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## From Naxalbari to the End of Armed Naxalism: History and Legacy of India's Naxalite Movement

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### ABSTRACT

*Why does a revolutionary movement that never captured state power, and that has, according to the available evidence, lost its centrally organized armed capacity, remain historically significant? This article addresses that question through the case of the Naxalite movement, from its origins in the 1967 Naxalbari uprising in West Bengal to the reported collapse of its principal successor organization, the CPI (Maoist), in 2025–2026. It argues that the movement's significance lies in a paradox: an insurgency that failed militarily nonetheless reshaped the political environment in which agrarian reform, tribal rights, left politics, and state security practice subsequently developed, and its history therefore poses an open question—explored throughout the article and returned to in the conclusion—of whether the end of organized armed Naxalism represents the resolution of the conditions that produced it, or only the disappearance of their principal organized expression. The argument is developed through historical and interpretive synthesis of secondary scholarship, descriptive analysis of official conflict data for 2010–2025, supplemented by reported developments through March 2026, three heuristic formal models adapted from the civil-conflict literature, and a case study of the security operation—Operation Kagar—that preceded the movement's dissolution. The article finds that the movement's long-term legacy is best understood as three partly distinct strands—material (agrarian policy), political (left strategy and state security practice), and cultural (literature, cinema, and collective memory)—each of which persists independently of the armed organization's fate, and it treats the still-unfolding 2025–2026 record as provisional contemporary history rather than settled fact.*

Keywords: Naxalism; Naxalbari; West Bengal; Maoism; agrarian politics; tribal rights; Left-Wing Extremism; insurgency

### 1. Introduction

Few political events in postcolonial Indian history have had as profound and enduring an impact on the political imagination of Bengal as the peasant uprising that erupted at Naxalbari, a small subdivision in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, in May 1967. The Naxalbari uprising, in which poor peasants and tea garden workers, led by local communist cadres, seized land from zamindars and confronted police repression with armed resistance, announced the birth of a radical agrarian movement that would challenge the Indian state's legitimacy from within its own theoretical frameworks. Named after the village where it began, the Naxalite movement—or its more expansive national derivative, often called Maoism or Left-Wing Extremism—remained active in parts of India for nearly six decades, making it one of the longest-running rural insurgencies of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Alpa Shah), before the Indian government declared organized armed Naxalism eliminated in the closing days of March 2026.

The significance of Naxalbari and the movement it inspired extends far beyond its immediate geography or its concrete achievements in land redistribution, which were modest and short-lived. The movement catalyzed a generational rupture within Indian communism, producing a lasting split between those committed to parliamentary electoral politics and those who saw the ballot box as insufficient as a vehicle for fundamental social transformation. It mobilized a significant section of Bengali middle-class youth and intelligentsia into revolutionary politics, producing a cultural and literary ferment whose traces are visible in Bengal to this day. And it posed, with unusual clarity, fundamental questions about the relationship between the state, law, property, and violence in a formally democratic polity characterized by profound economic inequality.

This article's central proposition is that the historical significance of Naxalism lies in the paradox that an armed movement which failed to achieve revolutionary state power nevertheless reshaped the political environment in which agrarian reform, tribal rights, left politics, state security practice, and debates over the limits of legitimate dissent subsequently developed. Its trajectory—from Naxalbari, through fragmentation and geographic displacement into central India, to the reported collapse of its principal armed successor organization fifty-nine years later—illuminates both the persistence of the structural grievances that produced it and the limits of revolutionary organization within a formally democratic state. This yields the article's central research question, addressed most directly in Section 13 and the Conclusion: does the collapse of organized armed Naxalism represent the resolution of

the historical conditions that produced the movement, or merely the disappearance of their principal organized armed expression?

Existing scholarship has extensively examined the movement's origins, organizational evolution, ideology, and violence, including its later central-Indian phase (Banerjee; Dasgupta; Mohanty; Sundar; Alpa Shah); its relationship to West Bengal's subsequent political culture and agrarian transformation, by contrast, has received comparatively less integrated treatment, and no existing study has had the benefit of assessing the movement's 2025–2026 collapse. This article contributes in four ways: first, by integrating the West Bengal origins of Naxalism with the organizational transformation and geographic displacement that produced its later central-Indian phase; second, by connecting structural (agrarian) and organizational (fragmentation, recruitment, attrition) explanations within a common analytical frame; third, by foregrounding the agency and differentiated experience of Adivasi communities and women, whose participation the historiography has systematically underrepresented; and fourth, by offering a cautious, source-disciplined analytical account of the 2025–2026 collapse, explicitly treated as provisional contemporary history.

### **1.1 Scope, Terminology, and a Note on 'Collapse'**

Several terms used throughout this article require precise definition, since they are often used interchangeably in public discourse in ways that obscure important distinctions. Naxalbari refers specifically to the 1967 uprising in Darjeeling district. The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), or CPI(ML), refers to the organization formally constituted under Charu Majumdar's leadership in 1969. The Communist Party of India (Maoist), or CPI (Maoist), refers to the organization formed through the 2004 merger of the People's War Group and the Maoist Communist Centre, and which remained the dominant Naxalite formation until its reported 2025–2026 collapse. 'Naxalism' and 'Naxalite movement' are used in this article as umbrella terms for the broader political and insurgent tradition descending from Naxalbari, while recognizing substantial ideological, organizational, and generational differences among its constituent formations; where a specific organization is meant, it is named directly. 'Left-Wing Extremism' (LWE) is a governmental and security classification used by Indian official sources for statistical and administrative purposes, and is used in this article primarily when reporting official data; it is not fully synonymous with 'Naxalism' as a political-historical category, since LWE statistics can include violence by groups or individuals only loosely connected to the CPI (Maoist)'s organized structure, and conversely cannot capture the movement's political or cultural presence where it did not translate into recorded violence.

A further terminological caution concerns the word 'collapse' itself, used throughout this article to describe the events of 2025–2026. Three distinct claims should not be conflated: (i) the Indian government's political declaration that organized armed Naxalism had been eliminated by 31 March 2026; (ii) the reported organizational and military collapse of the CPI (Maoist)'s command structure and armed cadre base, evidenced by leadership deaths, mass surrenders, and the cessation of large-scale organized violence; and (iii) the historical disappearance of Naxalism as an ideology, a body of political memory, or a set of underlying grievances, none of which this article claims to have occurred. This article's use of 'collapse' refers specifically to claim (ii)—the reported disintegration of organized armed capacity—and takes no position on claim (iii), which Section 13 and the Conclusion argue remains genuinely open.

## **2. Historiographical Perspectives**

The academic literature on the Naxalite movement falls broadly into five overlapping streams, summarized in Table A below: political-historical analyses focused on organizational genealogy and ideological development; sociological studies of agrarian structure and peasant mobilization; ethnographic and human-rights-oriented scholarship concerned with the movement's later manifestations; gender and subaltern/memory-oriented scholarship examining women's agency and marginalization within Naxalite organizing (Sinha Roy, "Speaking Silence"; Sinha Roy, "Magic Moments"), discussed further in Section 7.2; and, more recently, the formal civil-conflict literature, which this article draws on in Section 10 without claiming that literature's own empirical rigor.

Sumanta Banerjee's *In the Wake of Naxalbari* remains the foundational political history of the movement, offering a detailed account of its origins, organizational evolution, and suppression based on extensive primary research. Banerjee's sympathetic but critical perspective established many of the analytical categories that subsequent scholarship has either adopted or contested. Biplab Dasgupta's *The Naxalite Movement* provides a contemporaneous sociological analysis emphasizing the structural roots of agrarian discontent in West Bengal's land tenure system.

More recent scholarship has been shaped by the movement's resurgence in central India. Nandini Sundar's *The Burning Forest* offers a searing ethnographic account of the conflict in Bastar, Chhattisgarh, documenting the experience of Adivasi communities caught between Maoist cadres and state security forces. Sundar's work is notable for foregrounding indigenous perspectives and challenging the binary of 'insurgency versus counter-insurgency' that dominates official and much journalistic discourse. Alpa Shah's *Nightmarch* similarly employs ethnographic methods to examine the lives of Maoist guerrillas in Jharkhand, offering a nuanced portrait of the movement's social base and internal culture.

Maitreesh Ghatak and Parikshit Ghosh have contributed a quantitative analysis of the relationship between agrarian conditions and Naxalite activity, finding that districts with higher levels of agrarian inequality and forest-dependent populations correlate significantly with Maoist presence (Ghatak and Ghosh). Their district-level empirical specification—its dependent variable, explanatory variables, and reported associations, though not its statistical estimation itself—is translated into an explicit formal specification in Section 10.1 below, in order to state precisely which structural variables the agrarian-crisis account of Sections 4 and 7 implies should predict Maoist presence; the present article does not reproduce or extend Ghatak and Ghosh's own econometric estimation. The formal civil-conflict literature more broadly (Fearon and Laitin; Grossman) offers concepts—state capacity, the insurgent's opportunity cost, contact-based recruitment dynamics—that are not India-specific but that this article applies conceptually in Section 10 to

organize claims the historiography already makes qualitatively.

| Approach                                         | Key sources                 | Core argument                                                          | Limitation                                                                              | This article's use                          |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Political history                                | Banerjee                    | Organizational genealogy and ideological development                   | Limited quantitative grounding                                                          | Basis for Sections 5, 6, 9                  |
| Agrarian sociology                               | Dasgupta                    | Structural roots in land tenure and inequality                         | Less attention to the later central-Indian phase                                        | Basis for Section 4; linked to Section 10.1 |
| Ethnography / human rights                       | Sundar; Alpa Shah           | Subaltern experience and contested legitimacy                          | Geographically concentrated case studies                                                | Basis for Sections 7, 12, 13                |
| Formal civil-conflict theory                     | Fearon and Laitin; Grossman | State capacity and opportunity-cost accounts of insurgency             | Not developed with India specifically in view                                           | Adapted heuristically in Section 10         |
| Gender and subaltern/memory-oriented scholarship | Sinha Roy                   | Women's agency, memory, and marginalization within Naxalite organizing | Focused on Naxalbari-era West Bengal; less developed for the later central-Indian phase | Basis for Section 7.2                       |

