

‘The origins, influence, suppression and resilience of the Maoist/Naxalite movement in India, c. 1967 – present’.

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Introduction

On 25 May 1967, in one village called Prasadujot in the Naxalbari bloc in the West Bengal state of India, a group of peasants tried forcibly to seize land, to which the peasants had legal entitlement, from the landlords who controlled it. They were led by two left-wing activists Kanu Sanyal (1929-2010) and Jangal Santhal (?-1981), and supported by a communist ideologue, Charu Mazumdar (1918-1972).ⁱ This resulted in a violent confrontation between the peasants and the police, who were supporting the landlords. This seemingly isolated revolt in a far flung village eventually gave birth to a movement that attracted the attention of the world. An English-language journalist or commentator gave it the name ‘Naxalite’, and this name has stuck and has even been adopted by the supporters of the movement. The word ‘Naxalite’ is used in India both to describe the movement as well as to characterise an individual or an organisation associated with the movement e.g. ‘a Naxalite guerrilla’, ‘a Naxalite activist’ ‘a pro-Naxalite civil rights group’ or ‘a Naxalite sympathiser’. Almost 50 years on from what seemed at first to be an isolated revolt, the fall out for Indian politics may be judged from a remark in 2010 by the then Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh. Singh, the main architect of the neo-liberal economic reforms initiated in India in July 1991 when he was Finance Minister, characterised the Naxalite movement as the single biggest internal security threat to India, and urged that it needed to be controlled to keep India on its path of economic growth that he had initiated.ⁱⁱ

This paper looks at the background to the emergence of this movement; the significance of that May 1967 revolt, the immediate implications of that revolt for the left and

bourgeois politics in India, and very briefly the long term implications of the rise of the Naxalite movement. I was personally involved in this movement as a student activist and supporter, although I resisted the attempts by the 'party' leadership to involve me in acts of violence. However, although my activism amounted only to the study and dissemination of the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin and [Mao Tse-tung](#) as an undergraduate economics student at Panjab University, Chandigarh (India), I was arrested in 1971, tortured and narrowly escaped being killed.ⁱⁱⁱ

The movement's first phase came to an end in 1972 but it has resurfaced in a different form quite powerfully in the last decade.^{iv} Although most of the movement's history relates to the years and decades after 1968, it has a close relationship with the events of 1968, as well as the overall political culture of India and the world around that time.

Background: Parliamentary democracy, armed insurrection and Maoism in India's Communist movement 1947-1967.

The roots of the Naxalite movement lie in India's communist movement. The Communist Party of India (CPI) was born shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution. After the degeneration of the Bolshevik Revolution and the rise of Stalinism in Russia, a very small current in the movement was sympathetic to the Left opposition led by Trotsky.^v The bulk of the CPI went with Stalin not because of any specific admiration for Stalin or his policies but out of loyalty to the Soviet Union, considered then as the mother country of communism. Stalin's influence on the CPI's policies and strategy continued until his death in 1953.^{vi} The Soviet Union's role in defeating Nazi Germany ensured that Stalin was well regarded not only by CPI members and sympathisers but also more widely in India. This broader social approval in its turn reinforced the communist movement's admiration for Stalin and the USSR.

The CPI participated in the anti-colonial struggle against British rule in India but also directed its criticism at the 'bourgeois' leadership of the main Indian nationalist party- the Indian National Congress (INC) - led by Gandhi and Nehru. There were several other currents in Indian people's struggle against British colonial rule which were influenced in varying degrees by the communist ideas. The most well-known was the group led by the Indian revolutionary Bhagat Singh, who played a leading role in organising terrorist attacks against the symbols of the colonial establishment in India.^{vii} In contrast to the movement led by Gandhi, which adopted a path of non-violent resistance and struggle against colonial rule, Bhagat Singh epitomised the goal of violently overthrowing colonial rule.^{viii} This competition between peaceful and armed struggle paths to India's independence left a permanent legacy in India's communist movement. Soon after India became independent in 1947, the CPI was riven with factional conflict between two tendencies - one advocating participation in the parliamentary democratic institutions set up under the constitution of the new republic, and the other advocating a path of armed insurrection. At the CPI's second congress at Calcutta in February, 1948, the armed insurrection tendency won the ideological and organisation battle. The so-called 'Zhdanov Doctrine' of insurrection, named after CPSU ideologist Andrei Zhdanov, was accepted and rationalised on the premise that India was not really free, but only a 'semi-colony of British imperialism'.^{ix} The conflict between the two tendencies became accentuated by the success of the Chinese revolution under Mao's leadership. The faction deriving inspiration from the Chinese success and advocating the path of armed insurrection gained leadership temporarily and launched an armed uprising in the Telangana region of South India in 1946. [DATE?] This uprising was brutally crushed militarily by the Indian government led by Nehru, the first prime minister of India. The armed insurrection attempt having failed, the constitutionalist tendency gained the upper hand in the CPI leadership in 1951. [DATE?] As a result, the CPI started participating actively in central

parliamentary and state assembly elections after 1951. [DATE?] The CPI became the main opposition party in India's central parliament and remained so for most of the 1950s. The greatest success of the CPI was to win a majority in the elections to the state assembly of the south Indian state of Kerala in 1957. This was the first time a democratically elected communist government had been formed in India,^x) and only the second time in the world - the tiny republic of San Marino in Italy had an elected communist administration from 1945 and 1957.^{xi}

