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The Naxalite Movement and the Indian State, 1967-1969

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Despite the recent characterizations of the Naxalite movement as India's "bloody class war" in the New York Times or as the country's "greatest internal security threat," the history of the struggle defies simple categorization. Although the movement began as a peasants' rebellion in Naxalbari in 1967 and was supported by the Communist Party of India (Maoist), its social origins cannot be reduced to class conflict alone. This difficulty is due to the complexity and variability of its social bases over the last four decades, as well as the changing nature of the state. This paper calls for a new interpretation of the movement and its relationship to the state: situating the struggle within the context of the development of Indian state from "a reluctant pro-capitalist state that flirted with socialism" after 1947 to "an enthusiastic pro-capitalist state with a neo-liberal ideology" in the 1980s. Through interviews, archival research and secondary sources, this paper hopes to demonstrate that while national and state-level policies of security and development have structured strategies of resistance taken up by the Naxals, these strategies have in turn shaped the Indian state from below. This paper uses a synthetic mode of analysis, paying special attention to gender, caste and religion as well as the mediating influences of post-coloniality and neoliberal globalization.

Introduction

Although the movement began as a peasants' rebellion in Naxalbari in 1967 and was supported by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), its social origins cannot be reduced to class conflict alone.

Despite the recent characterizations of the Naxalite movement as India's "bloody class war" in the *New York Times* or as the country's "greatest internal security threat" by then-Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2010, the long history of the struggle defies simple categorization¹. Although the movement began as a peasants' rebellion in Naxalbari in 1967 and was supported by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), its social origins cannot be reduced to class conflict alone. The complexity and variability of its social bases over nearly five decades, as well as the changing nature of the state, explain the difficulty of adequately theorizing about the Naxalite movement.

The Naxalite movement has continued in phases over the last 47 years and was most recently reborn under the aegis of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) in 2003 and 2004. The present-day iteration undoubtedly shares a lineage with the early years of the struggle: namely, the involvement of a communist party, the quotidian experiences of poverty, inequality and structural violence for the people in the so-called "Red Corridor" region, the use of terrains that are more suitable for guerrilla warfare than elsewhere in India, a persistent and significant *adivasi* base, et cetera². Nevertheless, there are significant differences as well, both in the way the struggle is theorized and fought on the ground and the way it is thought and written about in the media, parliamentary debates and security briefings at the two levels of government and academic literature.

This particular paper focuses on the first three years of Naxalbari from 1967 to 1969 and attempts to make some comments on the political character of the movement and state responses at this time. Despite the ample production of literature in the wake of the 2000s phase of the movement, similar systematic studies are difficult to find for earlier periods of the struggle. To fill the gap in the accounts of the early years of the insurrection, this paper situates the Naxalite struggle within the context of the dramatic developments in the Indian

state form over the last five decades. This is particularly significant in the Naxalite case as its first few years were during a crucial transitional period for the Indian state: the tumults of the late 1960s and early 1970s were critical to transforming “a reluctant pro-capitalist [Indian] state that flirted with socialism” after 1947 to “an enthusiastic pro-capitalist state with a neo-liberal ideology” in the 1990s³.

Over the past five decades, in intended and inadvertent ways, the Naxalite movement has not only altered state strategies on how it should relate to and rule its rural population, but the uprising has also changed how the limbs and mechanisms of the state relate to each other⁴. Examining state reactions to the first three years of the insurrection crystallizes the fact that the Naxalite movement was a key event for Indian federalism: it figured prominently in debates over the allocation of powers, jurisdiction and responsibilities in India’s federalist arrangement and configured future central-local relations. Nevertheless, despite the presence of many axes of hostility between the centre and the states, the central government’s assessment of the Naxalites as security threats and its containment policy consisting of *danda*, *daroga* and *data* were largely embraced by the states in their efforts to tame and deter the movement. Examining the Indian state’s reactions to Naxalbari in its disaggregated form in the context of centre-state relations thus also elucidates the genealogy of the securitization discourse vis-à-vis the Naxalite movement that has become increasingly dominant in recent years.

Methodology: Content and Geospatial Analysis

Due to the overt involvement of police personnel in the “originating” episode of Naxalbari and the movement’s conspicuous claims-making on the state, the intimate relationship between the Naxalite uprising and the state has been highly visible in media reports. Much of the analysis of the resultant changes in state form related in this paper is informed by the content analysis of 580 *Times of India* articles between 1967 and 1969. The articles were chosen by

conducting a search on the Proquest Times of India Historical Archives, 1838-2004, with the keyword “naxal*.” This returned all articles that contained terms such as Naxalite, Naxal and Naxalbari in the title or the content. The absence of online or physical access to other Indian newspaper archives meant that only the archives of the national editions of the English-language daily, *Times of India*, between 1 January 1967 and 31 December 1969 were searched for references to the unit of analysis “naxal*.” Given the resource and time constraints, the search was not extended to the archived local editions of the same newspaper on the Proquest database.

