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### Naxalism in India

The word **Naxal**, **Naxalite** or **Naksalvadi** is a generic term used to refer to militant Communist groups operating in different parts of India under different organizational envelopes. In the eastern states of the mainland India (Bihar, West Bengal and Orissa), they are usually known as, or refer to themselves as Maoists while in southern states like Kerala they are known under other titles. They have been declared as a terrorist organization under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act of India (1967).

The term 'Naxal' derives from the name of the village Naxalbari in the state of West Bengal, India, where the movement had its origin. The Naxals are considered far-left radical communists, supportive of Maoist political sentiment and ideology. Their origin can be traced to the split in 1967 of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), leading to the formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). Initially the movement had its centre in West Bengal. In later years, it spread into less developed areas of rural central and eastern India, such as Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh through the activities of underground groups like the Communist Party of India (Maoist).

As of 2009, Naxalites were active across approximately 220 districts in twenty states of India accounting for about 40 percent of India's geographical area, They are especially concentrated in an area known as the "Red corridor", where they control 92,000 square kilometers. According to India's intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing, 20,000 armed cadre Naxalites were operating in addition to 50,000 regular cadres and their growing influence prompted Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to declare them to be the most serious internal threat to India's national security.

In February 2009, the Indian Central government announced its plans for broad, co-ordinated operations in all affected states (Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal), to plug all possible escape routes of Naxalites.

### **Naxalism: Biggest Threat to India**

A nightmare is beginning to unfold in the heart of India: latest intelligence reports say that armed Naxalites have a presence in 170 districts in 15 states of India as of now, and spreading wide and far.

Just months back, the Naxals were present only in 156 districts in 13 states. Not just numbers, what adds to the administration's worry is that they are armed with sophisticated weapons.

From the peasant uprising in Naxalbari village in Darjeeling district of West Bengal in May 1967, the movement is today a complex web that covers some 15 states of India, and with active links to the Maoists of Nepal.

When the group started under the leadership of people like Kanu Sanyal and Charu Majumdar in West Bengal it was still part of Communist Part of India (Marxist), but split away, took to underground and stayed there to build a powerful network spanning hundreds of villages.

In 1969 they had floated the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). The group has split several times and some of the have returned to the democratic process.

Security agencies began to worry afresh in September 2004 when two of India's leading armed movements, the Maoist Communist Centre and the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), popularly called the People's War Group, merged to form the Communist Party of India (Maoist).

## History

The term Naxalites comes from Naxalbari, a small village in West Bengal, where a section of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM) led by Charu Majumdar, Kanu Sanyal and Jangal Santhal initiated a violent uprising in 1967. On May 18, 1967, the Siliguri Kishan Sabha, of which Jangal was the president, declared their readiness to adopt armed struggle to redistribute land to the landless. The following week, a sharecropper near Naxalbari village was attacked by the landlord's men over a land dispute. On May 24, when a police team arrived to arrest the peasant leaders, they were ambushed by a group of tribals led by Jangal Santhal, and a police inspector was killed in a hail of arrows. This event encouraged many Santhal tribals and other poor people to join the movement and to start attacking local landlords.

Charu Majumdar, inspired by the doctrines of Mao Zedong, provided ideological leadership for the Naxalbari movement, advocating that Indian peasants and lower class tribals overthrow the government and upper classes by force. A large number of urban elites were also attracted to the ideology, which spread through Majumdar's writings, particularly the 'Historic Eight Documents' which formed the basis of Naxalite ideology. In 1967 Naxalites organized the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR), and later broke away from CPM. Violent uprisings were organized in several parts of the country. In 1969 the AICCCR gave birth to the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI(ML)).

Practically all Naxalite groups trace their origin to the CPI(ML). A separate offshoot from the beginning was the Maoist Communist Centre, which evolved out of the Dakshin Desh-group. The MCC later fused with the People's War Group to form the Communist Party of India (Maoist). A third offshoot was that of the Andhra revolutionary communists, mainly represented by the UCCRI(ML), following the mass line legacy of T. Nagi Reddy, which broke with the AICCCR at an early stage.

During the 1970s the movement was fragmented into disputing factions. By 1980 it was estimated that around 30 Naxalite groups were active, with a combined membership of 30,000. A 2004 Indian home ministry estimate puts numbers at that time as "9,300 hardcore underground cadre... [holding] around 6,500 regular weapons beside a large number of unlicensed country-made arms". According to Judith Vidal-Hall (2006), "More recent figures put the strength of the movement at 15,000, and claim the guerrillas control an estimated one fifth of India's forests, as well as being active in 160 of the country's 604 administrative districts. India's Research and Analysis Wing, believed in 2006 that 20,000 Naxals were involved in the growing insurgency.

Today some Naxalite groups have become legal organisations participating in parliamentary elections, such as the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation. Others, such as the Communist Party of India (Maoist) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Janashakti, are engaged in armed guerrilla struggles.

On 6 April, 2010 Naxalites launched the biggest assault in the history of the Naxalite movement by killing 76 security personnel. The attack was launched by up to 1000 Naxalites in a well-planned attack, killing an estimated 76 CRPF policemen in two separate ambushes and wounding 50 others, in the jungles of Chattisgarh's Dantewada district. On

17th May naxals blew up a bus on Dantewda-sukhma road in Chhattisgarh, killing 15 policemen and 20 civilians. In third Major attack by Naxals on 29th June, at least 26 personnels of Indian Centre Reserve Forces (CRPF) were killed in Narayanpur district of Chhattisgarh.

## Violence in Bengal

The Naxalites gained a strong presence amongst the radical sections of the student movement in Calcutta. Students left school to join the Naxalites. Majumdar, to entice more students into his organisation, declared that revolutionary warfare was to take place not only in the rural areas as before, but everywhere and spontaneously. Thus Majumdar declared an "annihilation line", a dictum that Naxalites should assassinate individual "class enemies" such as landlords, businessmen, university teachers, police officers, politicians of both Right and Left) and others.

Throughout Calcutta, schools were shut down. Naxalites took over Jadavpur University and used the machine shop facilities to make pipe guns to attack the police. Their headquarters became Presidency College, Kolkata. The Naxalites found supporters among some of the educated elite, and Delhi's prestigious St. Stephen's College, alma mater of many contemporary Indian leaders and thinkers, became a hotbed of Naxalite activities.

The Chief Minister, Siddhartha Shankar Ray of the Congress Party, instituted strong counter-measures against the Naxalites. The West Bengal police fought back to stop the Naxalites. The house of Somen Mitra, the Congress MLA of Sealdah, was turned into a torture chamber where Naxal students from Presidency College and CU were incarcerated illegally by Police and the Congress cadres. CPI-M cadres were also involved in the "State terror". After suffering losses and facing the public rejection of Majumdar's "annihilation line", the Naxalites alleged human rights violations by the West Bengal police, who responded that the state was effectively fighting a civil war and that democratic pleasantries had no place in a war, especially when the opponent did not fight within the norms of democracy and civility.

Large sections of the Naxal movement began to question Majumdar's leadership. In 1971 the CPI(ML) was split, as the Satyanarayan Singh revolted against Majumdar's leadership. In 1972 Majumdar was arrested by the police and died in Alipore Jail. His death accelerated the fragmentation of the movements.

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