The success of the democratic constitutional path did not end the struggle between the two tendencies in the CPI. The Sino-Soviet conflict from the late 1950s onwards sharpened this ideological contestation between the peaceful path supported by the Soviet Union and the armed struggle path supported by China.^{xii} . The Sino-Indian border conflict in 1962 brought these two lines into sharp opposition. The CPI formally supported the Indian national government of Nehru and accused China of launching an armed attack on India. This decision was opposed by a substantial, though not majority, section of the top party leadership, including some leading lights of India's communist movement. This section expressed solidarity with China and criticised the Nehru government for military aggression against socialist China. This pro-China section characterised and denounced the political position of the pro-Indian nationalist leadership of the CPI as 'revisionist'. The charge was that the main CPI leadership had abandoned the revolutionary path and had become collaborationist with the Indian state. The pro-China section of the CPI leadership was arrested and imprisoned by the Nehru government. The opposing tendencies in the party became so acutely polarised that the pro-China section eventually left the CPI in 1964 and formed the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M), written more generally as CPM). The formation of the CPM coincided with the start of the decline of the Indian National Congress that had dominated the anti-colonial struggle and had controlled power at the

federal centre and in the states in the post-colonial era. Nehru, who represented the dominance of the INC, died in 1964, and in the 1967 elections, the party was defeated in several states by anti-Congress united fronts of left, right and the centre. For the communist movement, it opened new opportunities of capturing and sharing power in certain states. The CPM, which had projected itself as a militant communist party keeping open the option of armed struggle, jumped at the opportunity of using constitutionally guaranteed power through elections, with the intention partly of ‘wrecking the constitution from within’ as a leading CPM leader and strategist E. M. S. Namboodiripad had once put it.^{xiii} However, this strategy of using the parliamentary path disillusioned the more militant cadre who had left the CPI and had joined the CPM in the hope of launching militant class struggles and, if necessary, armed actions against the class enemies. The parliamentary and armed struggle paths came into sharp confrontation with each other on that fateful day in May 1967 when the peasants led by Kanu Sanyal and Jangal Santhal forcibly occupied the land and forced the landlords to flee. The West Bengal united front government, in which the CPM was a major partner, sent the state police to repress the rebellious peasants. The police firing led to the death of 11 peasants, including 8 women and 2 children.^{xiv} The Naxalite movement was born that day and the peasants killed that day became the martyrs of the movement. The CPM was further split. One section supported the ‘revolutionary peasants’, while the dominant section supported the party against the ‘left-wing adventurism’ of the Naxalbari activists. Beijing Radio and the *People's Daily* from China hailed the Naxalbari rebellion, calling it ‘a spring thunder in India’. The formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist- Leninist) (CPI (ML)) was formally declared at an impressive rally in Calcutta on April 22, 1969 (Lenin’s birthday). The CPI (ML) declared its open allegiance to China and Mao Tse-tung thought and announced that its aim was the overthrow of the Indian state through an armed uprising of the Indian peasantry that would liberate the rural areas from class enemies. The liberated zones

would be used to create a red army that would eventually surround the cities and take them over, leading to the overthrow the Indian state. The CPI (ML) proclaimed itself to be the revolutionary party that would lead the revolutionary march of the red army from the rural to the urban areas. It denounced the CPM as 'neo-revisionist' implying that the CPM merely talked about revolution but in practice was following the same reformist parliamentary path it had denounced when it split from the 'revisionist' CPI.

The significance of the 1967 revolt

This raises several inter-connected and to an extent overlapping questions. What did this revolt represent in terms of the political culture of the time locally, nationally and globally? What were the key burning issues in India's post-colonial history at that point of time that were highlighted by that revolt? What were the connections of that revolt with the 1968 radical upsurge in countries of advanced capitalism? What was the relationship of that revolt to developments in the global communist movement? What challenges did the revolt pose for Marxist theory? This list of questions is not in any way exhaustive. This is merely a way of starting to make a sense of that revolt.

As far as the question of political culture of the time locally, nationally and globally is concerned, at the local level or state level in West Bengal, there was a tension between the growing militancy and strength of the communist movement in the state, and the restraint being imposed on that militancy by the fact that communist parties were part of the governance. At a national level, the Congress party was declining in importance in some regions of India while the party retained control at the federal-central level. At a global level, the contestation between the Chinese Communist Party and the CPSU for control of the global communist movement was being reflected at this local/regional and national level.

One obvious issue in India's post-colonial history at that time that was highlighted by that revolt seemed to be the decline of the Congress party and the emergence of the tensions in Centre-State relations as a result of that. Equally important was the unresolved agrarian question of land ownership and control. The dreams and hopes that had been raised when India became independent of direct colonial control, could no longer be sustained after about two decades of independence. The period of hope and optimism of the 1950s and perhaps early 1960s was giving way to a period of disenchantment, discontentment and revolt against the established order. This change in the national mood was beginning to be seen in the themes of Indian cinema too.

The revolt was certainly connected with the global radicalisation of politics around 1968. This link was perhaps not obvious in the beginning, when the land question seemed to be the main concern of the movement, but the subsequent spread of the movement among the educated youth throughout the country signalled that connection very clearly, especially in cities like Kolkata (in West Bengal), Hyderabad (in Andhra Pradesh) and to a lesser extent Delhi and Chandigarh (where I was then a student).

The revolt was most clearly linked with the schism in the world communist movement and the struggle between the CPC and CPSU for control and influence over that movement. This contestation took different forms in different places, but in India it expressed itself mainly in the split between supporters of the parliamentary path and the armed struggle path.

Interestingly, this split was not along generational lines as might have been expected, with the younger members opting for armed struggle and the older ones opting for the parliamentary path. For example, the most prominent Naxalite leader in Punjab between 1967 and 1971[WHEN?], Baba Bujha Singh, was in his 80s and he was not the only one in the mature age group.^{xv} Later on during the period between 1972 and 1975, [WHEN?] the influence of the movement was mainly among students and younger school teachers.

The most challenging issue for Marxist theory raised by the revolt was the importance of peasantry in the struggle for overthrowing capitalism (or feudalism or semi-feudalism) in less developed capitalist economies in the Third World. The *Monthly Review* school of thought certainly theorised peasantry as a revolutionary class in line with the Maoist theory while *New Left Review* (just to take an example) criticised this sort of ‘Third Worldism’. Another important question was that of armed struggle and revolution versus parliamentary path and reforms.