The search results were coded chronologically by year and by type of actor. The latter was roughly coded to conform to the categories of Naxalites, different state governments, the central government, various communist party factions, other parties and a miscellaneous “other” classification. Additional specifics were retained in the columns entitled “Area,” “Actors” and “Details” so as to prevent context-stripping as much as possible. The coding was completed by loosely keeping political scientist and communications theorist Harold Lasswell’s formulation of the core objectives of content analysis in mind: “Who says what, to whom, why, to what extent and with what effect?”⁵ It was only “loosely” kept in mind because making neat demarcations between actors and those affected by their actions was not necessarily straightforward or even possible in some cases. Nonetheless, these newspaper reports were particularly illuminating vis-à-vis the varying levels of tension between the centre and the states and the national security agenda espoused by the central government from the beginning of the movement.

Terrain has played an important role in many communist revolutions for tactical reasons⁶. It is not mere coincidence that the communist leader Charu Mazumdar described Srikakulam, one of the centres of Naxalite activity in Andhra Pradesh, as “a jungle surrounded by hills.” Nor is it surprising to find E.M.S. Namboodiripad, the communist Chief Minister of Kerala, characterizing Wynad in Kerala to be “ideally suited for the tactic of guerrilla warfare⁷.” Peoples living in forests,

wilderness, hills and frontier regions in India have long been automatically assigned to the administrative category and identity marker of tribals or *adivasis*⁸. While the classification of “tribal” or “*adivasi*” is not unproblematic or unitary, the Naxalite movement’s strong *adivasi* base strengthens the rationale for investigating its geospatial aspects. To visually represent the topography of the struggle, the content analysis dataset was uploaded to Google Maps Engine Lite and the data was mapped according to the years and the types of actors involved. The outputs consist of three maps for the years of 1967, 1968 and 1969. These maps provide the reader with insights into the role of terrain both as determinant and staging ground in the Naxalite movement and are discussed in the next section.

Mapping the Movement: 1967 to 1969

The eponymous episode of the Naxal struggle was the infamous police shooting of six women, one man and two children in the village of Naxalbari in West Bengal on 25 May 1967⁹. Naxalbari is situated in northern West Bengal, near the borders of Nepal and Bangladesh (then East Pakistan). In 1967, many of the landless peasant and sharecropper population of the heavily agrarian area retained their tribal affiliation and were identified as Santhals in media reports. Months of clashes with landowners and police personnel, forcible occupation of land by peasants and organization by Communist Party of India (Marxist) cadres had preceded the now-iconic event. The immediate but short-lived response to the Naxalbari massacre in the media was to frame it as revenge for the May 4 murder of a police inspector by an arrow¹⁰. The following maps for 1967, 1968 and 1969 demonstrate the gradual dispersion of the Naxalite revolution west- and south-ward from West Bengal. While West Bengal continued to be the epicentre of the struggle in the late 1960s, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh became important sites of Naxalite activity by the end of the 1960s. The maps also represent the intensity of the central and local governments’ security responses and communist party factionalism in each state. The insets for West Bengal, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh enable an

enlarged view of the terrain of the struggle.

1967

In the aftermath of the May 25 massacre, Naxalite activity spread throughout the northern region of West Bengal. The inset demonstrates that Naxalite actions were clustered around Naxalbari, while decisions by the West Bengal government and the communist politburo emanated from Calcutta. Although Naxalbari itself appears as a relatively flat agrarian region on the map, its northern reaches share the geographical attributes of the rocky, mountainous and the lush landscape of Sikkim. Naxalite activity occurred in far fewer numbers in Kerala and Andhra Pradesh than in West Bengal in 1967.

The Naxalite Movement in 1967

Inset: West Bengal.

[Computer map]. No scale given.

AutoNavi, Basarsoft, Google,

MapaGISrael, ORION-ME, SK

Planet, Zenrin. Mountain View, CA:

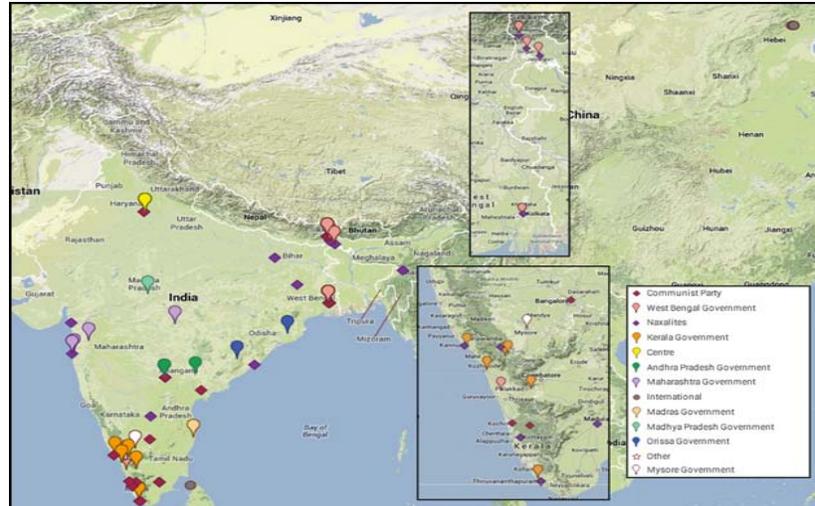
Google Maps¹¹



1968

The 1968 map demonstrates the southbound dispersion of Naxalite activity and parliamentary responses. West Bengal continued to experience a significant amount of Naxalite episodes in the agrarian plains between Sikkim and East Pakistan. Nevertheless, the struggle had moved to Kerala by 1967. The majority of Naxalite activities and such state responses as ministerial visits and police fortifications in Kerala were carried out in urban areas along the coast. A smaller number occurred in the rainforests adjacent to the Malabar Uplands, especially in Wynad.

