio-Economic Grievances

The Naxalite movement in India is driven by socio-economic backwardness, unemployment, and hardship in the 'Red Corridor' of Indian states. These regions, despite having rich resources, face deep-rooted inequity in resource distribution due to perceived exploitation by the state and companies. This hatred drives people into Naxalism as resources for extraction and development do not accrue to the populations involved. Some states, including Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Bihar, have significantly higher poverty rates, unemployment rates, and low literacy levels. These factors lead to a loss of faith in the state and the spread of Maoist ideas. Naxal leaders may call followers to battle for revolutionary goals, while some may fight for land, jobs, and better living. The cycle of poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment can lead to the spread of Maoist ideas.¹²

Inadequate Government Response and Governance Failures

The Indian government initially viewed naxalism as a law-and-order issue, neglecting socio-economic factors that led to insurgency. The seven-schedule Indian Constitution's role breakdown led to disparities in policy making and implementation. The Fifth Schedule of the Constitution, which grants special status to tribal lands, and acts like the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) and the Forest Rights Act, 2006, aimed to decentralize power and reinstate tribal rights. However, these provisions have been unsatisfactory and have been implemented in a worse way, causing land alienation, displacement, and marginalization, which fuels the Naxalite movement. The tribal populations, who would benefit from these laws, continue to suffer from land alienation, displacement, and marginalization.¹³

Land Rights and Development Deficit

The issue of land rights has been central to the Naxalite movement since its inception in the late 1960s. The slogan "land to the tiller" continues to resonate in areas where land ownership is concentrated in the hands of a few. At the same time, large sections of the rural population remain landless or possess insufficient land for subsistence farming. According to the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), 60% of India's population holds just 5% of the country's land, while

¹¹ Ghosh, Rajashri. "Naxalism: The Left-Wing Extremist Movement in India." PPSY 52, no. 2 (2023), 7-22.

¹² Iqbal, Rakhshanda. "Indian State Terrorism in Perspective: The Case of Naxalite/Maoist Movement." PJTR 5, no. 1 (2023).

¹³ Tripathi, Ambikesh Kumar. "Violence and Threat Perception: Maoist Conflict and the Indian State." In *Maoist Insurgency, State and People*, pp. 100-121. (Routledge India, 2023).

the top 10% control 55% of it. This stark inequality has been a significant factor in driving support for Naxalism, as the movement promises to redistribute land and correct these historical injustices.¹⁴

Moreover, the lack of infrastructure and development in Naxal-affected areas has further marginalized these regions. Poor road and rail connectivity, inadequate healthcare and education services, and limited access to markets have hampered socio-economic progress. Telecommunication infrastructure is also lacking; rural teledensity is just 56.71% compared to 156.82% in urban areas. This development deficit, coupled with a lack of social services, perpetuates the economic isolation of these communities and strengthens their support for Naxalism.¹⁵

Geography, Arms, and Financial Support

The geographical terrain of the "Red Corridor," which is heavily forested and remote, provides the perfect hideout for Naxalite guerrilla forces. These areas, difficult to access, serve as sanctuaries from which they can launch attacks and organize their operations. Additionally, Naxals have built extensive networks with various militant and criminal organizations in South Asia, facilitating a steady supply of arms and ammunition. Through porous borders with Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, they obtain weapons and financial support from a variety of sources, including Islamist groups backed by Pakistan's ISI and local crime syndicates. The Naxal movement is also financially robust. It is estimated that they collect over ₹140 crore annually from various sources, the most prominent being the mining industry, along with levies on tendu leaf collection. In regions where they run parallel governments, they impose "revolutionary taxes" on local businesses and residents, further consolidating their control.¹⁶

LAWS AGAINST NAXALISM IN INDIA

The Indian government has enacted several laws to combat Naxalism, aiming to curb left-wing extremism (LWE) and restore peace in the affected regions. These laws focus on security measures, criminalizing insurgent activities, and addressing the socio-economic grievances that fuel the movement. The following are key legal provisions targeting Naxalite groups:¹⁷

- **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), 1967**

The UAPA is one of the primary laws used to deal with insurgent groups like Naxalites. It empowers the government to declare an organization as "unlawful" and to take stringent action against individuals or groups involved in terrorist activities, including Naxalism. The act enables law enforcement agencies to arrest, detain, and prosecute those suspected of aiding Naxalite activities.