The immediate implications of the 1967 revolt for the left and bourgeois politics in India

There were three armed communist rebellions in India right after independence in 1947. All three rebellions revolved around control over and ownership of land and produce from the land. One was in the Telangana region of the erstwhile southern state of Hyderabad which coincided with India’s independence from British colonial rule in 1947;^{xvi} the second one was in Tebhaga region in West Bengal in 1948,^{xvii} and the third one was a Lal Communist Party (Red Communist Party) led revolt in the erstwhile PEPSU region of the present state of Punjab in 1948.^{xviii} All three rebellions were militarily crushed by the Indian state, with large scale human rights violations in all three regions. Paradoxical as it may sound, the military suppression of these three armed rebellions spread the mass influence of the communist movement in these three states. This can be attributed primarily to two developments: first, the land reforms introduced by the Indian state to take the heat out of the communist movement, which ended up increasing the popularity of the communists, and second, the over-all global political culture which favoured communism in the 1950s.

The land reforms boosted communist influence because immediately after the Indian state had suppressed the armed rebellions in the three states, it initiated land reforms, mainly in the form of granting better propriety rights to the peasantry in order to deal with the

perceived socio-economic causes of the rebellions. In the mass consciousness of the peasantry, it was not the Indian state which was seen as their main benefactor - it was the communists, whose multiple sacrifices were seen as having forced the Indian state to grant concession to the peasants and tenants. In all three states - Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Punjab - the electoral performance of the CPI was impressive in the 1950s. This suggests that the two distinct paths in communist politics - that of armed struggle and that of parliamentary work – could be complementary. This is something that has not been recognised either in the political perspectives of both the main tendencies- the armed struggle tendency and the parliamentary tendency- in the Indian communist movement, or in the academic literature on the subject. The failure to recognise this complementarity, and an over-emphasis on the competitiveness between the two tendencies have contributed to sectarianism in the Indian communist movement,^{xix} with destructive implications for the communist movement both in India, and, perhaps, beyond.^{xx}

On the contribution of global political culture in the 1950s to the growth in communist influence, it is important to note that in the post-Great Depression and post-Second World period, there was general acceptance, both in the advanced capitalist economies and in the developing capitalist economies in the Third World, that the state and planning had positive roles to play in economic and political governance. The successful Soviet industrialisation of the 1930s - despite its severe human costs - and the success of the Chinese revolution in 1949, together with the hegemony of Keynesian welfare policies in the countries of advanced capitalism, had increased the appeal of socialist and communist ways of organising societies. This overall global political culture contributed to communist influence in India and other developing capitalist economies.

In view of all this, we can interpret the emergence of the Naxalite movement in 1967 as an off shoot of the continuing strengthening of communist influence in India in the 1960s.

This influence was not only expressed in the impressive electoral performances of the communist parties but extended beyond to the cultural sphere of literature, cinema and theatre; and to the social sphere in the form of trade unions, peasant organisations and student unions dominated by communists or sometimes non-communist socialists. The increasing communist influence in the country led, perhaps, to an overestimation of its potential, and the Naxalite movement was one outcome of this. In its turn, this over-optimism revived and strengthened the armed struggle heritage of the earlier period, and some participants of these earlier struggles became reenergised, and emerged as prominent participants in the new struggle (e.g. Baba Bujha Singh and Baba Hari Singh Mirgind in Punjab). However, although the Naxalite movement resembled the 1940s/50s struggles in terms of primacy it gave to armed struggle, there was also one critical difference. The three struggles of the 1940s and 1950s were localised. They had no links with movements in other parts of India, even though these localised struggles were influenced by external ideological directions from the Soviet Union. The Naxalite movement, in contrast, started as a spontaneous local conflict but became very quickly an all-India phenomenon, spreading to Andhra Pradesh and Kerala in the South; Bihar and, to a lesser extent UP in the Hindi heartland; and Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and, to some extent, Delhi in the North.^{xxi}

The Naxalite movement was also crushed in the same manner as the previous armed Communist rebellions, through very severe state repression. The scale of human rights violations was much higher and geographically more widespread than it had been during the earlier period - except perhaps in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh where in the 1940s/1950s there were mass executions, especially of Muslim peasants that have remained under-reported.^{xxii}

The suppression of the Naxalite movement involved massive human rights violations. These included summary executions in police custody (called 'encounter killings'), cases of

brutal torture leading to death, such as those of Charu Mazumdar^{xxiii} and Baba Bujha Singh,^{xxiv} and long periods of imprisonment. Such treatment gave birth to civil liberties and human rights organisations that were initially focussed on the release of political prisoners because thousands of Naxalite activists and sympathisers had been arrested and imprisoned. Some of the civil rights organisations involved in the campaign to demand release of political organisations were not politically sympathetic to Naxalites' armed struggle methods but they viewed brutal suppression of the movement as a danger to the survival of democracy in India. This potential danger to democracy in India made them realise the necessity of strengthening the political culture of civil liberties and human rights^{xxv} [SHOULD THIS POINT BE DEVELOPED A BIT HERE?] The experience of crushing the Naxalite movement led to greater militarisation of the Indian state, and the knowledge and practice the armed forces gained have since been used to crush other anti-Indian state nationalist rebellions in Kashmir, Punjab and the North East, as well as the reinvented Naxalite movement more recently, especially in the states of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand in central India.^{xxvi}