Table A. Historiographical Approaches to the Naxalite Movement

### 3. Methodology

This article employs historical analysis and interpretive synthesis, supplemented by descriptive quantitative analysis of official conflict data and three heuristic formal models adapted for expository purposes from the civil-conflict literature. Table B summarizes the evidence base by type, period, and function. The article draws primarily on published secondary scholarship, including monographs, edited volumes, and journal articles in English and Bengali. Where available, government reports, parliamentary replies, commission findings, and organizational documents produced by the Naxalite movement itself are referenced. For the period after 2024, the article also draws on contemporaneous news reporting—necessarily a provisional and rapidly evolving source base—on the security operations, surrenders, and political statements that accompanied the movement's collapse. The article does not draw on original archival research or fieldwork, and its claims accordingly remain those of historical interpretation and synthesis rather than primary discovery.

| Evidence type                 | Period covered | Function in this article                                                         |
|-------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Secondary historiography      | 1960s–2010s    | Historical reconstruction and interpretive synthesis                             |
| Government / MHA data         | 2010–2025      | Descriptive statistics on violence and territorial spread (Section 11)           |
| Contemporary journalism       | 2024–2026      | Chronology of recent events, reported with source attribution                    |
| Human-rights documentation    | 1970s–2020s    | Counter-account of state conduct; treated as advocacy evidence, not settled fact |
| Literary and cultural sources | 1970s–present  | Evidence of collective memory and cultural legacy (Section 14)                   |

| Evidence type           | Period covered             | Function in this article                                                              |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Heuristic formal models | Analytical (not estimated) | Explicit statement of causal logic already present in the historiography (Section 10) |

Table B. Evidence Base by Type, Period, and Function

Two methodological clarifications follow directly from this evidence base. First, the three formal models developed in Section 10 are heuristic devices for organizing existing historical claims in explicit terms; they are not estimated on movement-specific data, which do not exist in usable form for a clandestine organization, and the article does not present them as original econometric findings. Where a model implies a directional relationship (for instance, that greater agrarian inequality should raise the probability of sustained Maoist presence), this is reported as a hypothesized relationship consistent with the cited literature, not as a result derived from new estimation. Second, the article distinguishes throughout between descriptive statistics, sequential association, and causal inference: where the text states that one condition 'contributed to,' 'is consistent with,' or 'may have reduced' another, this reflects an interpretive judgment based on the cited sources rather than a demonstrated causal mechanism.

A further note on sources is warranted. Much of the historiography of the Naxalite movement was produced by participants or observers with strong political commitments, either sympathetic or hostile to the movement. This article has sought to draw on a range of perspectives and to flag where interpretations are contested. Human rights documentation, while produced by advocacy organizations with their own orientations, provides important evidence about the treatment of movement members and suspected sympathizers that is not available from official sources; the same caution applies, a fortiori, to the still-unfolding record of the 2025–2026 collapse, where government claims of a clean 'elimination' of Naxalism and advocacy claims of extrajudicial killing coexist and are both reported here as contested positions rather than settled fact. Throughout Sections 12 and 13, the article uses explicit attributional language—'according to,' 'government accounts state,' 'contemporary reporting indicates,' 'this cannot yet be independently established'—rather than presenting provisional 2025–2026 claims in the same declarative register as the better-established historical narrative of Sections 4–9.

## 4. Socio-Economic Conditions: The Agrarian Crisis in West Bengal

### 4.1 Land Distribution Before Naxalbari

The social conditions that produced the Naxalite movement cannot be understood without reference to the deeply unequal agrarian structure of West Bengal in the 1960s. Despite land reform legislation passed by the Congress government in the 1950s, effective redistribution of land had been minimal. The Zamindari Abolition Act of 1953 had formally abolished the zamindari system, but large landholders retained substantial holdings through the use of legal loopholes, benami transactions, and political connections. Meanwhile, the rural poor—sharecroppers, agricultural labourers, and marginal farmers—remained in conditions of severe poverty and dependence.

| Indicator                         | West Bengal (1960s)     |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Landless households               | Approx. 35–40%          |
| Sharecroppers (bargadars)         | Over 30% of cultivators |
| Rural poverty rate                | Above 50%               |
| Average landholding of top 10%    | Over 10 acres           |
| Average landholding of bottom 50% | Under 1 acre            |

Table 1. Agrarian Conditions in West Bengal, 1960s

Sources: Bhattacharyya (2009), Dasgupta (1974). These figures are state-wide averages and should not be treated as precise measurements of conditions in Naxalbari itself.

Contemporary census administration itself reveals difficulties in accurately capturing the structure of landholding and tenancy. The 1961 Census administration report records enumerators' difficulties in determining the area of land in the possession of bargadars, noting that sharecropping arrangements could terminate after harvest and that land possession might therefore need to be assessed over the preceding twelve months. The report also acknowledged that landowners frequently cultivated their holdings through bargadars (sharecroppers) or hired labourers, potentially affecting the accuracy of the census picture of cultivation and landholding (Sen Gupta 55).

In the Naxalbari subdivision of Darjeeling district, these conditions were, on the qualitative evidence available, particularly acute. The area combined the grievances of tea garden workers—who laboured under quasi-indentured conditions on large plantations—with those of Santhal and Rajbanshi peasants who had lost forest and agricultural land to jute traders and moneylenders over generations. This combination of ethnic marginalization, economic exploitation, and disappointed expectations is best understood as a multi-causal configuration rather than a single determining condition: it interacted, as Section 5 discusses, with the specific organizational opportunity created by the 1967 United Front government, the ideological resources supplied by the Sino-Soviet split and Chinese revolutionary example, and the presence of committed local leadership, to produce an uprising whose timing and location cannot be explained by agrarian conditions alone (Dasgupta).

#### 4.2 The Failure of Parliamentary Land Reform

The immediate trigger for the Naxalbari uprising was the failure of the United Front government, formed in March 1967, to implement meaningful land reform. When poor peasants, encouraged by the CPM's electoral promises, occupied lands to which they had legal entitlement under existing but unenforced legislation, the government—under pressure from landlords and the Congress Party at the Centre—used police force to evict them. This experience confirmed the analysis of radical communists that the parliamentary route was incapable of delivering social transformation, and that only direct action could break the structural power of the landowning class; it is best read, however, as the proximate trigger that activated pre-existing structural grievances rather than as their sole cause.

### 5. Origins: The Naxalbari Uprising of 1967

The immediate background to the Naxalbari uprising lay in the political crisis of Indian communism in the 1960s. The Communist Party of India (CPI) had split in 1964, with the formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)—CPM—by leaders who rejected the CPI's alignment with the Congress government and the Soviet-sponsored policy of 'peaceful transition to socialism.' The CPM itself was, however, internally divided between a parliamentary-oriented majority and a more radical minority grouped around figures such as Charu Majumdar of Darjeeling, Kanu Sanyal of Siliguri, and Jangal Santhal of the local Santhal community, who were influenced by the Chinese Communist Party's critique of Soviet revisionism and by Mao Zedong's theory of protracted people's war (Dasgupta).

In March 1967, the CPM joined a United Front coalition government in West Bengal, raising expectations of agrarian reform among poor peasants in northern Bengal. When these expectations went unmet—land occupied by peasants was returned to landlords with police assistance—local communist leaders led by Jangal Santhal launched an armed seizure of land in Naxalbari in May 1967. The uprising lasted approximately three months before being suppressed by police firing in July 1967, in which eleven people including women and children were killed. Despite its brief duration, the Naxalbari uprising had an electrifying impact on radical politics across India, described by the Chinese Communist Party's *People's Daily* as 'a peal of spring thunder' (Banerjee, 1980).

The ideological framework articulated by Charu Majumdar drew directly on Mao Zedong's theory of new democratic revolution and protracted people's war. Majumdar argued that India remained a semi-feudal, semi-colonial society in which the conditions for armed revolution from the countryside were ripe, and that the CPM and the parliamentary left had betrayed the revolution by accepting the framework of bourgeois democracy. His eight documents, circulated clandestinely in the late 1960s, called for the creation of guerrilla squads, the annihilation of class enemies, and the building of liberated base areas along the Chinese revolutionary model (Majumdar).

| Year    | Event                                                                     |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1964    | Split of CPI; formation of CPI(M)                                         |
| 1967    | Naxalbari uprising; United Front government in West Bengal                |
| 1969    | Formal constitution of CPI(ML) under Charu Majumdar                       |
| 1970–72 | Peak of urban Naxalite activity in Calcutta; state repression intensifies |

| Year           | Event                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1972           | Death of Charu Majumdar in police custody; movement fragmentation                                                                                                     |
| 1975–77        | Emergency period; mass arrests and extrajudicial killings                                                                                                             |
| 1977           | Left Front comes to power in West Bengal                                                                                                                              |
| 1978           | Operation Barga begins                                                                                                                                                |
| 1990s          | Reconstitution of Naxalite formations in central India (PWG, MCC)                                                                                                     |
| 2004           | Merger of PWG and MCC to form CPI (Maoist)                                                                                                                            |
| 2009–14        | ‘Operation Green Hunt’ offensive; peak of Red Corridor violence (1,936 incidents in 2010)                                                                             |
| 2010s          | Expansion of ‘urban Naxal’ discourse; civil liberties concerns intensify                                                                                              |
| 2019           | Government intensifies coordinated Centre–state operations; violence falls below 700 incidents/year                                                                   |
| May 2025       | Operation Kagar: CPI (Maoist) general secretary Nambala Keshava Rao (‘Basavaraju’) and 26 cadres killed in Abujhmad                                                   |
| 2025–Mar. 2026 | Mass surrenders (including politburo member Mallojula Venugopal Rao and CMC chief Tippi Tirupati); government declares organized Naxalism eliminated by 31 March 2026 |

Table 2. Key Events in the Naxalite Movement, 1964–2026

Sources: Banerjee; Sundar; Alpa Shah; Ministry of Home Affairs parliamentary replies (2024–2025); Ramachandran; CNN; Business Standard.

## 6. The CPI(ML) and Urban Radicalism

The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)—CPI(ML)—was formally constituted in April 1969 under Charu Majumdar’s leadership, with the Naxalbari uprising as its founding myth. The party rejected participation in elections as a matter of principle and called for armed agrarian revolution. In its first phase, the movement spread from its initial base in the Darjeeling foothills into the tribal belt of Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh, the Girijan areas of the Eastern Ghats, and later to Bihar and other states (Mohanty).