The Naxalite Movement in 1968
Inset: West Bengal and Kerala.
 [Computer map]. No scale given. AutoNavi, Basarsoft, Google, MapGISrael, ORION-ME, SK Planet, Zenrin. Mountain View, CA: Google Maps, 2014. Using Google Maps Engine Lite Beta [GIS software]. Mountain View, CA: Google¹².



1969

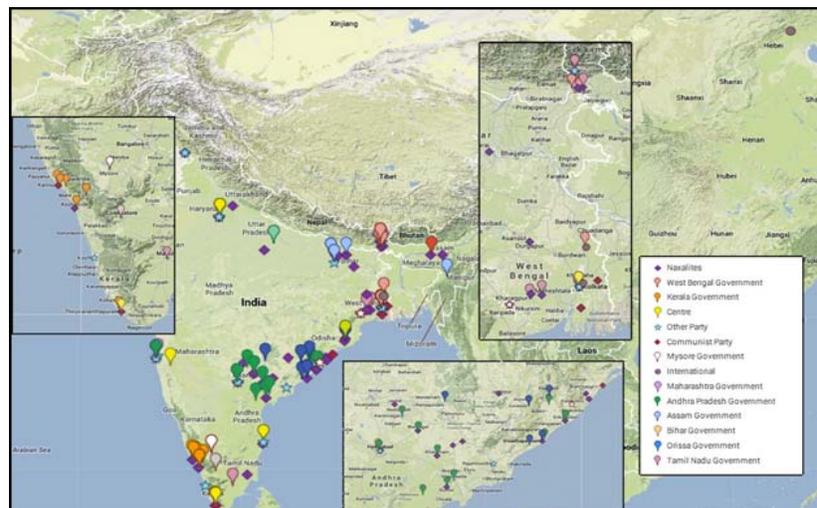
The 1969 map visually represents the changes in tempo and terrain, as well as the socio-demography of the struggle, between 1967 and 1969. The most conspicuous of these changes is the rather rapid dispersion of the movement in Andhra Pradesh. Of course, it is somewhat erroneous to consider Andhra Pradesh a homogeneous territory. The boundaries of the state have been in contention since 1947 due to the incorporation of the culturally distinct Telangana region with Andhra Pradesh. In fact, after nearly half a century of agitations, the southwestern state was divided into Telangana and Andhra Pradesh with a joint capital in Hyderabad in July 2014¹³. The map demonstrates that there were two parallel Naxalite movements in Andhra Pradesh. One arm was positioned around the central plains and agrarian landscape of the Telangana region. It built upon both the communist mobilization among peasants against landlordism from 1946 to 1949 and the contemporary demands for autonomous statehood for the region. The second strand of the movement was embedded in the elevated, forested agency area (denoting areas reserved for those deemed to be Scheduled Tribes in accordance with the Indian Constitution) in Srikakulam¹⁴. Two contributions to Desai's Agrarian Struggles in India after Independence, Tarun Kumar Bannerjee's "Girijan Movement in Srikakulam: 1967-70" and the National Labour

Institute (NLI) report entitled “Post-Independence Peasant Movements in Ryotwari Areas of Andhra Pradesh” confirm the bicephalic nature of the Andhra Pradesh Naxalite struggle at this time.

Regional and demographic bifurcations are also expressed in the 1969 West Bengal inset. While rural unrest continued, there was major mobilization and eruption of Naxalite activity in Calcutta. In the countryside landlords were deemed the primary class enemy, but in Calcutta the annihilation program targeted the police force and was carried on by lower middle- and middle-class urban youth. The map demonstrates that the West Bengal state responded with redoubled efforts: raids and executions by the police became a common occurrence on the streets of Calcutta in 1969¹⁵.

The Naxalite Movement in 1969 Inset: West Bengal, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh.

[Computer map]. No scale given. AutoNavi, Basarsoft, Google, MapGISrael, ORION-ME, SK Planet, Zenrin. Mountain View, CA: Google Maps, 2014. Using Google Maps Engine Lite Beta [GIS software]. Mountain View, CA: Google¹⁶.



The Response of the Parliamentarians

From its inception, the Naxalite movement has had a profound effect on the state. As Corbridge et al. note in their introduction to *Seeing the State: Governance and Governmentality in India*, the Indian state often appears as a fuzzy entity when viewed from below and the state tends to see its subaltern subjects through just as blurry a lens¹⁷. Similar accounts of seeing the state and seeing like a state have recently been furnished by anthropologists Alpa Shah (2010) and Akhil Gupta (2012)¹⁸.