- **National Security Act (NSA), 1980**

This act allows preventive detention of individuals who pose a threat to national security, including Naxal leaders and sympathizers. It enables authorities to detain individuals without trial for up to 12 months, thus preventing potential extremist activities.

- **Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act, 2005**

¹⁴ Ahlawat, Dalbir. "Naxal Insurgency in India: Managing Conflict through Empowerment." *IJCS* 13 (2024), 1-14.

¹⁵ Ghosh, Biswajit. "Movements of Radical Marxists: From Naxalism to Maoism." In *Exploring Social Movements*, pp. 173-193. (Routledge India, 2024).

¹⁶ Ahlawat, Dalbir. "Naxal insurgency in India: Genesis, ideological precepts, and security challenges." In *Terrorism, Security and Development in South Asia*, pp. 80-98. (Routledge, 2021).

¹⁷ Singh, Anshu. "Naxalism in India: Socio-economic Prospects to Combat Naxalism." (National Development, 2022), 124.

This state-specific law in Chhattisgarh, one of the most affected Naxal regions, empowers authorities to arrest individuals involved in Naxalite-related activities. It has been controversial due to allegations of misuse, but it serves as a critical tool in fighting Naxalism in the state.

- **Arms Act, 1959**

The Arms Act regulates the acquisition and possession of firearms and ammunition, which Naxalite groups often use. This act allows law enforcement to crack down on the illegal arms trade and possession in Naxal-affected areas.

- **The Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA)**

Though not specifically aimed at Naxalism, this act addresses one of the root causes of Naxalite violence—land and resource rights. By recognizing the rights of forest-dwelling communities, the act aims to reduce grievances that Naxalites often exploit. However, poor implementation of the FRA has allowed Naxal groups to recruit from displaced or dissatisfied communities.

LAWS AND GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES IN SUPPORT OF NAXALITE-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

While laws against Naxalism aim to suppress insurgent activities, the government has also introduced legislation and programs to address the socio-economic conditions that fuel the insurgency. These initiatives target development, tribal welfare, and land rights, offering a pathway for Naxalite supporters to reintegrate into society.¹⁸

- **Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006**

Also known as the Forest Rights Act, this legislation aims to correct historical injustices faced by tribal communities by recognizing their rights to forest land and resources. The act is a critical step toward addressing the land-related grievances that contribute to Naxalite support in tribal areas.

- **Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA)**

PESA extends the provisions of the Panchayati Raj system to tribal areas, giving local communities greater control over governance and resource management. This act aims to empower indigenous populations, allowing them to make decisions related to land and local governance, which Naxalites often claim to protect.

- **Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy, 2007**

Many Naxalite recruits come from communities displaced by industrial projects and mining operations. The Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy seeks to address these grievances by ensuring fair compensation and proper resettlement for displaced people. However, the success of this policy has been mixed, with many cases of poor implementation.

- **Integrated Action Plan (IAP), 2010**

The IAP was launched to expedite development in Naxal-affected areas. The plan focuses on infrastructure development, including roads, electricity, and schools, in tribal and backward areas. This developmental approach aims to wean people away from Naxalism by improving their quality of life and providing economic opportunities.

¹⁸ Ahlawat, Dalbir. "Naxal insurgency in India: Genesis, ideological precepts, and security challenges." In *Terrorism, Security and Development in South Asia*, pp. 80-98. (Routledge, 2021).

- **Surrender and Rehabilitation Policies**

Various state governments and the central government have adopted surrender and rehabilitation policies to encourage Naxalites to lay down arms. These policies offer financial assistance, vocational training, and housing support to Naxals who surrender voluntarily, aiming to integrate them into mainstream society.

NAXALISM: SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS

The roots of Naxalism lie in the socio-economic inequality that has plagued rural India for decades. In most of the areas where Naxalism has flourished, a common thread of underdevelopment, poverty, and exclusion from the benefits of India's economic growth can be found. The tribal and rural populations in these regions have historically been deprived of access to basic services like education, healthcare, and sanitation, as well as livelihoods that can sustain them.