Simultaneously, the movement found an unexpected resonance among Bengali urban youth, particularly university students in Calcutta. The late 1960s were a period of intense political radicalization among educated youth globally—the year 1968 witnessed student uprisings from Paris to Mexico City—and Naxalism offered Bengali students a revolutionary ideology that seemed to explain and challenge the poverty and inequality visible all around them. Thousands of students from Presidency College, Jadavpur University, and other institutions abandoned their studies to work in rural areas, attempting to build peasant guerrilla units and to practise the annihilation line—the targeted killing of landlords, moneylenders, and police informers.

The urban dimension of the Naxalite movement, particularly its youth and student component, produced some of the most celebrated cultural and literary outputs associated with Indian Maoism. Poets such as Subhas Mukhopadhyay and Shakti Chattopadhyay engaged, in different ways, with the political and cultural atmosphere surrounding the movement, while the novelist Mahasweta Devi’s work consistently engaged with the suffering of tribal and

peasant communities that formed the movement's social base. The Naxalite movement became an important component of the broader cultural-political radicalism that shaped Bengali intellectual life in the 1970s.

## 7. Gender and Tribal Dimensions of the Movement

### 7.1 Tribal Participation

The Naxalite movement was never simply a movement of educated urban youth or even of generic 'peasants.' Its social base in both West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh was predominantly tribal (Adivasi), and the specific grievances of tribal communities—dispossession from forest land, displacement by development projects, exclusion from state protection, and exposure to moneylender exploitation—were central to its mobilizing narrative. In Naxalbari itself, the Santhal community, led by Jangal Santhal, provided both the organic leadership and the mass following of the uprising. The movement's spread to Srikakulam, Bastar, and Jharkhand similarly followed lines of tribal marginalization (Sundar).

The relationship between the Naxalite movement and tribal communities has been complex and, in contemporary accounts, contested. On the one hand, the movement's insistence on land rights, forest rights, and protection from moneylender exploitation gave voice to genuine Adivasi grievances and produced tangible local benefits in some areas. On the other hand, the imposition of Maoist organizational discipline, the extraction of contributions and labour, and the consequences of violent conflict for civilian tribal populations have been extensively documented by scholars, particularly Sundar (2016). The Adivasi experience of the Naxalite movement cannot be reduced to either simple victimhood or simple agency; it was a relationship of genuine solidarity and of differential power—a tension that, as Section 12 discusses, recurred in the surrender testimonies of 2025–2026, in which former tribal cadres cited both disillusionment with Maoist practice and the pull of state rehabilitation incentives.

### 7.2 Women in the Naxalite Movement

Women's participation in the Naxalite movement has been a subject of significant scholarly interest, though it remains underrepresented in the mainstream historiography. Women participated in the Naxalite movement at multiple levels: as rank-and-file cadres in rural and urban units, as couriers and intelligence gatherers, as members of women's organizations affiliated with Naxalite parties, and, in some areas and periods, as armed combatants in People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) units (Sinha Roy, "Speaking Silence"; Sinha Roy, "Magic Moments").

A fuller account of why women joined, and what participation offered them, requires distinguishing several overlapping motives that the sources touch on only unevenly: access to land and forest resources on the same terms claimed for male cadres; a measure of personal autonomy from arranged marriage and household authority that party membership, however imperfectly, provided; ideological conviction; and, in some documented cases, recruitment through kinship networks or under direct or indirect coercion rather than independent choice (Sinha Roy, "Speaking Silence"; Sinha Roy, "Magic Moments"). Where women exercised genuine agency within the movement, it was frequently in these terms rather than in the language of formal ideological commitment that the organization's own documents used.

Against this account of agency must be set the organizational record. Feminist scholars have documented the ways in which gender hierarchies persisted within Naxalite organizations: women were disproportionately assigned to subordinate logistical and support roles rather than command positions, remained underrepresented in the CPI (Maoist)'s central committee and politburo throughout its history, and in a number of documented instances were subjected to sexual violence by their own cadres (Sinha Roy, "Speaking Silence"; Sinha Roy, "Magic Moments"). The gap between the movement's ideological commitment to gender equality and its organizational practice was, in this respect, a characteristic the Naxalite movement shared with many revolutionary organizations of the twentieth century.

The post-insurgency experience of women cadres forms a further, largely unstudied, dimension of this history. In the period surrounding the government's 31 March 2026 declaration that organized armed Naxalism had been eliminated, individual and small-group surrenders continued to be reported both before and after that date—among them a group of twenty-seven Naxalites who surrendered in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on 15 October 2025, ten of them women, according to contemporary reporting. Section 13 discusses this and comparable surrenders analytically, as evidence that the government's administrative deadline should be distinguished from the longer, more gradual process of individual demobilization; recorded separately, twelve of the thirty-five cadres who surrendered in the Bastar division on 31 March 2026 itself were women. Taken together, these figures indicate that women were visibly represented in substantial numbers among reported final-phase surrenders, although the available data do not permit a determination of whether women were disproportionately represented relative to their share of the remaining cadre population, a question later scholarship, drawing on the retrospective testimony discussed in Section 13, will need to interpret with appropriate caution regarding the reliability of self-reported reasons for surrender.

Women from tribal communities who participated in the movement experienced a further intersection of gender and ethnic subordination. Sundar (2016) documents specific, individually investigated cases of sexual violence committed against tribal women by state security personnel in the course of counter-insurgency operations; these documented cases have become a significant issue in contemporary civil liberties advocacy. This article follows its sources in describing these as documented cases of sexual violence rather than as evidence of a systematic policy, since the available documentation, while serious, does not by itself establish that sexual violence was used as a deliberate and sanctioned counter-insurgency tactic rather than being perpetrated by individual personnel.

## 8. Naxalbari in Global Revolutionary Context

The Naxalite movement cannot be understood in isolation from the international conjuncture of the 1960s and 1970s. It emerged in a specific moment of global revolutionary politics, shaped by the Sino-Soviet split, the Cultural Revolution in China, the Cuban Revolution, the Vietnamese resistance to American military intervention, and the global youth radicalization of 1968. Each of these contexts left its mark on the ideology and self-understanding of the Naxalite movement.

### 8.1 The Chinese Model

The most immediate international reference point for the Naxalite movement was the Chinese Revolution and Mao Zedong's theory of protracted people's war. Charu Majumdar's theoretical framework was explicitly derived from Mao's analysis of the Chinese revolutionary path: surrounding the cities from the countryside, building liberated base areas, and combining armed struggle with political mobilization among the peasantry. The Chinese Communist Party's endorsement of the Naxalbari uprising in 1967 provided significant ideological encouragement and legitimacy to the Indian Maoists; the extent of any accompanying material support has not been independently established by the sources consulted here. The Naxalite movement was, in this respect, one of the clearest attempts to adapt the Chinese revolutionary model to the Indian context.

The limitations of the Chinese model in the Indian context were, however, equally instructive. India's parliamentary democracy, its relatively stronger state capacity in most regions, the absence of external sanctuary, and the class composition of the Indian Communist Party's social base all differed significantly from the conditions that had obtained in China in the 1930s and 1940s. The failure of the Naxalite movement's first phase can be partly attributed to the mechanical application of a model developed in a different historical context (Mohanty).

### 8.2 Cuba and Vietnam

The Cuban Revolution of 1959, which had demonstrated the possibility of guerrilla victory against a state backed by American power, was a significant inspiration for revolutionary movements worldwide, including in India. Ernesto 'Che' Guevara's foco theory—the idea that a small guerrilla vanguard could create the conditions for revolution through exemplary armed action—resonated with the Naxalite emphasis on armed squads and annihilation. The limits of foco theory, exposed by Guevara's own defeat and death in Bolivia in 1967, were also instructive for the Naxalite experience.

The Vietnamese resistance to American military intervention, which culminated in the US withdrawal and North Vietnamese victory, provided the movement's most powerful evidence that a militarily weaker revolutionary force could defeat a technologically superior state through a combination of popular support, political organization, and sustained armed struggle. The Vietnamese experience offered an influential revolutionary example and shaped the movement's understanding of the relationship between political and military struggle.

### 8.3 Why the Imported Models Transformed on Indian Soil

The more analytically important question is not simply that the Naxalite movement drew on Chinese, Cuban, and Vietnamese example, but why each of these models produced a markedly different outcome when applied to Indian conditions. Table C summarizes the comparison. In each of the successful cases, revolutionary forces confronted a state whose capacity was already gravely weakened—by civil war and Japanese occupation in China, by a narrowly based and internationally isolated dictatorship in Cuba, by colonial withdrawal and foreign military intervention in Vietnam—and were able to contest or claim sovereign power outright. The Indian state that the Naxalites confronted after 1967, by contrast, possessed a functioning electoral apparatus with genuine (if imperfect) legitimacy even among the rural poor, a civil and military bureaucracy that had survived decolonization largely intact, and no equivalent crisis of sovereignty for revolutionary forces to exploit. This structural difference, rather than any deficiency in revolutionary commitment, is the more persuasive explanation for why the Naxalite movement could sustain a prolonged insurgency in India's structurally weakest regions—as the Red Corridor's forested, tribal, and state-thin districts demonstrate—without ever approaching the conditions under which the Chinese, Cuban, or Vietnamese revolutionary forces secured victory (Mohanty).

| Dimension                 | China (to 1949)                | Cuba (to 1959)                       | Vietnam (to 1975)                       | India (Naxalite movement)                |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| State capacity confronted | Fragmented, war-exhausted      | Narrow, internationally isolated     | Colonial, then foreign-backed           | Comparatively strong electoral democracy |
| External conditions       | Japanese occupation, civil war | Limited US appetite for intervention | Sustained foreign military intervention | No equivalent external shock             |
| Social base               | Broad peasant mobilization     | Small guerrilla vanguard (foco)      | Mass political-military organization    | Regionally concentrated, largely Adivasi |

| Dimension | China (to 1949)       | Cuba (to 1959)        | Vietnam (to 1975)     | India (Naxalite movement)                    |
|-----------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Outcome   | Revolutionary victory | Revolutionary victory | Revolutionary victory | No state capture; military collapse, 2025–26 |

Table C. Comparative Conditions for Revolutionary Success, China, Cuba, Vietnam, and India

## 9. State Repression and Organizational Fragmentation

The response of the Indian state to the Naxalite movement moved through several distinct phases, each with a different balance of coercion, negotiation, and reform. In West Bengal between 1970 and 1972, the Calcutta police under Commissioner Ranjit Gupta and the Congress government of Siddhartha Shankar Ray pursued what critics described as an extermination campaign against the movement, in which thousands of suspected Naxalites were arrested, tortured, and killed in police custody or in alleged encounter killings; Amnesty International documented extensive violations of due process and human rights (Amnesty International). The precise number killed remains genuinely disputed rather than merely imprecise: published estimates for West Bengal alone in the early 1970s range from approximately 2,000 to over 10,000, a range wide enough that it should be treated as an indication of the episode's severity rather than as a reliable count, and this article does not adopt any single figure within that range as established.