Despite the unmistakable tensions between the centre and the states, both adopted an increasingly repressive containment policy against the Naxalites that was more or less implemented through the mechanisms of *danda*, *daroga* and *data*.

The reactions of various parliamentary actors to the Naxalites often affected or underscored the evolution of the Indian state form in the late sixties. The responses emanating from Indira Gandhi's central government and the state governments of West Bengal, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh illuminated the escalating crisis of Indian federalism, primarily brought on by the erosion of the Congress Party's support base and the deaths of most of the anti-colonial nationalist leaders who had formed the party. Despite the unmistakable tensions between the centre and the states, both adopted an increasingly repressive containment policy against the Naxalites that was more or less implemented through the mechanisms of *danda*, *daroga* and *data*.

Disciplining and Punishing the Naxalites: Conceptualizing Danda, Daroga and Data

The three primary disciplinary mechanisms used by the centre against its Naxalite challengers were *danda*, *daroga*, and *data*. Even as local governments resisted central assertions of power over what they deemed state affairs, they soon followed the containment model set out by the centre. The one notable exception to this pattern was the Andhra government's necropolitical treatment of the *adivasi* Srikakulam rebels.

Danda is most often translated as "punishment" in English and its meaning is related to and coextensive with the stick customarily used for meting out such punishment. In the context of Indian politics, it signifies a longstanding ruling principle. In *Dominance without Hegemony*, Ranajit Guha conceptualizes *danda* as an essential mode of dominance for both the ancient and the British colonial rulers in India. In the era of monarchical absolutism, *danda* represented "an ensemble of 'power, authority and punishment.'" During the ruling period of the British Raj, the indigenous idiom of *danda* complemented the exported modernist imperative of order. The role of punishment was not simply seen as a convenient tool for imposing order, but it was considered to be the necessary condition that made order a possibility in the polity¹⁹.

Much as their British predecessors had done against peasant insurgents in colonial India, Indira Gandhi's cabinet extensively utilized the legal apparatus to mete out *danda* to the Naxalites to bring order²⁰. As early as July 1967, the central government negotiated with the West Bengal United Front government to issue a decree of specific sections of the Arms Act within the Siliguri subdivision. Y.B. Chavan, the Union Home Minister, requested the enforcement of Sections 4, 11 and 12 to ban the carrying and importation of such arms as bows, arrows, spears and rifles. When asked during a parliamentary debate why the central government was choosing to impose these three sections, the Home Minister noted that they carried much heavier penalties than breaches of Section 144, the customary legal code used in India against illegal bearing of arms²¹. By May 1968, the central government also pioneered the use of two acts against suspected Naxalites during the President's Rule period in West Bengal between 1968 and 1969: the Preventive Detentions Act (Article 22), which enabled the government to detain alleged Naxalites without trial to maintain public order, and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, which empowered them to impose restrictions on forming and meeting as a group or association in the name of protecting the sovereignty and integrity of India²². Despite a pitched battle between the states and the centre about jurisdiction, the government in West Bengal utilized the same legal codes against Naxalites and the Congress-led Andhra Pradesh government soon followed suit as well. The ruling principle of using *danda* to impose order could hardly have been clearer or less unselfconscious: in December 1968, Chavan declared that "if it became necessary, [the Naxalites would] be dealt with a *danda*²³."

The literal English translation of *daroga* is police superintendent²⁴. The police force has of course functioned as a central repressive state apparatus from the earliest moments of the modern state. In colonial and postcolonial India, a special relationship has existed between insurgents and *darogas*. As Guha demonstrates, conflation of rebellion with robbery and common civil offenses had been the defining colonial state response to agrarian uprisings²⁵.

Orthodox historians' interpretations have followed these state discourses and attempts at criminalization by *darogas*. In such a way, Indian historiography has been deeply structured by the *daroga*. According to Guha:

[A] powerful and sustained class struggle like the resistance of the Barasat or Pabna peasantry tends to invest the disparate attacks on property and person with new meanings and rephrase them as a part of a general discourse of rebellion. Consequently, each of these acts acquires an ambivalence: wired at the same time to two different codes—the code of individualistic or small-group deviance from the law where it originates and that of collective social defiance which adopts it—it bears the twin sign of a birth-mark and a becoming. It is precisely this duplex character which permits it to be interpreted one way or the other depending on the interpreter's point of view. A *daroga* or a historian who thinks like a *daroga* would be inclined to interpret it in terms of its past and condemn it²⁶.

The *daroga* hence played a crucial discursive role in constructing the rebel as petty criminal, as well as an instrumental one, during the British colonial era.

Guha's explication of the *daroga* as both a primary instrument of *danda* and a discursive bedrock that constructed and produced rebels as criminals is equally appropriate in the Naxalbari case. Arrests and indictments of Naxalites as dacoits, looters and murderers by *darogas* served to contain, criminalize and delegitimize the movement. The longer the Naxalite rebellion persisted, the more specially trained and extraordinarily empowered did such *darogas* become across West Bengal, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh²⁷.