This increasing militarisation of the Indian state has occurred simultaneously with the incorporation of the mainstream constitutionalist communist parties into the political culture of Indian establishment. The CPI and CPM have become increasingly vocal supporters of Indian nationalism resembling the nationalism of the two major bourgeois parties in India- the Indian National Congress championing secular/semi-secular Indian nationalism and the Bharatiya Janata Party articulating the vision of Hindu nationalism. Undoubtedly, CPI and CPM are opposed to the virulent Hindu nationalist agenda of BJP which has been responsible for sharpening sectarian Hindu communal mobilisation against the minority Muslim community and to some extent against the even smaller Christian minority community. However, the constant reiteration by CPI and CPM of their commitment to the 'unity and integrity of India' which appears sometimes as an attempt to present these parties as not

being less patriotic than BJP or Congress, has pitted them against smaller nationalities struggles in India and feeds into the political culture of considering territorial integrity of India as non-negotiable. This political perspective puts CPI and CPM into an uneasy company with the Hindu nationalism of BJP which also harps on the territorial integrity of India as non-negotiable question ^{xxvii} [IS THIS ENTIRELY FAIR – AREN'T THE CPI AND CPM OPPOSED TO *HINDU* NATIONALISM AS A DIVISIVE FORCE AGAINST *INDIAN* NATIONAL UNITY? STATEMENTS ON THEIR WEBSITES WOULD SUGGEST THEY ARE VERY CRITICAL OF THE BJP'S COMMUNALISM.] The constitutionalist communist parties' constant invocation of their Indian patriotism has now made them accepted as respectable in the Indian state's official culture.

The initial rise of the Naxalite movement from 1967, its suppression and subsequent re-emergence as CPI (Maoist) on 21 September, 2004 as a powerful armed movement has gone through various ups and downs. The party's network is spread over 160 odd districts in at least ten states of India, spanning some 400,000 square kilometres, equivalent to one-eighths of the total Indian land mass. ^{xxviii}

The long term implications of the rise of the Naxalite movement

Of the many long term political implications of the rise of Naxalite movement from the viewpoint of the left politics in India, two are particularly significant. The first is the incorporation of the constitutionalist communist parties into India's ruling establishment. It is possible that the constitutionalist communist parties might have been incorporated into India's political establishment even if there was no Naxalite movement. However, the Naxalite's rejection of India's constitution and their support to smaller nationality struggles for independence/secession from India when contrasted with the constitutionalist communist parties' repeated allegiance to India's constitution and support for India's territorial integrity against secessionist movements has made the constitutionalist communist parties appear

particularly respectable and acceptable in the official state culture. [NO CAUSAL RELATIONSHIP HAS BEEN DEMONSTRATED HERE. THE EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNIST PARTIES EVERYWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD WOULD SUGGEST THAT INCORPORATION INTO THE ESTABLISHMENT IS THEIR USUAL FATE, WHETHER OR NOT THERE ARE ARMED INSURGENCIES. THE ROLE OF NAXALISM IN THIS PROCESS NEEDS TO BE *SHOWN*, NOT MERELY ASSERTED.]

The second important political implication is the emergence of a sustainable communist tendency in India wedded to the path of armed struggle. This armed struggle communist tendency has not only survived various downturns in the communist movement in India, it is, in fact, seems to be competing with the constitutional communist tendency as politically more significant force. There is now little evidence of the complementarity between the constitutionalist path and the revolutionary armed struggle path discussed earlier. The relationship between them seems to be almost exclusively competitive.^{xxix} This led to violent conflicts between the Naxalites and the activists of the CPM in West Bengal in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This bloody saga of tit-for-tat killings of the cadres of the two tendencies was one of the most shameful periods of sectarianism in India's communist movement.

A long term consequence of the emergence of the Naxalite movement of the 1960s is that there is now a limited degree of co-existence between this communist tendency (currently called the Communist Party of India (Maoists)) and the Indian state. This coexistence has assumed a specific character - the movement led by the CPI (Maoists) is contained within the most underdeveloped regions of India that are resource rich. The Indian state has de facto accepted that several districts in central India constitute a Naxalite area of influence. Nandini Sundar, a Delhi-based left-wing sociologist who has done extensive field work in the central Indian regions where the current Maoist movement is concentrated, points out that the Indian security forces engaged in combing operations against the Maoists control

the roads leading to the areas of Maoist influence while “The Maoists control the jungles. In the frontlines of this battle are ordinary villagers who are being pitted against each other on a scale unparalleled in the history of Indian counterinsurgency’.’^{xxx} The CPI (Maoist) movement cannot expand beyond these contained areas, while the Indian state is not able to crush the movement in these areas without incurring significant security force losses and massive human rights violations.

This coexistence is, of course, temporary and riddled with tensions and perpetual conflict. At some stage the Indian capitalist class supported by international corporations may pressurise the state to launch a sustained armed attack on the CPI (Maoists) to wrest back the control of these regions of central India. International and national capital would certainly prefer to have unhindered access to these regions to get at their natural resources. Gautam Navlakha captures very succinctly the attraction of this resource rich region for Indian and global capital where he points out that when the central government speaks of Maoists obstructing development in tribal areas, it means the resistance Maoists are putting up against corporate exploitation of minerals, forests, water and land resources of adivasis [tribals]. He further points out that the capital intensive methods of production employed by corporations need skilled labour imported from outside and mere marginal employment of locals as unskilled low wage labour. In order to bypass laws requiring local consent, the documents are doctored or forged. Citing a study by India’s Planning Commission, Navlakha highlights that between 1951 and 1990, 40 million people were ‘moved out’ or displaced in rural and urban India and of these 40 per cent were tribals.’.^{xxxii} [NAVLAKHA MAY HAVE BEEN SUCCINCT, BUT THIS PASSAGE IS NOT. CAN WE CUT IT DOWN

SO THAT THE ESSENTIAL POINTS ARE MADE IN CONSIDERABLY
FEWER WORDS?]