Charu Majumdar was arrested in July 1972 and died in police custody twelve days later. His death accelerated a fragmentation that is best understood not as a single event but as a central causal mechanism running through the movement's entire subsequent history: successive splits occurred along lines of ideological disagreement (over the continued validity of the annihilation line), strategic disagreement (over armed struggle versus mass political organization), and disagreement over participation in electoral politics, producing numerous competing factions that each claimed the authentic Naxalbari inheritance. Some groups moderated their position and returned to parliamentary politics; others continued armed operations in different states; still others underwent complex organizational evolutions that eventually produced, in Bihar and later in Andhra Pradesh, the large Maoist formations that became prominent in the twenty-first century. This recurring pattern of fragmentation is, on the historical evidence reviewed here, a large part of the explanation for why the movement proved able to survive repression for decades without ever assembling the unified organizational capacity that revolutionary state capture would have required.

The People's War Group in Andhra Pradesh and the Maoist Communist Centre in Bihar—which merged in 2004 to form the Communist Party of India (Maoist)—represented a reconstituted Naxalism that had learned from the failures of the first phase. Rather than targeting urban areas or relying on the annihilation of individual class enemies, the CPI (Maoist) built a sustained presence in the forested tribal areas of central and eastern India, combining political organization, parallel welfare provision, and armed self-defence, and drawing on the geographic sanctuary of forest terrain, local kinship networks, informal taxation, and the practical absence of civil administration to sustain itself over decades in a way the first-phase movement in West Bengal, confronted with a more capable state, could not (Sundar). The movement's stronghold for the following two decades—the so-called Red Corridor stretching from Chhattisgarh through Jharkhand, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh—represented a zone of deep state absence and structural underdevelopment, and it is this second, geographically displaced phase of the movement whose rise and eventual dismantlement are modeled heuristically in the following section and quantified in Section 11.

## 10. Formalizing the Structural, Recruitment, and Decline Dynamics of Naxalism

The historiography surveyed above is overwhelmingly qualitative. This section makes three of its recurring causal claims explicit in formal terms: a specification of the structural conditions hypothesized to predict where Maoist activity concentrated, a rational-choice representation of the individual decision to join or leave the movement, and a heuristic compartmental model of the movement's overall lifecycle. None of the three is an original econometric contribution, and none is estimated on movement-specific data, which do not exist in usable form for a clandestine organization; each is offered as a heuristic formal model that states existing historical claims with the precision that formal notation allows, and each is presented with its own limitations made explicit rather than as a demonstrated empirical result.

### 10.1 A Formal Specification of Hypothesized Structural Conditions

Ghatak and Ghosh provide the empirical starting point for a structural account of where Naxalite activity concentrated, reporting that districts with greater agrarian inequality and larger forest-dependent populations were significantly more likely to experience sustained Maoist activity. What this article borrows from that study is its unit of analysis (the district-year), the broad category of explanatory variables it examines (poverty, forest cover, land inequality, tribal population share, and administrative reach), and the direction of the reported associations; it does not reproduce or extend Ghatak and Ghosh's own statistical estimation. The structural logic can be written as a district-level logistic (logit) specification. Let the binary outcome for district  $i$  in year  $t$ ,  $Maoist_{it}$ , equal 1 if the district records LWE-related violence and 0 otherwise:

$$Pr(Maoist_{it} = 1) = A(\beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot Poverty_{it} + \beta_2 \cdot ForestCover_i + \beta_3 \cdot LandGini_i + \beta_4 \cdot TribalShare_i + \beta_5 \cdot StateDistance_i + \varepsilon_{it})$$

where  $\Lambda(z) = 1 / (1 + e^{-z})$  is the standard logistic cumulative distribution function, Poverty is the district headcount poverty ratio, ForestCover is the proportion of district area under forest, LandGini is a Gini coefficient of land-operational holdings, TribalShare is the proportion of Scheduled Tribe population, and StateDistance is a proxy for the reach of ordinary civil administration. Consistent with the historiography reviewed in Sections 2 and 4, this article hypothesizes  $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4 > 0$  and  $\beta_5 < 0$ . These are stated explicitly as hypothesized relationships consistent with Ghatak and Ghosh's reported findings, not as new empirical results derived from estimating this equation; the specification's purpose is to say precisely which structural variables the 'agrarian crisis' account of Sections 4 and 7 implies should matter, so that the claim can in principle be tested against district-level data by future research. Read this way, the specification also offers a benchmark for interpreting the territorial contraction documented in Section 11: it is consistent with the historical record, though not independently verified here, that districts which dropped out of the LWE-affected list after 2014 disproportionately were ones where road-building, mobile connectivity, and new security-camp construction plausibly reduced the effective distance between forest interiors and the machinery of the state—that is, where StateDistance fell most sharply.

### 10.2 A Rational-Choice Representation of the Recruitment and Surrender Decision

A second, complementary tradition—associated with Grossman's model of insurrection as an occupational choice and with Fearon and Laitin's analysis of the conditions favouring insurgency—treats the decision to join an armed movement as the outcome of an individual comparison of expected payoffs. Let a prospective recruit compare the expected utility of joining the rebellion,  $U_r$ , with the expected utility of remaining in the existing rural or urban economy,  $U_s$ :

$$U_r = p \cdot V_r - c_r \quad \text{and} \quad U_s = w_s$$

Here  $p$  is the cadre's subjective probability that participation yields a valued outcome (land, status, ideological satisfaction, or eventual revolutionary victory),  $V_r$  is the value attached to that outcome,  $c_r$  is the expected cost of participation (encompassing the probability of death, injury, or arrest, weighted by the severity of that outcome), and  $w_s$  is the expected return to remaining outside the movement. An individual joins, in this stylized representation, when  $U_r > U_s$ , i.e., when  $p \cdot V_r - c_r > w_s$ . This single inequality is deliberately reductive, and should be read as a stylized representation of competing material incentives rather than a complete theory of recruitment: it brackets ideology, identity, kinship and peer-network recruitment, community pressure, coercion, revenge, gendered dynamics of the kind discussed in Section 7.2, and political socialization, all of which the historiography identifies as operating alongside, and sometimes instead of, the material calculation the equation represents.

With that caveat, the inequality organizes a good deal of the historical material already presented. In 1967, and again in the Dandakaranya region after 1980,  $w_s$  was depressed by the agrarian conditions described in Table 1—landlessness, indebtedness, exclusion from forest resources—while  $p \cdot V_r$  was elevated by the perceived legitimacy of land seizure and by international revolutionary example (Section 8). The state's response after 2014, and especially after 2019, is consistent with a deliberate attempt to reverse the inequality on both sides simultaneously: intensified operations (documented in Sections 11–12) plausibly raised  $c_r$  by increasing the probability of death or capture; road-building, electrification, mobile connectivity, and targeted development spending in the LWE-affected districts plausibly raised  $w_s$ ; and the string of decapitating strikes against senior leadership, culminating in the killing of Basavaraju in May 2025, plausibly reduced  $p$ , the subjective probability that continued armed struggle would yield a favourable outcome. Surrender testimonies reported by journalists in 2025–2026—a source base whose limitations Section 13 discusses directly—are consistent with, though they do not conclusively establish, this reading: cadres reported by wire services described disillusionment with the movement's ideology, resentment at its treatment of the tribal communities it claimed to represent, and the availability of the state's rehabilitation package as reasons for surrendering. In the notation above, this reporting is consistent with a situation in which  $U_r$  had fallen below  $U_s$  for a large share of remaining cadres, though the model itself cannot establish that this mechanism, rather than some other, was the operative one.

### 10.3 A Heuristic Compartmental Model of the Insurgency's Lifecycle

The overall trajectory of the movement—a sharp initial outbreak in 1967–72, near-total suppression in West Bengal, a slower second wave of growth in the tribal districts of central India from the 1980s through the mid-2000s, and a sustained multi-decade decline culminating in collapse by 2026—has the qualitative shape of an epidemic curve. It can be represented, purely as a heuristic device, with a compartmental model analogous to the Susceptible–Infected–Removed (SIR) framework used in mathematical epidemiology, in which  $S(t)$  denotes the pool of the rural population susceptible to recruitment by virtue of the grievances described in Sections 4 and 7,  $A(t)$  denotes the stock of active armed cadres, and  $R(t)$  denotes those removed from the active insurgency through death, arrest, or surrender. The system evolves as:

$$dS/dt = -\beta \cdot S \cdot A / N \quad dA/dt = \beta \cdot S \cdot A / N - \gamma \cdot A \quad dR/dt = \gamma \cdot A$$

where  $N$  is the relevant regional population,  $\beta$  is an assumed recruitment-contact parameter, and  $\gamma$  is an assumed attrition parameter—the per-cadre probability, per unit time, of being killed, arrested, or induced to surrender. As in epidemiological models, the ratio  $R_0 = \beta/\gamma$  determines whether the modeled outbreak grows ( $R_0 > 1$ ) or dies out ( $R_0 < 1$ ).