According to the 2011 Census, the states most affected by Naxalism, including Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, have a significant proportion of tribal populations. For instance, Jharkhand has a tribal population of around 26%, while Chhattisgarh's stands at approximately 31%. These populations, residing in remote forested areas, often rely on land for their livelihoods. Still, due to inefficient land reforms and exploitative land acquisition practices, they are frequently dispossessed of their resources. This economic disenfranchisement fuels anger and resentment, which extremist ideologies like Naxalism exploit.¹⁹

In many of these regions, the literacy rate is also significantly lower than the national average. For example, as per the National Sample Survey (NSS) data of 2017-18, the literacy rate in rural Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand was around 67% and 63%, respectively, compared to the national rural literacy rate of 73.5%. This gap in education prevents the rural poor from accessing employment opportunities in the formal sector, trapping them in a cycle of poverty and deprivation.²⁰

Land, Forests, and Livelihoods

Land and resource rights have historically been central to the Naxalite movement. The indigenous population depends heavily on forest resources for their livelihoods, but the Indian government's forest policies have often marginalized them. The Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006, which was supposed to address some of these issues by granting legal rights over land and forest resources to tribal communities, has not been implemented effectively in many Naxal-affected areas. A 2019 report by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs shows that only 45% of the total claims filed under the FRA have been settled. This slow implementation, coupled with the continued expansion of mining and industrial projects in these areas, has further alienated tribal populations. Large-scale displacement caused by these projects, often without adequate rehabilitation or compensation, has exacerbated the feeling of economic exclusion. Consequently, Naxalism finds fertile ground among people who perceive that the state has failed to protect their rights and provide for their well-being.

Poverty and Unemployment

Naxalism's strength also lies in its ability to exploit the economic vulnerabilities of the population. In states like Chhattisgarh, Bihar, and Jharkhand, the poverty rate is among the highest in India. As per NITI Aayog's 2021 report on the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), Bihar (51.91%), Jharkhand (42.16%), and Chhattisgarh (37.79%) had the highest proportion of their population

¹⁹ Saharia, R. P. "Naxalism and its impact in India." *RJHSS* 5, no. 2 (2014), 180-190.

²⁰ Desai, Krunal. "Infrastructure in India's Internal War: A District-Level Analysis of the Naxalite-Maoist Conflict." *UER* 18, no. 1 (2022), 3.

living in multidimensional poverty, considering factors such as nutrition, child mortality, years of schooling, and access to basic amenities like sanitation and electricity.²¹

Unemployment rates in these states are also significantly higher than the national average. For instance, Jharkhand's unemployment rate, as per the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21, stood at 6.2%, higher than the national average of 4.2%. The lack of employment opportunities leaves many youths in these regions susceptible to Naxal recruitment, as they find little incentive to support a government, they believe has abandoned them.²²

Development Deficit

A crucial dimension of the Naxalite issue is the absence of adequate developmental infrastructure. Poor road connectivity, inadequate healthcare facilities, and a lack of educational institutions often characterize the regions affected by Naxalism. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), in 2020, around 90 out of the 106 districts affected by Naxalism were in states with below-average infrastructure development indicators.

Government programs like the Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP), launched in 2018, aim to address the development deficit in these regions by focusing on key sectors such as health, education, agriculture, and basic infrastructure. While the initiative has made some progress, the development gap remains significant. The lack of trust between the local population and the state is one of the key reasons why development efforts have not yielded the desired outcomes.

Naxalism as a Multidimensional Challenge

Naxalism cannot be viewed merely as an internal security threat; it represents a multidimensional challenge that includes socio-economic, developmental, and security aspects. At the core of the problem lies the need to address socioeconomic disparities and integrate marginalized populations into mainstream development. Efforts to curb Naxalism must focus on equitable land distribution, better implementation of forest rights, provision of employment opportunities, and targeted development in the affected regions.

Government initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), aimed at improving rural connectivity, and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which provides rural employment are steps in the right direction. However, their effective implementation in Naxal-affected areas has been hampered by insurgency, corruption, and a lack of trust between the state and local communities. Additionally, security operations alone will not eliminate Naxalism; they must be complemented by sustained socio-economic development and political inclusion.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTORS TO URBAN NAXALISM

Urban environments often showcase stark disparities in income and living conditions, contributing to a sense of injustice among underprivileged populations. Cities like Mumbai exemplify this divide, where luxurious residences stand in stark contrast to sprawling slums. These slums, teeming with residents deprived of basic amenities, become fertile grounds for resentment and discontent. Such environments not only spotlight the wealth gap but also crystallize the failures of urban planning and social equity, making these areas ripe for the propagation of extremist doctrines.²³

²¹ Kundu, Suparna. "Adivasis and the Naxal Movement." *IJLLR* 5 (2023), 1.