The Indian state may well succumb to the pressure of global and Indian capital to push for unhindered access to these regions' natural resources. If it is able to muster sufficient national consensus to launch armed intrusions into these regions to break the Maoist resistance it will lead to human rights violations on an unprecedented scale. It will also further strengthen the militarisation of the Indian state. Such a scenario may be considered unthinkable now but history tells us that unthinkables do happen.

In one respect, the CPI (Maoist) perspective and strategy differs not only from the constitutionalist communist parties but also all other all-India parties. The CPI (Maoist) does not subscribe to the idea that India is one nation. It recognises the multiple nationalities in India and the right of these nations to self-determination.^{xxxii} If the political economy of India's capitalist development leads to sharper conflicts between multiple regional nationalist aspirations and the Centre representing one unified Indian nationalism, whether in secular or Hindu garb, alliances may emerge between communist revolutionaries and regional nationalist formations against the Centre. The Centre may not be able to crush these alliances.^{xxxiii} If the constitutionalist communist parties (mainly the CPI and CPM)^{xxxiv} cease siding ideologically with the parties of centralised and unitarist Indian nationalism and come to recognise the progressive potentialities of regional nationalisms in India, this could greatly enhance the power of the communist-regional nationalism alliance known in Indian political discourse as Third Alternative or Third Front.^{xxxv} That historical possibility for re-imagining India's future still persists.

Conclusion

The Naxalite movement emerged from the conflict between two tendencies in the global and Indian communist movement - the parliamentary constitutionalist path and the armed struggle path. Its timing and political approach was also shaped by global political movements such as the 1968 radical upsurge. In its first phase, [1967-69] its support base was mainly among the peasants and tribal communities, and in the second phase, [1969-72 DATES NEEDED HERE] its main support base shifted to urban students and youth. During this second phase, it represented some of the radicalism and the iconoclasms of the wider global student and youth movement of 1968. After suffering a decline from mid 1970s to late 1970s, [THROUGHOUT THAT DECADE, OR FROM A CERTAIN POINT?] over the past three decades the Naxalite movement has re-emerged, especially since 2004, as a powerful challenger to the hegemony of the centralist Indian state. The revived movement has taken a leading role in developing social welfare, human developmental and educational activities in the tribal areas where it has operated for decades and where it has de facto administrative control. Additionally, the social base, and even the leadership profile, of the movement has significantly changed from urban middle class students and intelligentsia to tribal young men and, even more significantly, to tribal women. Again, Navlakha has described this social welfare and educational work very well: 'For nearly three decades, Maoists have lived, mobilised, radicalised and empowered the tribals to set up their own "governance". What began in the early 1980s as a campaign against forest, revenue and police departments and money-lenders started to address 'internal contradictions' in adivasi society, including land ownership... And the Maoists took up issues of fixing prices for forest produce, the most important being raising of prices of 'tendu patta' from Rs 2 for 100

bundles (of 100 leaves each) in the early 1980s to Rs 80 for the same by mid-1990s. The 'janata sarkar' [Parallel Peoples' Government] runs schools, health system, rural credit and seed bank, small irrigation projects, etc... They have also introduced social reforms, pushed gender sensitive reforms within the adivasi society including inside families... In north Bihar, ... Maoists are helping people to tide over acute water scarcity in Gaya district of central Bihar. After three consecutive years of scarce rainfall, water shortage was expected. While the administration slept, the cadres are digging wells, paying for repairs of hand pumps, installing new ones, getting well-to-do farmers to use diesel pumps to create water reservoir for village use, as well as ensuring equitable distribution of water... Thus, the Maoists pose a challenge unlike anything posed by other insurgencies. ^{xxxvi} , [AGAIN, THIS PASSAGE COULD USEFULLY BE SHORTENED]

Regarding the shift in the social base and leadership profile of the movement to the tribal men and women, the best testimony comes from a participant in the movement. Bachcha Prasad Singh, an activist of the movement, who was released from Punjab's Patiala Central Jail on 31 May 2016, provided an insider view of this aspect of the movement in an interview he gave to Shailza Sharma: There was a time when majority of the leadership was among the students and intellectuals from middle class and in fact the current leadership is a continuity of the intelligentsia who joined at that time... but presently, a large majority from the peasantry and Adivasis are forming a part of the on-ground leading forces. The revolutionary movement is trying to cultivate a leadership amongst the Adivasis... . Earlier there was a tradition of intellectuals joining the revolutionary

movement from Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Punjab and other States; however, this has seen a slowdown since the revolutionary movement is weak in urban and plain areas. . It is a positive aspect of the movement that the leading forces are Adivasis, however, if the movement has to be advanced, the leadership has to come from students and intellectuals.^{xxxvii} [CONDENSE, PLEASE]

Though this view reflects the outdated Leninist view of the party where intellectuals bring the ‘scientific consciousness’ of socialism to the working masses, he shows the growing Adivasi character of leadership that is reflective of the mass base of the party.

The long term legacy of the 1960s Naxalite movement in India is fourfold: one, it has given birth to a sustainable communist tendency following the extra parliamentary path of armed struggle; two, it has given birth to a human rights/democratic rights/civil liberties movement in India; third, it has produced at least two generations of academics and journalists inspired by the movement in the direction of Marxism, and fourth, its impact has been seen in quite significant ways in varieties of creative literary and artistic productions. We have already discussed the first two and would briefly indicate the evidence for the third and the fourth. Some of the leading Indian social scientists whether working in India or abroad demonstrate the impact of the Naxalite movement in their work as Marxism-inspired scholars. Just to mention a few: the economists Amit Bhaduri and Paresh Chattopadhyay, the political scientists Randhir Singh^{xxxviii} and Manoranjan Mohanty, the sociologist Nalini Sundar and historian Ranjit Guha. In the field of journalism, the best known Indian social scientist journal *Economic and Political Weekly* has often contributions from journalists whose work clearly shows the influence of the Naxalite movement such as Sumanta Banerjee and Gautam Navlakha. The late Samar Sen who edited the weekly *Frontier* for many years was a hugely respected journalist.