The analogy is illustrative, not literal, and its limitations should be stated as clearly as its uses. Unlike disease transmission, insurgent recruitment is not simply a matter of random contact between an active cadre and a susceptible individual; civilian populations are not passively 'susceptible' in the epidemiological sense but exercise judgment about a movement's legitimacy; individuals can move between compartments in both directions, since former cadres sometimes rejoin after surrendering; organizational structure, leadership quality, and external sanctuary all matter in ways a two-parameter

model cannot capture; geographic relocation of the kind that occurred between the 1970s and the 1990s effectively resets the model's population base in a way the equations do not represent on their own; and political legitimacy—arguably the single most important variable in the entire history recounted in this article—cannot be adequately reduced to the parameters  $\beta$  and  $\gamma$ . Subject to these limitations, the framework nonetheless offers a compact way of restating what the historical narrative already implies: the 1970–72 collapse in Bengal is consistent with a sudden, severe increase in  $\gamma$  (mass arrests and killings under Ranjit Gupta and Siddhartha Shankar Ray) that pushed  $R_0$  below 1 almost overnight; the movement's slow-burning persistence in the Red Corridor between roughly 1990 and 2010 is consistent with a sustained  $R_0$  modestly above 1, sustained by a fresh susceptible population in a new geographic setting; and the long final decline of 2019–2026, culminating in the reported organizational collapse of 2025–26, is consistent with a second, sharper increase in  $\gamma$ —achieved through intelligence-led decapitation strikes (Section 12), the saturation of the forested interior with new security camps, and a surrender-and-rehabilitation policy that simultaneously reduced  $\beta$  by shrinking the susceptible population  $S(t)$ , broadly in line with the rational-choice logic of Section 10.2.

Figure 4 presents a numerical simulation of this system, with  $\beta$  and  $\gamma$  assumed piecewise by historical period to reproduce the qualitative, two-wave shape of the movement's history and the approximate timing of its major inflection points. It is not a reconstruction of actual cadre-strength figures, which are not systematically known for a clandestine organization, and is labeled accordingly.

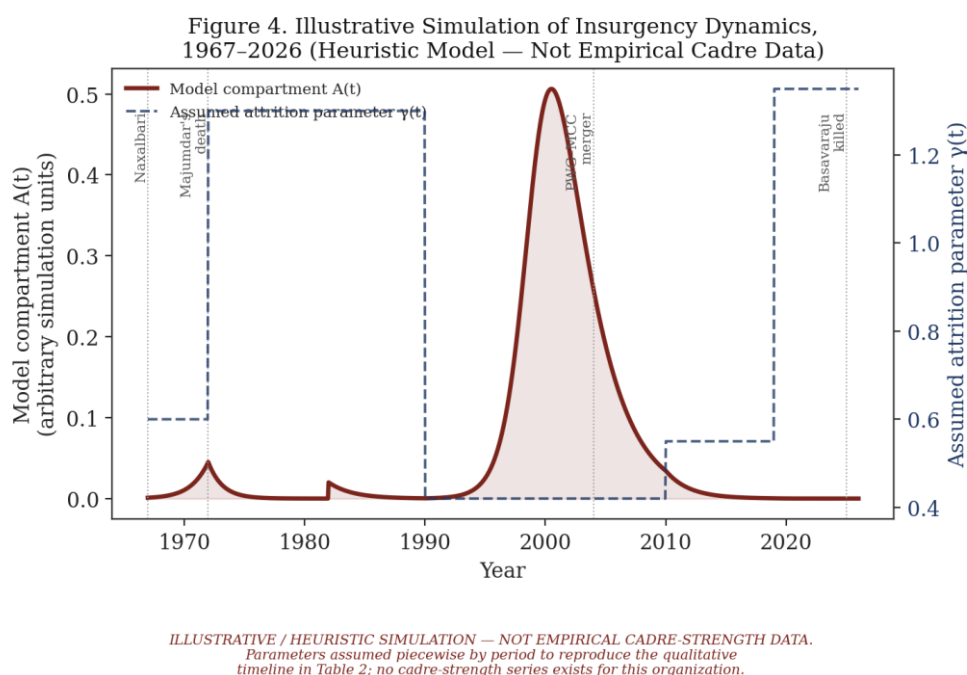


Figure 4. Illustrative Simulation of Insurgency Dynamics, 1967–2026 (Heuristic Model — Not Empirical Cadre Data).

### 11. Quantifying Fifteen Years of Decline: Violence, Territory, and Attrition, 2010–2025

Whatever their interpretive disagreements, government and independent sources concur on the broad statistical trajectory of Left-Wing Extremist (LWE) violence in India since its most recent peak around 2010. Table 3 and Figures 1–2 present, separately, the number of LWE-related violent incidents and the combined civilian and security-force death toll reported to Parliament between 2010 and 2024; Table 4 and Figure 3 document the parallel contraction in the number of districts officially classified as LWE-affected. Incident counts and death tolls are presented as two figures rather than one dual-axis chart, and district counts are presented separately again, because—as the notes to both tables make explicit—these are measures constructed on different bases and should not be read as a single, seamlessly comparable series.

| Year | Violent incidents | Deaths (civilians + SF) |
|------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| 2010 | 1,936             | 1,005                   |
| 2015 | 1,089             | —                       |
| 2016 | 1,048             | —                       |

| Year | Violent incidents                                 | Deaths (civilians + SF) |
|------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 2017 | 908                                               | —                       |
| 2018 | 833                                               | —                       |
| 2019 | 501                                               | 202                     |
| 2020 | 470                                               | —                       |
| 2021 | 361                                               | 147                     |
| 2022 | 413                                               | —                       |
| 2023 | 485                                               | —                       |
| 2024 | 374                                               | 150                     |
| 2025 | sharp further decline (partial-year figures only) | —                       |

Table 3. LWE Violence Incidents and Combined Casualties, India, 2010–2025

Sources: Ministry of Home Affairs replies to the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, as reported in Deccan Herald (Aug. 2024; Dec. 2024) and ETV Bharat (25 Mar. 2025). Combined death figures are reported only for the years shown; a dash indicates that a comparable combined figure was not located in the sources consulted, not that no deaths occurred. Incident count between 2010 and 2019 fell by  $(1,936 - 501) / 1,936 \approx 74$  per cent.

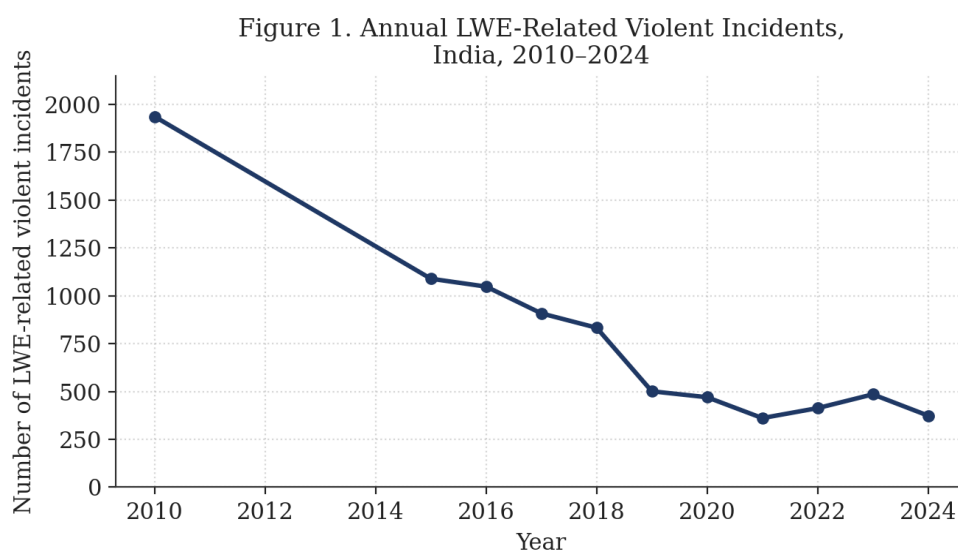


Figure 1. Annual LWE-Related Violent Incidents, India, 2010–2024.

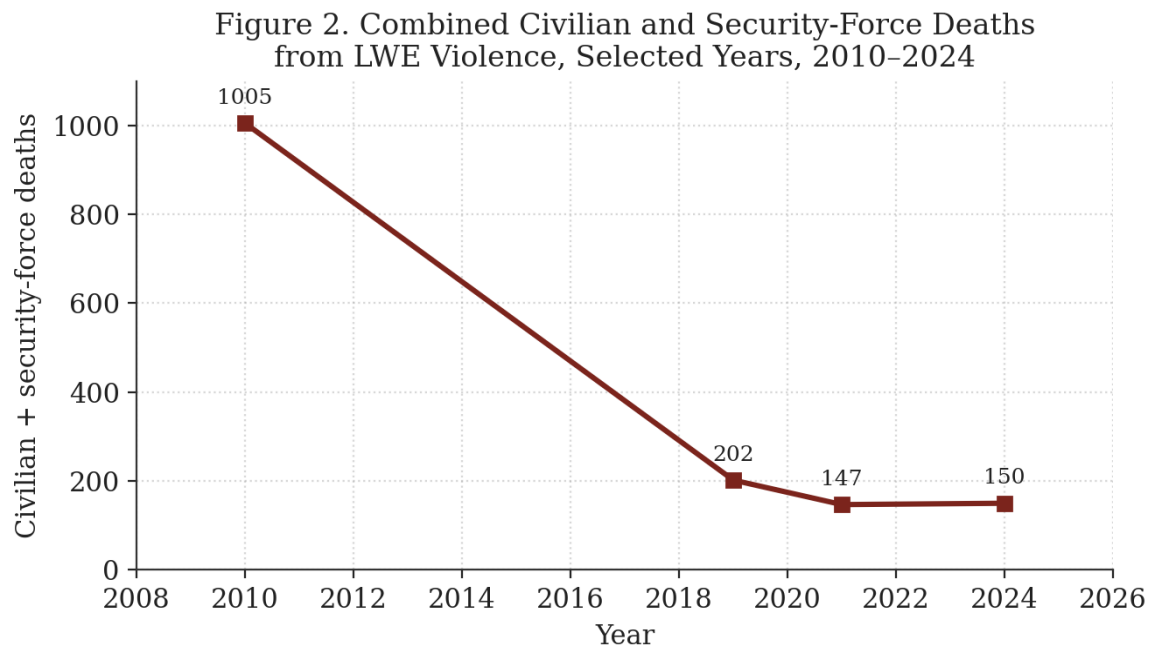


Figure 2. Combined Civilian and Security-Force Deaths from LWE Violence, Selected Years, 2010–2024.

| Year | Districts classified as LWE-affected                                  |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2010 | 96 (districts reporting at least one incident)                        |
| 2013 | 126 (districts covered under the Security-Related Expenditure scheme) |
| 2018 | 90 (SRE scheme)                                                       |
| 2021 | 70 (SRE scheme)                                                       |
| 2024 | 38 (SRE scheme)                                                       |
| 2025 | 18, of which 6 designated 'most affected'                             |

Table 4. Contraction of the Geographical Footprint of Left-Wing Extremism, 2010–2025

Source: *The Shillong Times* (1 Apr. 2025). The 2010 and 2013–2025 figures use different official classifications (districts reporting incidents vs. districts covered under the Security-Related Expenditure scheme) and are not fully comparable; both are reported here for transparency rather than combined into a single trend.

