



## Red Shadows Fading: The Decline of Naxalism in India and Government Response in a New Era

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### ARTICLE DETAILS

#### Research Paper

**Accepted:** 28-03-2025

**Published:** 16-04-2025

#### Keywords:

*Naxalism, Maoism, Left-Wing Extremism, Socio-Economic Disparities, Security Measures, Development Initiatives, Tribal Rights, Violence*

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### ABSTRACT

The Naxalite movement, which began in 1967 in Naxalbari, West Bengal, as a radical peasant uprising, has evolved into one of India's longest-running internal security challenges. Rooted in socio-economic disparities, land rights issues, and tribal marginalization, Naxalism has oscillated between violent insurgency and ideological assertion. Over the past two decades, the Indian state has shifted from reactive military strategies to more holistic approaches encompassing development, dialogue, and democratic integration. In recent years, a significant decline in Naxal violence has been observed. In multiple statements during 2023 and 2024, Union Home Minister Amit Shah affirmed that the "Naxalite menace is nearing its end" and emphasized the success of proactive policies that blend security with welfare initiatives. This research paper analyzes Naxalism's historical trajectory, causes, and evolution and present governmental policies, ground realities, and future strategies for ensuring enduring peace in affected regions. The study uses a qualitative approach, relying on government reports, policy reviews, media accounts, and expert analyses to comprehensively understand the Naxalite decline.

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**DOI :** <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15307947>

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## Introduction

In a democracy, the genuine and authentic voice of the people finds a proper medium to reach the highest form of power; the people of India have long cherished the dream of living under a healthy governance system, validated through mandates for constitutionally formed governments. However, sometimes, the system's shortcomings reach a point where people's trust in the legal framework wanes. A popular government becomes a pawn in the hands of industrial capitalists and entrepreneurial tycoons, causing people to lose control over their lives, leading to anarchy. This arises from a strong feeling of injustice and alienation. This discontent intensifies when policies and schemes fail to reach the last person in line, coupled with a lax administrative system and corruption. One problem born out of such dissatisfaction is Naxalism.

Naxalism, also known as Maoism, is influenced by the principles of Maoism, a form of communism developed by Mao Zedong. Maoists used propaganda and rebellion against the state, which Mao described as a protracted war. The central theme of Maoist ideology is violence and armed rebellion to capture state power. Maoist ideology glorifies violence and employs deception to mobilize people around the perceived inadequacies of the existing system, encouraging them to resort to violence as the only means of redress.

After the Naxalite attack in Sukma in April 2021, which tragically claimed the lives of 21 security personnel, no major Naxalite attacks have occurred, unlike earlier years when such incidents were frequent. However, due to swift actions by security forces, government efforts toward poverty alleviation and development, and the Naxalite ideology deviating from its goals to engage in extreme violence and extortion, such incidents have steadily declined. In response to a question in the Rajya Sabha on September 21, 2020, Minister of State for Home Affairs, Shri Kishan Reddy, stated that 90 districts across 11 states are considered affected by left-wing extremism and are covered under the Home Ministry's security-related expenditure scheme. The combined efforts of the government, security forces, and local communities have significantly reduced left-wing extremist incidents, deaths, and their geographical spread over the past decade. In 2010, 96 districts were affected by left-wing extremism, while in 2019, Naxalite-related violent incidents occurred in 46 districts across the country. According to Home Ministry data, between 2009-2013, 8,782 cases of Naxalite violence were reported, which decreased to 4,969 between 2014-2018. These figures indicate that Naxalism is now on the decline.



However, a January 2025 ambush in Bijapur, killing eight security personnel, underscored the persistent challenge. Despite this, Union Home Minister Amit Shah reaffirmed the government's commitment to eradicating Naxalism by March 2026, noting that only six districts remain "most affected" compared to 126 in 2013. Due to swift actions by security forces, government efforts toward poverty alleviation and development, and the Naxalite ideology deviating from its goals to engage in extreme violence and extortion, such incidents have steadily declined.