Since the Naxalbari rebellion erupted due to the brutal death of 10 Santhal peasants in the hands of police officers, the West Bengal government was initially unwilling to counter Naxalite activity through the deployment of additional police personnel. On 12 June 1967, Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee ordered that the police use restraint in Naxalbari and surrounding areas²⁸. By 4 July 1967, however, Mukherjee reversed his decision and issued orders for the police to enter

Naxalite stronghold areas “to prevent murder, raid, loot and molestation of women²⁹.” In the aftermath of Naxalite attacks on police stations in Tellicherry and Pulpalli in Kerala, large numbers of *darogas* were deployed to apprehend the rebels and charge them with petty crimes. An unnamed top-ranked police officer publicly ridiculed some Wynad rebels who had attempted to attack the police station there and dismissed any revolutionary potential in their actions by commenting that “[r]evolutionaries do not run away at the sight of the police³⁰.”

Data constituted the last element of the disciplinary triad against the Naxalites from 1967 to 1969. During the content analysis process, it became clear that the majority of the news reports were as concerned with numerically representing the strength of the Naxalite movement, as they were with describing the nature of their activities. The central and state governments devoted considerable resources to making regular public announcements on the number of Naxalites killed, arrested and sentenced. Content analysis demonstrates that between 1967 and 1969, there were 43 such updates issued by the Union administration and local governments in Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Kerala, Orissa and Bihar. These data updates served a dual purpose: firstly, they attested to the absolute legibility of “the Naxalite problem” to the state and its efficiency in containing that problem; secondly, they strengthened the discursive trend of criminalizing the rebels and further deconstructed the socio-political character of the Naxalite combatants to produce them as an aggregate of raw data.

In *Seeing Like a State*, political scientist James C. Scott theorizes that legibility is a set of techniques that is essential to the operation of every modern state because ruling first requires “reading” the subject population³¹. The central and local governments’ ability to render the Naxalite rebellion legible to themselves and to the public through extensive data collection on deaths, arrests, and sentencing confirmed their efficacy. In the face of the challenge posed by the Naxalites to the state, these data updates emphasized the state’s superior resources and ability and consequently legitimized its claim to

rule. Much like the *darogas*, the central and local governments used these announcements on arrests and sentencing of Naxalites to criminalize the rebels. Resorting to data also allowed these administrations to strip the Naxalite struggle of its intricate socio-political underpinnings. The compound social inequalities and political grievances that had given rise to the movement were discarded and deconstructed. The Naxalite insurgents were riven from their contexts and produced instead as an aggregate of raw data for public presentation; their complex and chaotic social hieroglyphics were ordered and translated to the standardized, nationally legible language of data.

Donna Haraway has noted the following about the semiotics of science in her seminal essay on science, epistemology and objectivity called “Situated Knowledges”:

Science has been about a search of translation, convertibility, mobility of meanings, and universality – which [becomes] reductionism only when one language (guess whose?) must be enforced as the standard for all translations and conversions³².

The central and local governments’ search for legibility and the consequent reduction of the Naxalite “problem” through data would be less problematic if it did not come at the expense of queries into the logic of the Naxalite uprising.

Data is neither necessarily reductive, nor always an act of meaning-breaking aimed at the subaltern. The central and local governments’ search for legibility and the consequent reduction of the Naxalite “problem” through data would be less problematic if it did not come at the expense of queries into the logic of the Naxalite uprising. Content analysis reveals that although investigations into land insecurity and inequality had been conducted by both central and local administrations during the early years of the rebellion in an effort to understand and redirect it, by 1969 such discussions became rarer and data updates became more frequent at all levels of government.

Federalism and Its Discontents

1967 marked the twentieth year of India as a postcolonial nation-state, having gained its independence from the British through a prolonged and fierce anti-colonial nationalist movement in 1947. India’s centralized federalism had a longer

history, however, and its origins were extremely contentious. The first time the Indian state was committed to a federation was during a crucial and particularly tense period of the nationalist movement in 1935. As a response to the Indian nationalists' call for the establishment of self-rule, the British Raj had introduced the Government of India Act of 1935. By 1967, the federalism experiment in India was still ongoing, but it was facing a severe crisis over the proper division of powers, jurisdictions, and responsibilities between the centre and the states.

Between 1964 and 1967 these centre-state tensions were exacerbated by the so-called "passing of the tall men" phenomenon: by 1967, no charismatic leader from the nationalist movement was still living and no new leader equal in political acumen or magnetism appeared in their wake. The Indian National Congress (INC), considered the national party of India at this time, suffered an immense setback due to the death of Jawaharlal Nehru while in office in 1964 and then the passing of his successor, the esteemed Lal Bahadur Shastri, after 18 months. These were the volatile and uncertain circumstances under which Indira Gandhi assumed the helm of INC and the Prime Ministerial position in the Union government in 1966³³. The Congress was again returned to power in the 1967 general elections. Nevertheless, the 1967 elections saw its base of support shaken for first time in the history of independent India, as the party only managed 40.7 per cent of the votes in the Lok Sabha (the lower house in India's bicameral parliament) and 40 per cent of the votes in the state assemblies.