Figure 3. Contraction of the Geographical Footprint of Left-Wing Extremism, 2010–2025

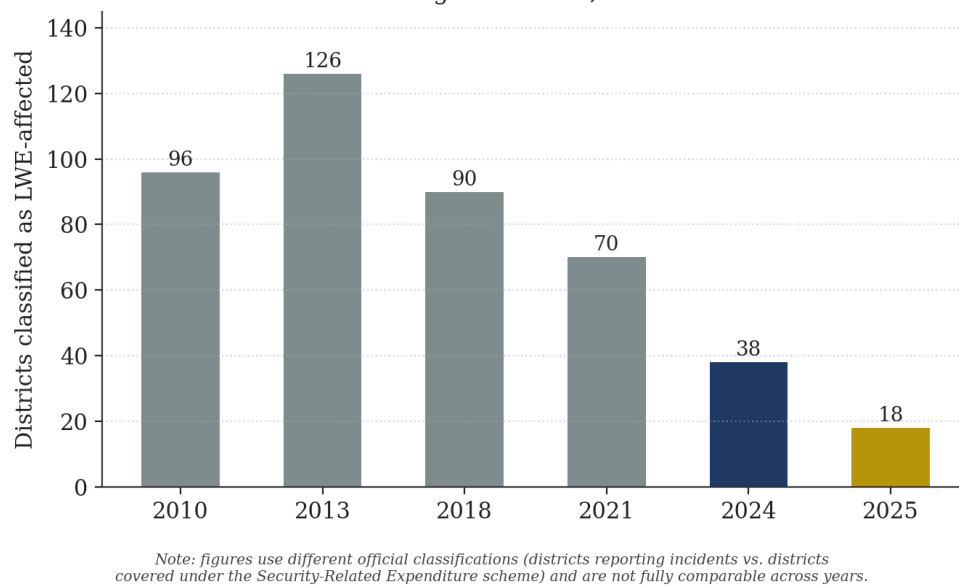


Figure 3. Contraction of the Geographical Footprint of Left-Wing Extremism, 2010–2025.

Two features of this record are analytically significant, though both should be read as descriptive association rather than demonstrated causation. First, the decline is not linear: incidents fell steeply between 2010 and 2019 (a 74 per cent reduction, as calculated in the note to Table 3) but plateaued, and even rose modestly, between 2020 and 2023—years in which pandemic-related disruption to security operations coincided with continued Maoist activity concentrated in a shrinking core, chiefly the Bastar division of Chhattisgarh, which by 2024 is reported to have accounted for the large majority of all remaining incidents nationally. Second, the final collapse in 2025–2026 was disproportionately concentrated in leadership attrition and mass surrender rather than in a corresponding rise in incident counts, which by then were already low; the available evidence is consistent with the movement's command structure having been dismantled and its remaining cadre base persuaded, district by district, to leave the movement, rather than with a conventional war of attrition fought incident by incident—the dynamic set out formally, and with its own limitations, in Section 10.3.

## 12. Case Study: Operation Kagar and the Killing of Basavaraju, May 2025

The single most consequential reported event in the movement's final years was the killing of Nambala Keshava Rao, alias Basavaraju, the general secretary of the CPI (Maoist) and the movement's most senior remaining leader, in the Abujhmad forest straddling Narayanpur and Bijapur districts of Chhattisgarh on 21 May 2025. Because independent verification of the specific circumstances is difficult, this case study separates the official account, the critical account offered by human-rights and left-solidarity organizations, and this article's own historiographical assessment of what can and cannot be established.

### 12.1 The Official Account

According to government and security-force statements, Basavaraju—then in his early seventies, and, on the assessment of Indian security agencies, the principal strategist behind a series of the movement's most lethal attacks, including the 2010 ambush in Chintalnar/Dantewada that reportedly killed 74 to 76 CRPF personnel—was tracked and killed in an operation that multiple official and media accounts describe as having involved several weeks of intelligence-led pursuit culminating in an intense final engagement. Official accounts state that a joint force of the Chhattisgarh Police's District Reserve Guard (DRG), drawn from Narayanpur, Bijapur, Dantewada, and Kondagaon districts, together with central paramilitary COBRA commandos, deliberately fragmented the target group into smaller units before cornering Basavaraju's remaining party in the Kareguttalu hills and Abujhmad interior. Approximately twenty-six to twenty-eight Maoist cadres, including senior Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee members, are reported to have been killed alongside him; security forces are reported to have recovered and destroyed weapons-manufacturing facilities, improvised-explosive-device components, and communications equipment at the site. The Prime Minister and the Union Home Minister publicly described the operation as a landmark victory and reaffirmed the government's commitment to eliminating organized Naxalism by 31 March 2026. The operation is described by security officials as part of a broader, sustained offensive referred to as Operation Kagar.

### 12.2 The Critical Account

Human rights and left-solidarity organizations offered a markedly different reading of the same event. A statement circulated by the advocacy platform Sanhati characterized the operation as a 'state-sanctioned execution' rather than a genuine armed encounter, questioned the official account of the

circumstances in which Basavaraju was killed, and situated the operation within a broader critique of government development and security policy in Adivasi areas. This critical account should be understood as advocacy evidence rather than independently verified fact, in the same sense that the official casualty figures above should be understood as the security establishment's own account rather than independently verified fact; neither account has been confirmed by a source independent of the parties to the conflict.

### **12.3 Historiographical Assessment: What Can and Cannot Be Established**

Given the remoteness of the site, the absence of independent observers, and the reliance of all available accounts on either government or advocacy sources, this article draws the following limited conclusions. What can be established with reasonable confidence, because it is reported consistently across government, security, and independent journalistic sources and has not been directly disputed even by critical accounts, is that Basavaraju was killed in Abujhmad on 21 May 2025 together with a substantial number of other senior cadres, and that this removed the movement's most experienced remaining strategic leadership. What remains genuinely disputed is the precise sequence of events at the site, whether the encounter occurred as officially described, and the broader characterization of the operation as either a legitimate counter-insurgency success or, as Sanhati and allied critics argue, an extrajudicial killing consistent with a broader pattern documented in Section 9. This article takes no position on that disputed characterization. What is not disputed by either account is that the operation was followed, within months, by an accelerating cascade of surrenders, discussed in Section 13, which this article treats as a separate and more securely documented development.

## **13. The End of Armed Naxalism? Collapse, Surrender, and Contested Meaning, 2025–2026**

In the ten months following Basavaraju's death, the CPI (Maoist)'s remaining command structure is reported to have undergone a particularly rapid disintegration in its recent history. According to contemporary reporting, in October 2025 politburo and Central Military Commission member Mallojula Venugopal Rao ('Bhupathi') surrendered in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district along with roughly sixty guerrillas; fifty cadres reportedly surrendered in Bijapur in March 2025; twenty-six in Sukma in January 2026; and **thirty-five** in the Bastar division—including twenty-five in Bijapur, twelve of them women—on 31 March 2026, the government's self-imposed deadline ("61 Senior Naxal Cadres"; "26 Naxalites Surrender"; "35 Naxalites Surrender"). In the last week of February 2026, Tippiri Tirupati, alias 'Devuji,' who had emerged as one of the movement's most senior surviving figures and who had headed its Central Military Commission, is reported to have surrendered in Telangana along with other senior cadres (Henry). By the government's own account, the remaining organized armed structure had been reduced to the point that the CPI (Maoist)'s central leadership and armed formations could no longer function as a coordinated insurgent force; Union Home Minister Amit Shah presented 31 March 2026 as the culmination of the government's campaign to eliminate Left-Wing Extremism (Amit Shah; Ramachandran).

The government's 31 March 2026 declaration should, however, be read as an administrative and political statement rather than as an empirical claim that literally every individual cadre had surrendered by that date. Contemporary reporting shows that individual and small-group surrenders continued throughout the final phase of the insurgency. For example, twenty-seven Naxalites, including ten women, surrendered in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on 15 October 2025, while further groups surrendered during the months preceding the March deadline ("27 Naxalites Surrender"; "51 Naxalites with Rs 1.61 Crore Reward"). These developments are best interpreted not as evidence that the March declaration was factually false, but as illustrating the distinction, introduced in Section 1.1, between the government's political declaration that organized armed Naxalism had been eliminated and the longer, more gradual process of individual demobilization that a genuine organizational collapse of this kind is likely to involve. On the available evidence, the CPI (Maoist)'s capacity for centrally organized armed action appears to have ceased by the March deadline; residual individual demobilization is therefore compatible with, rather than necessarily contradictory to, the conclusion that the organization had lost its capacity to function as a centrally coordinated armed insurgency (Amit Shah; Ramachandran).