### **Causes of the Origin and Rise of Naxalism**

Factually, left-wing extremism in India began in 1967 in the village of Naxalbari in West Bengal's Darjeeling district, which is why this militant movement is called "Naxalism." Initiated by Charu Majumdar, Kanu Sanyal, and Kanhai Chatterjee to curb the exploitation of small farmers by landlords, this armed movement was named Naxalism. When the Naxal movement began in 1967, the Indian government viewed it as a law-and-order issue. It failed to analyze the movement's causes or the extent of public mobilization, which led to its inability to curb its spread. The Naxal movement emerged due to prevailing social and economic issues. Dangerous levels of poverty marked the areas where the Naxal movement gained strength. Post-independence, the Indian government focused on policies to improve agricultural production on a large scale without adequately addressing economic and social inequalities.

Such conditions were fully exploited by Naxal ideology, which promised people freedom from poverty and exploitation, not through the governmental system but by adopting violent means to secure their rights. Taking advantage of these circumstances, The Naxal movement broadened its support base as the rural impoverished and marginalized resonated with its ideology. The establishment, ideology, and dissemination are fundamentally anchored in socio-economic conditions as communist doctrine gained prominence, sharecroppers and landless laborers, predominantly from lower castes and tribes, aligned with the movement. This created an atmosphere of conflict between the upper landlord and lower labor classes.

Naxal-affected areas also lack basic infrastructure such as education, healthcare, and roads. Additionally, the complex and costly judicial system delays justice for people with low incomes, fueling discontent. In tribal-dominated areas, the rapid exploitation of natural resources has led to displacement, with inadequate solutions provided beyond superficial measures. Moreover, most Naxal-affected areas, such as hilly or dense forest regions, are geographically remote, with limited administrative and



developmental reach. Naxalites have taken full advantage of this, establishing parallel governance systems, forcing even those who do not believe in their ideology to align with them out of necessity.

Additionally, through various forest acts, the government declared forest lands protected areas, creating difficulties for tribes living there. Thus, those most affected by the status quo became key participants in the Naxal movement.

### **Government Efforts to Curb Naxalism**

The government is addressing the Naxal issue through a multi-pronged strategy. To resolve any problem, both short-term and long-term plans are implemented. Since the Naxal movement is an ideology-driven issue, it cannot be resolved solely through police action or law enforcement. Therefore, the government is pursuing security measures, development initiatives, and efforts to ensure the rights of tribal and other marginalized communities. To tackle this issue, the central government has redefined the "Red Corridor," reducing the number of Naxal-affected districts to roughly one-fifth of the original count, citing a decline in violence in these areas.

The Ministry of Home Affairs is committed to empowering local communities by ensuring their rights while promoting development and curbing violent activities. The central government supports states by providing Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) units and intelligence, establishing counter-insurgency schools, modernizing state police and intelligence networks, and providing helicopters for anti-left-wing extremism operations.

### **Law and Order Approach**

- **Police Modernization:** The government has initiated a police modernization program in Naxal-affected regions, wherein the national government allocates significant financial resources to state governments to enhance their equipment, encompassing advanced communication systems, vehicles, and infrastructure. In 2024, Shah emphasized using drones, satellite imagery, and artificial intelligence to monitor Naxal activities, thereby diminishing ambushes that had previously resulted in significant losses. In response to the escalating deployment of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) by Naxalites and the consequent rise in casualties, the government has resolved to supply mine-protected vehicles (MPVs) to the military. Central paramilitary forces have been assigned for an extended duration to support states.



- **Legislation:** The central and state governments have introduced laws to deter people from joining the Naxal movement, including the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act of 2007, the Forest Rights Act of 2006, and the Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act of 2006, among others.