Regarding the impact of the movement on literary and artistic productions, it is most well known in Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Bengal and Kerala. In Punjab, the poets Pash, Sant Ram Udasi and Lal Singh Dil^{xxxix}, and the theatre artist Gursharan Singh clearly articulate the impact of the movement. In Andhra Pradesh, Naxalite folk songs have become part of the mainstream and Gummadi Vittal Rao, popularly known as Gaddar (born 1949), is a celebrated Telgu poet who openly supports the Naxalite movement. In Bengal, Satyajit Ray's 1971 film *Seemabaddha* was based on the life of an upper class family during the Naxalite Movement, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas made a critically acclaimed film *The Naxalites* in 1980, and a 2005 movie called *Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi*, directed by Sudhir Mishra, was set against the backdrop of the Naxalite movement. From Kerala, Satchidanandan is a nationally and internationally recognised poet who was inspired by the Naxalite movement. [SOME EXAMPLES OF THIS WOULD BE VERY WELCOME, ESPECIALLY THE LAST 2.]

Politically, the single most important threat to the left and democratic movement in India is the rise of Hindu nationalists to power at the central/federal government and in some states, given the clear fascist/semi-fascist tendencies in Hindu nationalism. The leadership of the Naxalite movement seems aware of the challenges this poses for the left and democratic movements in India. As Bachcha Prasad Singh put it in the interview cited above: 'In my opinion the way to confront the present scenario is to form a strong resistance and a broader united front against Hindutva forces, it does not matter if this united front is a collection of the parliamentary left, radical left or socialist faction, a united front is required. A unanimous and public backlash against imperialism, Hindu fundamentalism and State repression from a cultural, economic or political front, is the need of the hour; on individual and local levels, without emphasising the need for any sort of

organizational backing, we have to create strong counteractive forces. It is the time to stay united, to forget our dogmatic and ideological differences and remember what Lenin said ‘divided we fall, united we win’.^{xl}

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See Bibek Debroy, ‘The last of the three’, *The Indian Express*, March 25 2010.

ii See The Hindu (2010). ‘Naxalism biggest threat to internal security: Manmohan’, May 24 (<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/naxalism-biggest-threat-to-internal-security-manmohan/article436781.ece>). He made this remark first in July 2006 and repeated it several times in slightly different words at different forums. His latest reported remark was in 2010 that is cited here.

iii I recount this nightmarish experience in some detail in Chapter 1 of Pritam Singh, *Economy, Culture and Human Rights: Turbulence in Punjab, India and Beyond* (New Delhi: Three Essays Collective, 2010), and in Pritam Singh, ‘Experiencing Torture and Human Rights Violations: Reflections on Self-Experience’ in J. Rajan and O. Dwivedi (eds.) *Human Rights in Postcolonial India*, New York/London/Delhi: Routledge, 2016.

iv A good and detailed account of the movement until 1984 is Shantha Sinha, ‘The Naxal Challenge (1967-1984)’, 2010, available online on http://www.academia.edu/10453796/The_Naxal_Challenge_1967-84. Other scholarly studies on the movement are: Sumanta Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution: The Naxalite Uprising*. Select book Service Syndicate, New Delhi, 1984; Sumanta Banerjee, ‘Beyond Naxalbari’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 41, No. 29, 22-28 July 2006, pp. 3159-3163; Vani K Barooah, ‘Deprivation, Violence, and Conflict: An Analysis of Naxalite Activity in the Districts of India’, *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, Vol 2, No.2, 2008, pp. 317-333); Raman Dixit, ‘Naxalite Movement in India: The State's Response’,

Journal of Defence Studies, Vol 4, No. 2, 2010, pp. 21-35; Oliver Vanden Eynde, 'Targets of violence: evidence from India's Naxalite conflict', *PSE Working Papers*, Paris-Jourdan Sciences Economiques, 2015 (<https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01202689>); Ramachandra Guha, 'Adivasis, Naxalites and Indian Democracy', 11 August 2007 *EPW* pp. 3305-3312; Tilak Das Gupta, (1993): 'Recent Developments in the Naxalite Movement', *Monthly Review*, Vol 45, 1993 pp 8-23; Tilak Das Gupta, 'Maoism in India: Ideology, Programme and Armed Struggle', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 41, No. 29 (22-28 July 2006, pp. 3172-3176; Manoranjan Mohanty, 'Challenges of Revolutionary Violence: The Naxalite Movement in Perspective', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 41, No. 29 (22-28 July 2006), pp. 3163-3168; Samar Sen, Debabrata Panda and Ashish Lahiri, *Naxalbari and After: A Frontier Anthology*, Vols 2, Kathashilpa, Calcutta, 1978; Prakash Singh, *The Naxalite Movement in India*, Rupa and Co, New Delhi, 1995; Rabindra Ray, *The Naxalites and Their Ideology*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1988.

^v This is based on several conversations with the late Prof A. R. Desai (1915-1994) who was one of the earliest Trotskyists in India.

^{vi} One account describes that four top leaders of the party (C. Rajeshwar Rao, M. Basavapunniah, Ajoy Kumar Ghosh and S. A. Dange) went to Moscow and met Stalin to seek his help in resolving the political conflict between two opposing factions, and 'After discussions with Stalin the differences were resolved temporarily' K. Gopolakrishnan, 'CPM THEN AND NOW. Coping with new realities', *The Tribune*, 11 January 1999.