Surrendering cadres, in statements reported by wire services and government broadcasters—a source base whose limitations were flagged in Section 3, since retrospective surrender testimony may be shaped by rehabilitation incentives, political pressure, and the passage of time in ways a contemporaneous 1967 source would not—repeatedly cited three overlapping reasons for laying down arms: disappointment with what several described as a hollow or exhausted ideology; resentment at what they characterized as Maoist mistreatment of the tribal communities the movement claimed to defend; and the practical inducements of state rehabilitation packages, which combined cash assistance with promises of vocational training, housing assistance, and reintegration support ("50 Naxalites Surrender"; "26 Naxalites Surrender"). In the March 2025 Bijapur surrender, for example, police attributed the cadres' decision to what they described as the "hollow and inhuman" Maoist ideology, alleged exploitation of tribal communities by senior cadres, internal differences, and the expansion of security and development initiatives ("50 Naxalites Surrender"). The January 2026 Sukma surrender similarly involved cadres who reportedly cited the state's surrender and rehabilitation policy ("26 Naxalites Surrender"). According to *The Diplomat's* 2026 reporting, the historian Sumanta Banerjee, whose 1980 study remains the field's foundational text (Section 2), attributed the movement's collapse primarily to its long-term alienation from the rural masses it claimed to represent and to its failure to remain connected with wider social movements (Ramachandran).

The meaning of this collapse remains, appropriately, contested, and this article treats the contest itself as part of the historical record rather than attempting to resolve it. The government's framing presents March 2026 as the successful conclusion of a security campaign begun in earnest after 2014 and intensified after 2019: violence eliminated, districts liberated, and tribal populations freed from a decades-long cycle of coercion by both insurgents and counter-insurgents (Amit Shah). Critics, including the advocacy voices already noted in Section 12.2, offer a markedly different reading: that the campaign's tempo and lethality—including the disputed circumstances of Basavaraju's death—amounted to an extermination campaign against a political movement rather than a conventional counter-insurgency; that structural conditions in the affected districts (land alienation, displacement by mining and infrastructure projects, and weak implementation of the Forest Rights Act) remain substantially unaddressed even as the armed movement has ended; and

that the discourse of 'urban Naxal' prosecutions against lawyers, journalists, and academics discussed in Section 15 may persist, or even intensify, once its original insurgent referent has disappeared. These critical positions remain matters of interpretation and advocacy rather than independently established conclusions, as discussed in Section 12.2. Both readings can therefore be true simultaneously in different registers: the available historical and contemporary record supports the conclusion that organized armed Naxalism, as a fighting force, had ceased to function in any meaningful centrally coordinated sense by the government's deadline (claim (ii) in the terminology of Section 1.1), while leaving entirely open the question central to this article's argument—whether the structural grievances that produced Naxalism in 1967 have themselves been resolved, or merely deprived, for now, of an organized armed expression (claim (iii)).

The significance of the final phase lies less in any single surrender or government declaration than in the convergence of several indicators: senior leadership attrition, the contraction of the movement's territorial and organizational base, large-scale surrenders, arrests and defections, and the sustained decline in LWE-related violence documented in Section 11. No single indicator is sufficient to establish organizational collapse, particularly because the clandestine strength of an insurgent organization cannot be directly observed. The evidence is nevertheless mutually reinforcing. The surrender of Bhupathi in October 2025, the surrender of Devuji in February 2026, the continuing flow of cadre surrenders, and the government's account of the dismantling of the CPI (Maoist)'s central leadership together indicate a profound loss of organizational capacity ("61 Senior Naxal Cadres"; Henry; Amit Shah). The conclusion advanced here is therefore not that every individual Maoist had surrendered or disappeared by 31 March 2026, but that the CPI (Maoist) had, by that point, lost the centralized command and armed capacity necessary to sustain a major insurgency.

Because these events lie only months in the past at the time of writing, the historiographical judgment on them is necessarily provisional, and this section should be read as an account of contemporary history rather than as settled historical interpretation. Unlike the 1972 collapse in West Bengal, which took subsequent decades of scholarship (Banerjee; Dasgupta) to interpret, the 2025–2026 collapse in central India has not yet been the subject of a comparable body of peer-reviewed historical or ethnographic study. The account offered here therefore relies principally on contemporaneous news reporting, government and parliamentary statements, and surrender accounts, explicitly flagged as such throughout. These sources permit a strong provisional assessment of organizational decline, but not yet a definitive historical explanation of why the movement collapsed or what its longer-term social consequences will be. The interpretation should consequently be revisited as archival, ethnographic, and post-collapse scholarship becomes available.

## 14. Cultural and Intellectual Legacy

### 14.1 Literature

The Naxalite movement generated a substantial body of literary and cultural production, much of it produced by participants, sympathizers, or writers responding critically to the movement and its aftermath. This body of work constitutes an important part of its enduring legacy. The analytical question pursued here is not merely which authors engaged with the movement, but how literature functioned as a vehicle of political memory—as mourning, as an assertion of martyrdom, as an expression of generational and political guilt among survivors, and as a means of preserving experiences of political violence that differed from dominant official representations of the period, in which Naxalite activists were frequently characterized primarily through the categories of criminality and extremism.

Mahasweta Devi's *Hajar Churashir Maa (Mother of 1084, 1974)* is particularly illustrative of the relationship between political violence and mourning. The novel is structured around a mother's belated confrontation, on the anniversary of her son's death, with the political convictions and circumstances surrounding his killing. In this respect, the work transforms private grief into a broader reflection on political repression, social inequality, and the moral consequences of state violence (Devi). Samaresh Majumdar's *Kalbela* and *Uttarkaal* similarly engage with the experiences of a generation of Bengali youth during and after the Naxalite period, placing greater emphasis on the longer psychological and social consequences of political radicalization and subsequent disillusionment. The movement also generated poetry and other forms of cultural expression, including material circulated within radical political circles. Poets such as Subhas Mukhopadhyay and Shakti Chattopadhyay occupied positions within the wider cultural milieu in which the movement was debated, even where their relationship to Naxalite politics was neither uniform nor uncritical.

The literary record therefore does more than preserve references to a historical movement. It provides a space in which revolutionary aspiration, political violence, repression, grief, disillusionment, and moral ambiguity can be represented simultaneously. Literature thus became one of the principal means through which the Naxalite experience was converted from an episode of political conflict into an object of continuing historical and cultural memory.

### 14.2 Cinema

Bengali parallel cinema of the 1970s and subsequent decades engaged extensively with the Naxalite experience, and here too the more useful analytical question concerns how the movement was represented rather than simply the fact of its representation. Mrinal Sen's *Calcutta 71* (1972) constructs its argument through a fragmented and non-linear structure linking different historical moments of poverty and deprivation. The film can therefore be read as locating the social conditions associated with Naxalite radicalization within a longer history of urban and rural inequality rather than treating 1967 as an isolated rupture (Sen, *Calcutta 71*). *Padatik (The Guerrilla Fighter, 1973)*, by contrast, focuses more directly on the experiences of an underground cadre and on the tensions between revolutionary commitment, organizational discipline, and individual disillusionment (Sen, *Padatik*).

Sen's own retrospective account provides particularly strong evidence for reading *Padatik* as an exercise in political self-criticism rather than as a

straightforward denunciation of the Naxalite movement. Looking back on the film, Sen explained that he made it after the immediate violence and political passions had subsided, when there was greater scope for reassessment, describing the process as a form of “soul searching.” He emphasized that he retained great respect for those who had played militant roles in the Naxalite movement while simultaneously becoming critical of the movement's disintegration (Sen, *Montage*). He further recalled that the fugitive protagonist was deliberately constructed as someone who begins to question himself, the Party, its leadership, and the direction of the movement. The film thus presents revolutionary commitment alongside an emerging interrogation of organizational authority and political strategy (Sen, *Montage*). Sen also acknowledged the difficulty of distinguishing political self-criticism from what might be perceived as slander, suggesting that *Padatik* deliberately occupied an ambiguous position between sympathy for revolutionary commitment and criticism of its organizational failures (Sen, *Montage*).

This perspective is also visible in the film's treatment of organizational discipline and individual conscience. Sen recalled that experiences from his own earlier political milieu entered *Padatik*, including conflicts between Party authority, underground existence, personal loyalty, and political dissent (Sen, *Montage*). The film can therefore be understood as a cinematic space in which revolutionary commitment, political discipline, personal relationships, and doubts about leadership are brought into tension. Its critical perspective does not necessarily negate the grievances that contributed to radicalization; rather, it questions whether organizational practices adopted in the name of revolution could remain faithful to those broader aspirations.

The significance of *Padatik* also lies in its relationship to the wider cultural politics of Sen's Calcutta trilogy. Sen later distinguished the more immediate political responses represented by *Interview* and *Calcutta 71* from *Padatik*, which allowed greater space for reassessment after the political situation had changed (Sen, *Montage*). Contemporary commentary likewise places *Padatik* within a trilogy concerned with political unrest, social deprivation, and the condition of Kolkata in the early 1970s. The film therefore occupies an important position between political intervention and historical reflection: it records the atmosphere of the period while simultaneously subjecting revolutionary politics to critical examination.

The significance of this cultural production lies not merely in its aesthetic qualities but in its function as a form of political memory that operates independently of the movement's organizational fate. Literary and cinematic representations offered alternative perspectives on the aspirations, experiences, violence, repression, and disillusionment associated with the Naxalite period. Recent scholarship on cultural representations of the movement further demonstrates that works such as Mahasweta Devi's *Hajar Churashir Maa* and Samaresh Majumdar's *Kalbela* provide important spaces for examining how Naxalite experiences, including those of women, have been remembered and represented in Bengali and wider South Asian cultural production (Bhattacharya 1240–42). The literary and cinematic record consequently contributed to a cultural archive through which subsequent generations could interpret the movement not only as an episode of insurgency but also as a history of idealism, conflict, repression, disillusionment, and unresolved social questions. This distinction between the history of Naxalism and the memory of Naxalism is analytically important. The organizational decline of armed Naxalism does not erase the cultural representations through which the movement has been remembered and debated since the late 1960s. Rather, the reported organizational collapse of 2025–26 may itself become a new subject of retrospective interpretation within this longer cultural history.

## 15. The Legacy of Naxalism in West Bengal

In West Bengal itself, the Naxalite movement as an armed insurgency was effectively suppressed by the mid-1970s, and the subsequent Left Front governments maintained a firm position against the CPI (Maoist) and its predecessors. The legacy of Naxalism in the state is thus primarily cultural, intellectual, and political rather than organizational. The movement's influence on Bengali literature, cinema, and intellectual life is pervasive, as discussed above.