²² Kumar, Vinod. "Problems and Challenges Tribal Community in India." *JRSSH* 3, no. 2 (2024), 1-6.

²³ Behera, Anshuman. "Manufacturing Threat: The Reality and Rhetoric of Urban Maoism in India." In *Maoist Insurgency, State and People*, pp. 36-47. (Routledge India, 2024).

Unemployment is a significant factor in urban dwellers' bitterness towards the government, particularly in areas affected by Naxal groups. In states like Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, youth are left hopeless about their future due to lack of employment, which is often exploited by Naxal groups. School availability and affordability remain concerns for children in low-income areas, making them vulnerable to radical views condemning the state's indifference and offering hope for renewal.

Poverty in urban centers, such as the Dharavi slum in Mumbai, leads to harsh living standards and social unrest. Urban development projects aim to update cities, but many are affected by these plans, leading to political disempowerment and bitterness among the commoners. Large-scale projects like metro rail constructions in Bengaluru and Hyderabad create social unrest and potential Islamists who feel marginalized by these projects. Corruption is deeply rooted in urban development and housing projects, undermining confidence in governmental organizations.

When scandals or corrupt practices are exposed, militancy emerges as extreme groups present better alternatives to governance capable of addressing structural injustices. Pre-existing injustices, such as discrimination in caste, religion, or economy, fuel grievances against the ruling system, supporting the narratives of groups like the Naxals who claim that states have abandoned the most vulnerable citizens.

With increasing opportunities and power to change the world through new technologies and resources, social inequality remains unchanged, and revolutionary ideals become increasingly popular. The erosion of faith in conventional political institutions has led to the emergence of Naxalism in urban centers, as political parties are often seen as immune to the problems that affect common people.

RECALIBRATING THE STRATEGY FOR ELIMINATING THE MENACE

Although there have been considerable decreases in Naxal assaults in recent decades due to the government's transition from a solely 'enemy-centric approach' to a more comprehensive strategy that incorporates development initiatives, the insurgency continues to represent a danger. In April 2021, a notable incident transpired when Maoists ambushed a collaborative unit comprising the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the elite Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (COBRA), the District Reserve Guard (DRG), and the Special Task Force (STF) in Terram, leading to the unfortunate fatalities of 22 security personnel and injuries to 30 others. This prompts an inquiry into why, despite extensive efforts, Naxals persist in causing significant casualties to security personnel. The solution resides in a confluence of inadequate governance and suboptimal policy execution at the grassroots level. Furthermore, several government initiatives unintentionally overlook the constitutional protections established for the native community.

For any counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy to succeed, it is inadequate to depend only on military measures.²⁴ A robust security presence may temporarily curtail insurgent activity; nevertheless, enduring peace requires a profound emphasis on earning the confidence and support of the local populace. Research indicates that military interventions have ended about 7% of insurgencies, while 43% have been concluded by political discussion, bolstered by military backing.²⁵ This illustrates the need for a more population-focused methodology. The security forces must persist in safeguarding development initiatives, but enduring stability depends on cultivating trust and

²⁴ Roy, Kaushik. *Modern insurgencies and counterinsurgencies: a global history*. (Routledge, 2022).

²⁵ Banaji, Jairus, Spencer A. Leonard, and Sunit Singh. "The Maoist Insurgency in India: End of the Road for Indian Stalinism?" In *The Maoist Movement in India*, pp. 39-56. (Routledge India, 2020).

promoting social involvement among the local populace. Historically, Indigenous populations have experienced neglect and marginalization by the government. It is essential to rectify this neglect by acknowledging forest rights, strengthening tribal leaders, and addressing fundamental needs such as access to food, water, and shelter.