^{vii} Given the current identification of 'terrorism' mainly with Islamic fundamentalism or attacks on innocents, there have been objections to the use of word 'terrorist' to describe Bhagat Singh and some of his and his associates' actions. These objections, though well

intentioned with the purpose of honouring the great revolutionary, overlook a whole tradition of revolutionary terrorism, which can be clearly differentiated from many of the actions of current strand of terrorism. The most significant difference is that revolutionary terrorism is clearly opposed to attacks on innocent/uninvolved civilians. Instead, it targets the symbols of oppression - powerful agents of the oppressive might of the state and the sources of the oppressive state's economic and political power. Additionally, revolutionary terrorism uses it as a part of the wider strategy to arouse and mobilise masses especially in periods of perceived demoralisation in mass struggles. My use of the word 'terrorist' to describe Bhagat Singh's actions is from this perspective of revolutionary terrorism. For further elaboration of Bhagat Singh's socialist ideology and his views on violence/non-violence, see Pritam Singh, Review article on S Irfan Habib's book *To Make the Deaf Hear: Ideology and Programme of Bhagat Singh and His Comrades*, (New Delhi, Three Essays Collective, 2007) in: *Journal of Punjab Studies*, Vol 14, No 2, Fall 2007, pp 297-304..

^{viii} See Ibid. Pritam Singh, 'Bhagat Singh, Gandhi and the British', *The Tribune*, (Chandigarh, India) 25 March 2015.

^{ix} See Gopolakrishnan, 'CPM THEN AND NOW.

^x See Thomas Johnson Nossiter, [*Communism in Kerala: A Study in Political Adaptation*](#). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982.

^{xi} See Manali Desai, [*State Formation and Radical Democracy in India*](#). Taylor & Francis, London, 2006, p. 142; Alan James Mayne, [*From Politics Past to Politics Future: An Integrated Analysis of Current and Emergent Paradigms*](#). Greenwood Publishing Group, Westport, Connecticut [place] 1999, p. 59.

xii See Bhupinder Brar, *Explaining Communist Crises*. Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1994. [PAGE NUMBER??]

xiii See Gopolakrishnan, *CPM THEN AND NOW*

xiv On the piece of land where the conflict led to the deaths, the CPI (ML) has put up busts of Lenin, Stalin, Mao and [Charu Majumder](#), and a memorial column erected there has the names of the people who died during the police shooting. The names are 1. Dhaneswari Devi (F), 2. Simaswari Mullick (F), 3. Nayaneswari Mullick (F), 4. Surubala Burman (F), 5. Sonamati Singh (F), 6. Fulmati Devi (F), 7. Samsari Saibani (F), 8. Gaudrau Saibani (M), 9. Kharsingh Mullick (M) and ‘two children’. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naxalbari>

xv Baba Bujha Singh was reported by the police to have been killed in an ‘encounter’ with them on 28 July, 1971. See Singh, *Economy, Culture and Human Rights* [PAGE NUMBER?? 184-85] for more details on this killing by the police and the civil society response to it.

xvi See Shantha Sinha, *Maoists in Andhra Pradesh*. Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1989, for a detailed study of the movement in Andhra Pradesh. Telangana region was part of Andhra Pradesh until 2014 when it acquired the status of a state in the Indian federation. See also K Balagopal, ‘Maoist Movement in Andhra Pradesh’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 41, No. 29, 22-28 July 2006 pp. 3183-3187.

xvii See Rabindra Nath Mandal, *The Tebhaga Movement in Kakdwip*. Kolkata: Ratna Prakashan, 2001.

xviii See Gurharpal Singh, *Communism in Punjab: A Study of the Movement up to 1967*. Delhi: Ajanta, 1994; Bhagwan Josh, *Communist Movement in Punjab 1926–1947*. Delhi: Anupama Publications, 1979.

xix I have discussed this dimension of complementarity versus competitiveness in relations between the Indian communist movement and the Gandhi-led Congress movement for India’s independence in Pritam Singh, ‘Marxism, Indian State and Punjab’. *International*

Journal of Punjab Studies, vol. 4, no. 2, 1997, pp. 237–50., and between the revolutionary socialist Bhagat Singh tendency and the no-violent ‘mere transfer of power’ Gandhian tendency in Pritam Singh, ‘Political Economy of Centralisation in India: Some Critical Notes from a Decentralist Perspective’, in B. Nayak, ed. *Nationalizing Crisis: The Political Economy of Public Policy in Contemporary India*. Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2007, pp. 17–45; Pritam Singh, ‘Bhagat Singh, Gandhi and the British’, *The Tribune*, 25th March 2015, Chandigarh, India..

^{xx} For my analysis of the sectarianism in the human rights movement in India with special reference to Punjab, see Pritam Singh, ‘Sectarianism and Human Rights Discourse: The Politics of Human Rights in the Post-Colonial Punjab,’ in *Changing Concepts of Rights and Justice in South Asia*, edited by M Anderson and S Guha, Oxford University Press, 1998.

^{xxi} On Andhra Pradesh, see Sinha, *Maoists in Andhra Pradesh*, on Kerala, see Thomas Johnson Nossiter, [*Communism in Kerala: A Study in Political Adaptation*](#). University of California Press, 1982 and Lalu John Philip, *History of Naxalism in Kerala*, 2005, on <http://lalujohnphilip.blogspot.co.uk/2007/08/history-of-naxalism-in-kerala-by-lalu.html>; on Bihar, see Rajat Kujur, ‘Resurgent Naxal Movement in Bihar’, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 2005, on <http://www.ipcs.org/article/naxalite-violence/resurgent-naxal-movement-in-bihar-1852.html>; and on Punjab, see Paramjit Singh Judge, *Insurrection to Agitation: The Naxalite Movement in Punjab*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1992, and Pritam Singh, ‘Marxism in Punjab’. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30 March 1985. The information that the Naxalite movement had pockets of influence in UP, Himachal Pradesh and Delhi comes from discussion with activists and academics working on this area.

^{xxii} See Perry Anderson, *The Indian Ideology*. London/New York: Verso, 2013; and Pritam Singh, 'Review of Perry Anderson's Indian Ideology', *Socialist Resistance*, June 2014 (<http://socialistresistance.org/6414/the-indian-ideology-by-perry-anderson-a-review>).