The Naxalite movement also appears to have shaped the organizational culture and ideological framework of the Bengali left more broadly, though the precise causal weight of this influence, relative to other factors bearing on the CPM's strategy after 1977, is difficult to establish from the sources available to this article and should not be overstated. The more defensible claim is that Naxalism was one significant component of the political environment that made agrarian reform and rural political incorporation especially urgent for the incoming Left Front government: having watched a rival current on the left attempt, and fail at severe human cost, to address rural land grievances through armed struggle, the CPM had a strong incentive to demonstrate that parliamentary communism could deliver tangible benefits to the same constituency by other means (Bhattacharyya). This is offered as a plausible contextual reading of the CPM's incentives rather than as a demonstrated causal relationship between Naxalism and specific subsequent legislation.

Operation Barga, launched in 1978, registered sharecroppers and secured their legal rights against eviction, improving the bargaining position of a significant segment of the rural poor. Land reform under the Left Front is widely reported in the secondary literature to have redistributed a substantial acreage—commonly cited at over one million acres—to landless and land-poor households over the following two decades, though this article has not independently verified the exact acreage, the precise years over which it was distributed, or whether the figure includes homestead land in addition to agricultural land, and reports it here as a widely cited estimate rather than a figure this article has confirmed against primary government records (Bhattacharyya). These measures, while falling far short of the structural transformation envisioned by Naxalite ideology, represented real improvements in the material conditions of a significant portion of West Bengal's rural poor, and can reasonably be described as part of the Naxalite movement's most tangible material legacy—not through the movement's own actions, but through the political pressure that its emergence plausibly placed on its parliamentary rivals.

In the years leading up to the movement's national collapse, the legacy of Naxalism continued to be contested in West Bengal and across India. Human

rights organizations, journalists, and scholars documented continuing instances of extrajudicial killing, disputed encounter deaths, and the use of legislation such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act against suspected Maoists and their supporters, including, according to these sources, tribal community members, lawyers, and journalists with no direct organizational connection to the CPI (Maoist) (Human Rights Watch). The labeling of intellectuals and activists as 'urban Naxals' by government officials and media had, by the early 2020s, become a significant civil liberties concern in its own right; this article reports that characterization as a live and contested debate, in which state-security arguments about genuine organizational links and civil-liberties arguments about ideological guilt-by-association coexist, rather than treating either side's framing as settled. Whether this discourse persists, evolves, or recedes now that the CPI (Maoist) itself has ceased to exist as an organized armed force is, as Section 13 notes, one of the more consequential open questions the movement's history leaves for the immediate future.

## 16. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This article's conclusions are subject to a number of limitations that should be stated explicitly rather than left implicit in qualifying phrases scattered through the text. First, the article draws on secondary historiography and does not incorporate original archival research or fieldwork; its historical claims for the 1960s–1980s period are accordingly claims of synthesis rather than primary discovery. Second, the clandestine nature of the organizations discussed means that cadre-strength, recruitment, and casualty figures for the movement itself are incomplete and, in several instances noted in the text (Section 9), subject to wide and irreducible uncertainty. Third, official government statistics on LWE violence and affected districts have changed their definitions and classification criteria over time, as Section 11 documents, limiting the comparability of trends across the full 2010–2025 period. Fourth, the account of events since 2024 depends heavily on contemporary journalism and official statements rather than peer-reviewed scholarship, for the straightforward reason that the latter does not yet exist for events this recent; Sections 12 and 13 flag this dependence throughout rather than treating recent claims as equivalent in evidentiary weight to the better-established historical narrative of Sections 4–9. Fifth, the claims made by surrendering cadres reported in Section 13 are retrospective testimony offered in the context of a rehabilitation policy that may itself have shaped what cadres chose to say, and should not be read as a neutral record of motivation. Sixth, the three formal models developed in Section 10 are heuristic devices rather than estimated empirical models, with the specific limitations of each stated at the point where it is introduced; a genuine empirical test of the structural specification in Section 10.1, in particular, would require district-level panel data that lie outside this article's scope. Finally, cadre strength itself—the quantity the model in Section 10.3 attempts to represent—has never been measured directly for a clandestine insurgent organization, a limitation inherent to the subject matter rather than to this article's method.

These limitations point toward several directions for future research: a district-level empirical test of the structural specification proposed in Section 10.1, using panel data now available for a longer post-collapse period than was accessible at the time of writing; systematic oral-history and ethnographic research with surrendered and rehabilitated cadres, of the kind Sundar and Alpa Shah undertook for the movement's active phase, to assess the reliability and diversity of the surrender narratives reported in Section 13; archival research into CPM-era internal party documents to test the contextual reading of the Naxalism–Operation Barga relationship proposed in Section 15 more rigorously than the secondary literature currently allows; and a comparative study of the 2025–2026 collapse alongside the demobilization of other long-running insurgencies, which might help establish whether the pattern of leadership decapitation followed by cascading surrender documented here is a general feature of insurgency endings or a case-specific one.

## 17. Conclusion

The Naxalite movement in West Bengal represents one of the most significant political phenomena of postcolonial India. Emerging from agrarian grievances in Naxalbari in 1967, it developed into a broader revolutionary movement shaped by class conflict, international revolutionary politics, and the participation of peasants, workers, students, and urban youth. Its subsequent history was marked by state repression, organizational fragmentation, ideological disputes, geographical displacement, and the transformation of its principal armed formations. The movement that originated in West Bengal eventually found its most sustained armed expression in central and eastern India, particularly through the CPI(Maoist). By 2025–26, available evidence indicates a profound weakening and reported organizational and military collapse of this principal armed successor, although the disappearance of organized armed capacity should not be equated with the disappearance of the political, social, and cultural questions associated with Naxalism.

The history and legacy of the movement can be understood through three interconnected strands: material, political-security, and cultural. The material strand concerns the agrarian and socio-economic conditions that produced support for radical mobilization, including landlessness, unequal access to resources, displacement, and the marginalization of tribal and rural communities. Subsequent developments such as land reform, Operation Barga, and the expansion of panchayati raj altered the political and institutional environment in which agrarian radicalism operated. Yet many of the material strand's underlying questions concerning land, forest rights, and displacement remain unresolved. The political-security strand encompasses the transformation of revolutionary organizations, their fragmentation and geographical relocation, and the increasingly organized counter-insurgency response of the state. Its trajectory can be periodized into successive phases of repression, regrouping, geographic expansion, intensified counter-insurgency, and eventual decline. The reported organizational and military collapse of the principal armed successor closes the political-security strand as an organized armed phenomenon, but it does not erase the historical processes that produced it.

The cultural strand has a different trajectory and remains substantially independent of the organization's fate. Naxalism has entered Bengali and Indian cultural memory through literature, poetry, cinema, political discourse, and representations of revolutionary youth, martyrdom, violence, disillusionment, and generational conflict. Works associated with writers and filmmakers such as Mahasweta Devi, Samresh Majumdar, Subhas Mukhopadhyay, Shakti Chattopadhyay, Mrinal Sen, demonstrate that the movement became more than an episode of political violence: it became a subject through which

questions of memory, political morality, social injustice, and the failures of revolutionary idealism could be examined. Consequently, the end of organized armed Naxalism cannot by itself constitute the end of its cultural or intellectual afterlife.

The formal and analytical models employed in this study provide heuristic ways of interpreting these historical processes rather than empirical estimates of revolutionary behaviour. The structural specification emphasizes the interaction of agrarian inequality, state capacity, political opportunity, repression, and organizational strength; the rational-choice framework incorporates ideology alongside identity, kinship, peer recruitment, coercion, revenge, gender, and political socialization; and the compartmental model illustrates how recruitment, active participation, disengagement, and repression may interact over time. These models are therefore best understood as analytical devices that organize the historical evidence rather than as predictive econometric models. Their interpretation remains constrained by the absence of comprehensive archival and field data on clandestine organizations and by the changing definitions and measurement practices surrounding Left-Wing Extremism.

The central question of this study is whether the collapse of organized armed Naxalism represents the resolution of the historical conditions that generated the movement or merely the disappearance of their principal organized armed expression. The evidence examined here supports the latter interpretation. The decline of armed capacity does not necessarily imply the resolution of agrarian inequality, tribal marginalization, displacement, land and forest-rights disputes, or broader questions concerning political representation and state legitimacy. Similarly, the end of an insurgent organization does not automatically erase the ideological and cultural memories through which the movement continues to be interpreted. The significance of the 2025–26 developments therefore lies not simply in the weakening of an insurgent organization but in the apparent conclusion of a particular form of armed political mobilization that had persisted, in changing organizational forms and geographical locations, since 1967. The gender and tribal dimensions of the movement further demonstrate why organizational decline should not be treated as equivalent to historical resolution. Women's participation, experiences of political violence, and the gendered consequences of displacement and counter-insurgency require greater attention, while tribal communities occupied a central position in the later geography of the insurgency. Surrender testimonies and recent accounts of demobilization offer potentially valuable evidence concerning recruitment, coercion, ideological commitment, and disengagement, but such testimony must be interpreted cautiously because it is shaped by the circumstances of surrender and rehabilitation policies. These dimensions point toward important areas for future research rather than permitting definitive conclusions from the available evidence.

In comparative perspective, the Naxalite trajectory differs significantly from revolutionary movements that succeeded in capturing state power, such as those in China, Cuba, and Vietnam. The Indian movement never established national political sovereignty. Instead, its trajectory involved an initial revolutionary upsurge, regional repression, organizational fragmentation, geographic displacement and renewed growth, prolonged insurgency in central India, and finally the reported organizational and military collapse of its principal armed successor nearly six decades after Naxalbari. The comparison therefore highlights both the endurance of revolutionary ideology and the limits imposed by India's democratic institutions, electoral competition, state capacity, and changing rural political economy.

The historical significance of Naxalism consequently extends beyond the survival or disappearance of any particular organization. Its legacy can be found in debates over land reform, tribal rights, displacement, state violence, civil liberties, revolutionary politics, and the relationship between social justice and political violence. The movement's armed organizations may disappear, fragment, or surrender, but the historical questions that produced their emergence remain subjects of political and scholarly inquiry. On the available evidence, organized armed Naxalism appears to have come to a close for the first time since 1967; its political memory, cultural significance, and unresolved social questions, however, remain part of India's postcolonial historical landscape.

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