Table 1: Decline of Support for Congress (Centrally and in States), 1947 to 1967

Source: *India after Gandhi* by Ramachandra Guha (2007)³⁴

Table 19.1 – Performance of the Congress in Indian elections, 1952–67

Year	LOK SABHA		STATE ASSEMBLIES	
	Percentage of total Votes	Percentage of total Seats	Percentage of total Votes	Percentage of total Seats
1952	45.0	74.4	42.0	68.4
1957	47.8	75.1	45.5	65.1
1962	44.5	72.8	44.0	60.7
1967	40.7	54.5	40.0	48.5

Content analysis demonstrates that on at least 85 occasions over the three-year span of 1967 to 1969, the Naxalite movement was invoked as a justification for more central involvement in state governments or vice versa by a variety of parliamentary actors. While analyzing the first parliamentary debates reveals a more hesitant centre that had asked the West Bengal government for permission to send a parliamentary delegation, the tactics changed in a matter of two months³⁵. By July 1967, the Central Congress Parliament Board reached a resolution that the party should play an active role in non-Congress-administered states in legislature and through grassroots activism³⁶. The interventionist agenda of the Union government, especially as it concerned those states where Congress support had weakened significantly by the 1967 elections, began to come to the fore in the context of the Naxalite movement.

The blow to the INC reverberated most strongly in the states with left-leaning parties with robust mass bases. By 1967, West Bengal had been a leftist stronghold for decades. Previous state legislative assembly elections had returned successive leftist coalition governments to power, although Congress had been included in these coalitions before 1967³⁷. The violent confrontations in Naxalbari on May 25 arose exactly a month after the election of the United Front coalition government in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly. Even though the (INC) had won the most seats (127), the breakaway INC faction of Bangla Congress, the Communist Party of India (CPI), the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM), the Praja Socialist Party (PSP), the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP), and a few independent elected officials formed the United Front (UF) government. Bangla Congress leader Ajoy Mukherjee assumed the position of Chief Minister and Jyoti Basu of CPM became the Deputy Chief Minister³⁸. The coalition did not however emerge without considerable difficulty. CPM had split from the Communist Party of India (CPI) in 1963 because the CPI leaders had wanted to pursue a parliamentary path and withdraw from revolutionary activity³⁹. Thus, forming a coalition government became a cause for serious dispute within CPM leadership. The fissions within the United Front continued

after the formation of the coalition and provided the centre ample opportunities to extend its ideological reach into the state and to shore up support in the state and nationally as a strong, capable administration during a tremulous, uncertain epoch.

From the beginning, the relationship between the UF government and Indira Gandhi's central administration was rife with conflict. One of the outcomes of this tension was the origination of the current discursive trend of identifying the Naxalite movement strictly as a security matter. The Congress-led Union government's first response to the agitations was to label it as a "law and order" and security issue, partly due to Naxalbari's proximity to the Nepalese and (East) Pakistani borders, as well as China-adjacent Sikkim⁴⁰. Soon the perceived need to securitize the areas affected by the insurrection on the part of the central government became a ready tool for advancing talks of taking over specific functions of state governments or installing a provisional central government in those states⁴¹. These efforts and the fragmentation within the UF government eventually culminated in the application of the controversial Article 356 and the imposition of President's Rule from 1968 to 1969, which allowed for the central administration of West Bengal through the office of the Governor⁴².

During the United Front's first term in office, the visible centre-state tensions quickly presented an opportunity for the crumbling UF administration to shift responsibility, especially when it came to containing the Naxalites. Although in 1967 Ajoy Mukherjee's cabinet had repeatedly rebuffed central attempts at exerting control, as President's Rule and then the 1969 elections drew near the UF government adopted a markedly different approach⁴³. From 1967 to early 1968, UF discourse was centred around Naxalbari being motivated by the peasantry's land insecurity and painting the Union government as both an ill-equipped and illegitimate body for administering the political matters of West Bengal⁴⁴.

After the re-election of the UF coalition and of Ajoy Mukherjee as Chief Minister, they appropriated a conciliatory attitude and collaborated with Indira Gandhi's government. Even the CPM cabinet ministers such as Jyoti Basu and Hare Krishna Konar who had by-and-large supported progressive land policies and made an effort to hold Mukherjee's administration accountable for using brutal tactics against the Naxalites in the first term, drew closer to the centre in their second term in office, even if their official rhetoric differed from that of the Union government⁴⁵.

The Naxalite insurgents were regarded first and foremost as petty criminals. Many of the strategies used by Governor Dharma Vira during President's Rule, such as denying the Naxalite prisoners political status, were continued by the UF government after the 1969 elections despite frequent and prolonged hunger strikes⁴⁶. Jyoti Basu, Deputy Chief Minister for a second consecutive term, declared in April that state consent was necessary for posting Central Reserve Police in West Bengal to deal with the Naxalites⁴⁷.