### **Socio-Economic Development**

The government is working to expand infrastructure, skill development, education, energy, and digital connectivity in Maoist-affected areas to the fullest extent possible. In March 2025, Shah noted that over 15,000 houses, including 9,000 in Bastar, are being built under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana for families affected by violence, reinforcing development as a tool against Naxalism and connecting local businesses, such as those producing handicrafts, to online markets to increase income flow and ensure inclusion. This provides employment opportunities, reducing the likelihood of locals joining Naxal activities. Schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) have been launched to improve rural road connectivity.

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### **Security Measures**

- **Greyhounds:** Established in 1989 as a specialized anti-Naxal force.
- **Operation Green Hunt:** Launched in 2009-10, it involved heavy deployment of security forces in Naxal-affected areas.
- **Left-Wing Extremism Mobile Tower Project:** In 2014, the government approved the installation of mobile towers in left-wing extremism-affected states to improve connectivity.
- **Salwa Judum (2005-2011):** A militia established and mobilized in Chhattisgarh to combat Naxal violence, consisting of indigenous tribal youth who are backed and trained by the Chhattisgarh government. Despite being deemed unlawful and prohibited by a Supreme Court ruling, it persists in many manifestations, including armed auxiliary troops, District Reserve Groups, and other vigilante organizations.
- **Demonetization** also disrupted financial support to Naxalites, leading to approximately 700 Maoists surrendering thereafter.

### **SAMADHAN Strategy**



The central government introduced an eight-point plan called "SAMADHAN," an acronym derived from English words, to tackle the Naxal issue:

- S: Smart Leadership
- A: Aggressive Strategy
- M: Motivation and Training
- A: Actionable Intelligence
- D: Dashboard-Based KPIs and KRAs
- H: Harnessing Technology
- A: Action Plan for Each Theatre
- N: No Access to Financing

The SAMADHAN plan, initiated by the Indian government in 2017, is an extensive framework designed to combat Naxalism, a longstanding left-wing extremist insurgency stemming from socio-economic inequalities. The acronym represents Smart Leadership, Aggressive Strategy, Motivation and Training, Actionable Intelligence, Dashboard-based KPIs and KRAs, Harnessing Technology, Action Plan for Each Theatre, and No Access to Financing. This multifaceted strategy integrates security, development, and governance to eradicate Naxal influence, especially within the Red Corridor. Intelligent leadership underscores synchronized authority to invigorate security personnel, but an assertive strategy favors proactive initiatives over-reactive responses. Motivation and training augment the capabilities of police and paramilitary organizations, with specialized forces such as CoBRA and Greyhounds spearheading operations. Actionable intelligence, enhanced by contemporary technologies such as drones, artificial intelligence, and biometric-integrated weaponry, guarantees accurate targeting of Naxal sanctuaries. Dashboard-oriented KPIs monitor advancement, guaranteeing accountability. Utilizing technology, like satellite imaging and reinforced police stations, enhances operating efficiency. Customized action plans consider area specificities while constraining finances—via strategies such as demonetization and NIA-led asset confiscations—impedes Naxal income derived from extortion and illicit taxes.

Recent updates indicate advancement: in 2024, 287 Naxalites were eliminated in Chhattisgarh, and the number of impacted districts decreased to 16 by 2025. Development initiatives such as PMGSY and housing projects enhance security by resolving tribal issues. Nonetheless, poverty and governance deficiencies endure, requiring continuous attention to achieve the 2026 Naxal-free objective.



Initially, the Naxal movement was not viewed as a serious internal security threat, allowing Naxalites to establish themselves in remote tribal areas of some states. Due to their violent activities, administrative systems gradually withdrew from these areas, stalling security and development activities. This suited the Maoists, who established rudimentary parallel governance systems in these regions. However, over the past decade, the Naxal movement has been recognized as a severe internal security crisis and a significant obstacle to nation-building. Consequently, the government has initiated multi-dimensional measures to address security and development gaps in these areas. These efforts have effectively limited the expansion of the Maoist movement into new areas and reduced their dominance. Efforts are now underway to shrink their core areas gradually—a challenging process that will yield desired results in the long term, reducing the impact and influence of the Maoist insurgency to negligible levels.