India's counterinsurgency policy, based on the 'Clear, Hold, and Build' concept, has effectively eradicated Naxal strongholds and maintained dominance in most regions. However, the 'construct' phase still presents challenges, as it requires the involvement and trust of all community members, particularly indigenous people. Local, state, and federal governments must collaborate to address the diverse needs of stakeholders. A universal remedy is ineffective, as tribals, often landless agricultural laborers, have a rightful claim to their land, water, and natural resources. To regain authority and gain public support, India must prioritize infrastructure development, including reinforced police stations, road networks, telecommunications, and public distribution systems. Ethical governance and security protocols are needed to reinforce these initiatives. Government personnel at the grassroots level must be educated to engage with indigenous groups respectfully. The government has relied heavily on the CRPF for counterinsurgency operations, but more recruits must be sourced from the local populace, emulating the successful 'Greyhounds' model of Andhra Pradesh. Security personnel must be equipped with advanced equipment and training to effectively combat the Maoist menace.

The essence of the Naxalite insurgency is rooted in conflicts around land ownership and the entitlements of indigenous people to their natural resources. The fundamental reason for Naxalism may be attributed to the estrangement of these populations from their land. Drawing lessons from the Telangana peasant insurrection (1946-51),²⁶ the government should implement land redistribution, reform the judicial system, and reinstate the land and resource rights of indigenous communities, particularly Adivasis. Local populations must get advantages from industrial activity by gaining improved access to education, healthcare, transportation, and communication infrastructure. The emphasis must be on guaranteeing that the income derived from industrial ventures benefits the indigenous population.

The lack of political representation in areas affected by Naxalism is a significant issue, exacerbated by the exclusion of the local populace from the political process. The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, was established to empower tribal people, but its implementation has been unsuccessful in several states. The legislation is crucial for alleviating the alienation experienced by indigenous groups, but Andhra Pradesh's implementation often diverges from its initial purpose. Naxal-affected areas have significant potential for economic development, but must be fully embraced by the local people. Indigenous populations should be prioritized in job opportunities, and permanent employment, especially for the young, is essential. The state must ensure the effective implementation of relocation and rehabilitation initiatives, and private mining corporations must adhere to established rules overseen by independent authorities.

CONCLUSION

Naxalism, a significant insurgent movement rooted in socio-economic disparities, continues to pose a multidimensional challenge to India. Its persistence reflects the deep structural issues that affect marginalized communities, particularly in tribal and underdeveloped regions. The Naxalite

²⁶ D'Mello, Bernard, and Gautam Navlakha. "Maoist Insurgency and the State's Counterinsurgency in India: An Anti-Anti-Communist Historical Perspective." *The Palgrave Handbook of Anti-Communist Persecutions* (2020), 117-161.

insurgency is not merely a security concern but also a manifestation of systemic socio-economic deprivation, lack of development, and governance failures. Addressing the Naxalite issue requires a comprehensive approach that balances security measures with meaningful socio-economic interventions and developmental policies.

From a socio-economic perspective, Naxalism thrives in regions where the state's presence is weak, and basic human development indicators lag significantly behind national averages. High levels of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and landlessness have created conditions of alienation and resentment. The movement, which originally sought to champion the rights of the oppressed, has gained traction by exploiting these vulnerabilities. Thus, addressing these root causes through land reforms, education, healthcare, employment generation, and the protection of tribal rights becomes essential. It is only by empowering these marginalized communities and integrating them into the mainstream socio-economic fabric that a long-term solution can be achieved.

From a developmental viewpoint, the lack of infrastructure, roads, schools, and healthcare facilities in Naxal-affected areas exacerbates the sense of isolation and exclusion felt by these communities. The failure to bring these regions into the fold of national progress creates fertile ground for insurgency. Thus, prioritizing inclusive development that reaches the most marginalized sections of society is key. The government must invest in infrastructure, welfare schemes, and livelihood projects tailored to the specific needs of these regions, ensuring that the benefits of growth are equitably distributed.

While socio-economic and developmental interventions are critical, the security dimension cannot be ignored. The Naxal insurgency has evolved into a violent movement, and its armed wing continues to challenge the authority of the state. A balanced approach is necessary—one that does not rely solely on militaristic solutions but also includes confidence-building measures, dialogue, and rehabilitation of former insurgents.

Naxalism is a complex problem requiring a multifaceted solution. A holistic approach combining socio-economic development, effective governance, and security measures is the only sustainable way to address the underlying causes of the insurgency and restore peace and stability in affected regions. The path forward lies in bridging the development gap, ensuring justice, and fostering trust between the state and its citizens.