Nevertheless, other statements by Basu made it increasingly clear that while he supported decentralization and empowerment of the state governments, his views on securitizing the Naxal rebellion conformed to the centre's perspective. He not only advocated strengthening the state's police force, but also approved of giving rifles to "responsible" UF student militias to fight the Naxalites⁴⁸. The UF government's (and later the CPM government's) recruitment and use of such "volunteer forces" to fight alongside the police continued all throughout the late 1960s and the 1970s⁴⁹. By November 1969, he updated the public that Naxalites in West Bengal were non-existent by this point and existed only "in tea shops." He further contended that no Naxalites were being held under the Preventive Detentions Act passed by the Union government since they had been captured and then charged with criminal offences instead by the UF administration⁵⁰. The second UF government thus enthusiastically committed to the containment policy of *danda* and *daroga* outlined by the centre, while simultaneously advocating for decentralization.

Before 1967, Kerala was the only state to have elected a non-Congress state government. In the 1967 elections, Congress's support base in Kerala weakened even further. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM) won 52 seats out of 133 in the Kerala Legislative Assembly, INC won 30, and Communist Party of India (CPI) won 19. The communists formed a coalition and were led by CPM leader E.M.S. Namboodiripad, who retained his status as the only communist Chief Minister in India during his second term in office⁵¹. While the state-centre tensions were palpable in Kerala as well, they took a substantially different form in the southwestern state. Central interventions often took the form of curbing communist power, rather than directly focusing on the Naxalite movement, which had spread to Kerala by November 1967⁵². Naxalite insurgency in Kerala itself took a markedly different route and manifested more mildly than in West Bengal or Andhra Pradesh. According to the content analysis, the 15 Naxalite eruptions between 1967 and 1969 in Kerala mostly involved student and parliamentary-turned-revolutionary leaders and seemed to lack the type of rural mass following evident in Bengal or Andhra. Aside from a few heated debates in the Lok Sabha, Indira Gandhi's government remained surprisingly silent on the Naxalite insurgency in the state and focused their attentions instead on unseating Kerala as the epicentre of parliamentarian communism in India. The central government's Kerala strategy was demonstrated when it interceded and denied permission to E.M.S. Namboodiripad as he attempted to visit the Democratic German Republic and other communist East European countries in 1968⁵³.

For its part, the Marxist Kerala government used the police force and the courts to detain and demobilize Naxalites. Nevertheless, it was much less intent upon denying the political motivations of Naxalite prisoners than other states or the Union government.

For its part, the Marxist Kerala government used the police force and the courts to detain and demobilize Naxalites. Nevertheless, it was much less intent upon denying the political motivations of Naxalite prisoners than other states or the Union government. Miss Ajitha, one of the apprehended Naxalite leaders, was allowed to read Maoist literature while in solitary confinement. In March 1969, the Kerala government created a special class of political prisoners to try those charged with Naxalite activities such as the bombing of the police stations in Tellicherry (now Thalassery) and Pulpalli⁵⁴.

On 9 April 1969, Chief Minister E.M.S. Namboodiripad dismissed CPI Chariman Dange's suggestion that those apprehended for the Tellicherry and Pulpalli raids should be treated as "common criminals with no ideological political aims and objectives." The CPM leader opined that such an action would amount to an unfair denunciation of the Naxalite rebels' political motivations and betray his party's Marxist leanings⁵⁵. Public data updates formed a central strategy for the Kerala government. However, owing to their broad electoral success and exclusive parliamentary focus, unlike in West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh, Namboodiripad's updates concentrated less on the number of Naxalites who were dead or in detention and more on the numerical representation of CPM-Naxalite fragmentation. By the Chief Minister's account in 1968, there was 25 per cent attrition within the Darjeeling-area Marxists due to the Naxalites and only three in the 35-member CPM Central Committee had resigned their positions in order to join the revolutionaries. He especially stressed that no CPM state committee member, in Kerala or elsewhere, had defected to the Naxalite cause⁵⁶.

Despite being an early focal point of Naxalite activity, Andhra Pradesh did not present a challenge to the centre. The Congress had won a clear majority with 165 seats in the 1967 state legislative assembly elections⁵⁷. While the CPM or the CPI was not well-represented in the Andhra Pradesh legislature, the communists had a large following in the Telangana region and in the Srikakulam Agency Area. Telangana had been the site of a major peasant movement between 1946 and 1949 and the communists had been involved as the main organizers. T. Nagi Reddy, a prominent leader in the Telangana Rebellion, stepped down from his position both in the assembly and the CPM to become the leader of the Andhra Naxalite movement around Telangana. In the Srikakulam area, a schoolteacher named Venpatapu Satyanarayana led the communist mobilization among peasants and tribals⁵⁸. Even though the first Naxalite event in Andhra Pradesh was not reported in the media until November 1968, content analysis and the 1969 map (see figure 3) demonstrate that Naxalite activities in the state soon reached an extraordinary tempo and intensity⁵⁹.