According to the 2020-21 annual report of the Ministry of Home Affairs,

*"Over the past six years, there has been a significant decline in left-wing extremist violence and its geographical spread. The downward trend that began in 2011 continued into 2020. Compared to 2013, 2020 saw a 41% reduction in violent incidents (from 1,136 to 665) and a decrease in left-wing extremism-related deaths (from 397 to 183). Compared to 2019, 2020 maintained this trend, with a slight decline in violent incidents (from 670 to 665) and deaths (from 202 to 183). Security force casualties also decreased (from 52 to 43). Additionally, the reach of government development programs and other schemes has encouraged a large number of left-wing extremists to abandon violence and join the path of development."*

The geographical spread of left-wing extremist violence has also significantly reduced. In 2020, left-wing extremist violence was reported in 53 districts across nine states, compared to 76 districts across 10 states in 2013. The scope of violence has been largely contained, with 88% of left-wing extremist violence concentrated in just 30 districts. The Communist Party of India (Maoist) remains the most dominant among various left-wing extremist groups, accounting for over 86% of violent incidents and 96% of deaths.

### **Key Factors in Containing Naxalism**

- Ban on the CPI (Maoist)
- Strengthening intelligence networks





- Improved interstate coordination
- Addressing the issue of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs)
- Specialized India Reserve Battalion
- Special infrastructure schemes, including the construction of 250 fortified police stations in left-wing extremism-affected states
- Special central assistance for the 30 most affected districts
- Vocational training for surrendered Naxalites to promote self-employment

Immediate grant of ₹4 lakh for each surrendered Naxalite, kept as a fixed deposit for three years, which can be used as collateral for loans to start self-employment ventures. Monthly financial assistance of ₹6,000 for three years for each surrendered Naxalite.

Today, Naxalism is no longer a social movement or struggle but has degenerated into a form of terrorist activity involving murder, kidnapping, and other illegal acts for financial gain. The condition of people with low incomes in Naxal-affected areas remains unchanged, while Naxalites, who claim to fight for their rights, extort crores of rupees.

By April 2025, the Naxal movement in India had considerably diminished, although it continued to exist in isolated areas. The Home Ministry indicates that Naxal impact is confined to 16 districts in nine states, a reduction from 126 in 2013, with only six categorized as "most affected." In 2024, Chhattisgarh recorded the neutralization of 287 Naxalites, the arrest of 1,000 individuals, and the surrender of 837, indicating heightened operational activity. Recent events, such as the January 2025 Bijapur ambush that resulted in the deaths of eight security personnel, indicate persistent concerns. The government's SAMADHAN policy, which integrates security operations, development programs like PMGSY, and tribal welfare, has decreased incidents by 53% and casualties by 70% from 2014 to 2024. Home Minister Amit Shah aims for a Naxal-free India by March 2026; nevertheless, poverty, unemployment, and tribal alienation persist as hurdles. Surrenders, including 50 in Bijapur in March 2025, indicate diminishing morale, yet ideological vestiges and inaccessible landscapes perpetuate the conflict.

## Conclusion and Suggestions

Undoubtedly, the government's anti-Naxal measures and the increased reach of development programs to the last person have significantly reduced Naxal violence and its influence. However, the root causes of the Naxal movement—poverty, exploitation, and corruption—remain critical. For a complete





resolution, these conditions, which fuel the spread of Naxal ideology, must be eradicated; otherwise, this ideology-driven problem could resurface in the future. To address this issue thoroughly, the provisions of the Fifth Schedule and the PESA Act must be fully implemented to grant tribal communities the right to self-governance within constitutional boundaries. Additionally, mining activities should be environmentally friendly and minimal to avoid unnecessary displacement. Both state and central governments must adopt a two-pronged strategy to liberate Maoist-affected areas from their influence while achieving effective governance and rapid development goals through sustained efforts.

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