^{xxiii} see Debroy, 'The last of the three'.

^{xxiv} For a discussion of the killing of Baba Bujha Singh and the human rights protests over the killing, see Singh, *Economy, Culture and Human Rights* pp 184-85.[ANY PARTICULAR PAGE OR SECTION?] and Ajmer Sidhu, [*Baba Bujha Singh, an untold story*](#). Chandigarh, 2013.

^{xxv} See Nilanjan Dutta, 'From Subject to Citizens: Towards a History of the Indian Civil Rights Movement', in *Changing Concepts of Rights and Justice in South Asia*, edited by M Anderson and S Guha, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998.

^{xxvi} For very carefully collected data on the militarisation of Indian state in its dealings with the Naxalite movement in central India, see Gautam Navlakha, 'Maoists in India'. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 41, No. 22, 3-9 June 2006.

^{xxvii} This is elaborated and further developed in Pritam Singh, 'Political Economy of Nationalism: Minority Left and Minority Nationalisms vs Mainstream Left and Majority Nationalism in India'. *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2002, pp. 287–98.

^{xxviii} See Sumanta Banerjee 'Radical And Violent Political Movements' in Paul R. Brass (ed) *Routledge Handbook of South Asian Politics*, London and New York: Routledge.

^{xxix} Some activists in Punjab informed me that some of the leaders of the pro-Moscow Communist Party of India have been helpful in providing legal and economic assistance to

Naxalite activists and their families. One name which was often mentioned was that of Comrade Teja Singh Swatantar, certainly the most popular communist leader in Punjab, who was generous in providing all kinds of help to Naxalite activists including shelter to underground guerrillas. It is worthwhile mentioning here that Comrade Swatantar was a legendary leader of the Lal (meaning Red) Communist Party that had spearheaded an armed rebellion of the Punjabi peasants and tenants against the landlords and the Indian state in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Though he was in the pro-Moscow Communist Party of India during the period of the rise of the Naxalite movement in Punjab, he seemed to have empathy with the Naxalite activists through whom he, perhaps, saw his earlier youthful period of guerrilla struggle. A limited amount of information on him is available in Judge, *Insurrection to Agitation* and Gurharpal Singh, *Communism in Punjab: A Study of the Movement up to 1967*. Delhi: Ajanta, 1994.

^{xxx} See Nandini Sundar, 'Bastar, Maoism and Salwa Judum', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 41, No. 29 22-28 July 2006. See also Bela Bhatia, 'The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 40, No. 15 (9-15 April 2005), pp. 1536-1549.

^{xxxi} Navlakha, 'Maoists in India', p. 2189. This is a classic example of what Harvey calls 'accumulation by dispossession'. See David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003.

^{xxxii} See KVR, ed., *Prison-House Rose Garden: Seminar Papers on the Nationality Question in India*. Bangalore: All India League for Revolutionary Culture, 1993; Andhra Pradesh Radical Students Union, ed., *Nationality Question in India: Seminar Papers*. Hyderabad: Peace Book Centre, 1982, and Varvara P. Rao, ed., *Symphony of Freedom: Papers on Nationality Question*. New Delhi: All India Peoples Resistance Forum, 1996 for, articulation of the Maoist/Naxalite perspective on nationalities in India, their right to self-

determination and the conflict of that right with the vision of unitarist Indian nationalism. For a review of these perspectives, see Singh, 'Political Economy of Nationalism'.

^{xxxiii} For a discussion of many dimensions of the alliance between the Left and regional nationalisms leading to the formation of a third alternative beyond the Indian nationalist Congress Party and the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, see Singh, 'Marxism, Indian State and Punjab'; Singh, 'Political Economy of Nationalism'; Pritam Singh, 'Political Economy of the Third Front in India'. *Contemporary South Asia*, vol. 16, no. 4, December 2008, pp. 465–69; Pritam Singh, 'Left and the Third Front'. *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. XLIV, no. 12, 2009, pp. 8–11; Pritam Singh, 'Regional Nationalism'. *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. XLIV, no. 17, 25 April 2009; Pritam Singh, 'Charting a Progressive Third Alternative in Indian Politics: Hurdles and Potentialities'. *Naked Punch Asia*. Lahore, Pakistan, issue 3, August 2009, pp. 12–14.

^{xxxiv} There are other constitutionalist-communist currents in India who have limited pockets of influence in some states- mainly West Bengal and Kerala. These include Revolutionary Socialist Party, All India Forward Bloc and Socialist Unity Centre of India.

^{xxxv} For further development of this perspective of the Left taking a significant and potentially leading role, in forming such a Third Front or Third Alternative, see Singh, 'Political Economy of the Third Front in India'; Singh, 'Left and the Third Front' Singh, 'Regional Nationalism'; Singh, 'Charting a Progressive Third Alternative in Indian Politics'.

[../././Downloads/The Naxal Challenge 1967-84.pdf](http://.../Downloads/The Naxal Challenge 1967-84.pdf).

xxxvi Navlakha, 'Maoists in India, pp. 2187-88.

xxxvii See Shailza Sharma, 'Alleged Maoist on His Release From Prison and Other Matters: Interviewed by Shailza Sharma', 17 July 2016, on <https://kafila.org/2016/07/17/alleged-maoist-on-his-release-from-prison-and-other-matters-interviewed-by-shailza-sharma>.

xxxviii For my tribute to Randhir Singh, see Pritam Singh, 'Randhir Singh obituary', *The Guardian*, 24 February, 2016 (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/24/randhir-singh-obituary>).

xxxix Nirupama Dutt has translated some of the poems of Dil in English. See Nirupama Dutt, *Poet of the Revolution; Memoirs and Poems*, Penguin Books India, 2012.

xl See Shailza Sharma mentioned above..