In marked contrast to the reluctant acquiescence of the West Bengal government and the open defiance of the Kerala government, the Andhra leaders were less ambiguous and more eager for assistance from the central intelligence and security apparatuses in their campaign against the Naxalites. Both Indira Gandhi's Congress-led Union government and the Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee exerted a strong influence on the decisions of the state. The Congress Committee urged the Chief Minister that the inhabitants of the Khamam and Warrangal districts form self-defense leagues to fight the Naxalites and requested that the state government furnish such leagues with guns⁶⁰.

The objective for the Andhra Pradesh government was also highly distinct: while the state made use of the Union government's Preventive Detention Act and the Arms Act to arrest the Telangana Naxalites, it targeted the Srikakulam Naxalites for extermination via its own police force and the Central Reserve Police. The clearly articulated goals related to tribal identity in Srikakulam had posed a problem for the Andhra Pradesh government. Content analysis suggests that the brutality of the police action in Srikakulam was unmatched elsewhere between 1967 and 1969: 13 references to the police killing Naxalites in various forests and hills of Srikakulam were made and, unlike in Kerala or West Bengal, no corresponding efforts at arrests were documented in news reports.

The state response to the Srikakulam arm of the Naxalite uprising, the most conspicuously, distinctly, and self-consciously *adivasi* of the three in consideration, can be best characterized as necropolitics. In Achille Mbembe's conceptualization of necropolitics, colonial and postcolonial spaces represent spaces of exception and the lives of the denizens of such spaces are equated with savage life and animal life. As a result, it is not always necessary for the colonial or occupying state to exercise disciplinary power or biopower against these populations. In these spaces, exercising necropower by killing without being subject to juridical-institutional rules in the name of prolonging

“civilization” can be easily justified⁶¹. In the exceptional spaces of the hills and forests of Srikakulam, the “primitive” and “savage” *girijans* became the objects of necropower exercised by the Andhra Pradesh government and they were exterminated at will without the mediation of law between 1967 and 1969⁶². These were followed up by routine updates on the number of Naxalites detained and killed by these security forces all throughout 1969⁶³. No other state followed the *danda, daroga* and data containment model of the centre so closely or with such brutality during the first three years of the Naxalite movement.

Conclusion

The Naxalite movement continues to figure as a subject of media scrutiny, state security responses and development initiatives, academic interrogation, and communist mobilization 47 years after the tragic events in Naxalbari. The peasant mobilization and the subsequent massacre at Naxalbari were hardly isolated incidents in the charged political landscape of late 1960s India. The May 25th episode hence quickly became the emblem and the spark plug of a revolution that spread to multiple Indian states, most notably affecting Kerala and Andhra Pradesh (in addition to West Bengal) between 1967 and 1969.

Certain synchronies in rural and urban class structures across India, especially within peasants and students respectively, of course explain the longevity of the movement to some extent. Discriminations related to hierarchies of ethnicity, caste and gender coincided with and amplified many of the insurgents’ class-based alienation⁶⁴. Even when the limbs of the state were disaggregated and sometimes actively engaged in conflict with each other, the state responses to the Naxalites followed the general idiom of *danda, daroga* and data. The similarity of state strategies practised across the distinct apparatuses of the Union government and local administrations only served to deepen the Naxalite rebels’ hostility to the Indian polity as it existed and inoculated them further against the promised parliamentary path to liberation and autonomy.

Simultaneously, their unrelenting resistance strengthened the state's discourse of securitization.

...what does the sheer tenacity of the Naxalite struggle say about the present conditions of the Indian state and its relationship to the subaltern?

If Naxalbari is central to bringing the postcolonial Indian state's failings and lack of hegemony to the surface, as Ranajit Guha has suggested, what does the sheer tenacity of the Naxalite struggle say about the present conditions of the Indian state and its relationship to the subaltern⁶⁵? The Naxalites clearly are resistant to state hegemony, but they are not indifferent to state power. The CPML's attempts to create village soviets in the 1960s and the current Maoist local administrations in Naxalite stronghold areas are genealogically linked. The communist focus on state power (always figured against an ideal vision of the Indian state) has paradoxically drawn the state ever closer through Maoist reproductions of state-like formations and the state's infiltration through the co-option of locals as special forces police officers, workers in development projects, and participants in youth militias⁶⁶. The dialectic connection between the Naxalite movement and the Indian state is undeniable. To fully comprehend where the movement and the state form are headed in the future, it would be beneficial to continue to study the underexplored facets of the struggle, especially those related to its complex and hybrid social bases.

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Appendix A

Table 2: Appendix A
Abbreviations of Political Parties
and Coalitions

Abbreviations	Political Party or Coalition
UF	United Front coalition government in West Bengal
CPI/CPI-R/ CPI (R)	Communist Party of India, sometimes also known as CPI-R or CPI (R) in reference to being "Right Communists"
CPM/CPI-M/CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPM-L/CPI (ML)	Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)
Union Government	The Central administration in India is often referred to as the Union Government, as established by the Constitution of India
INC	Indian National Congress, generally referred to as the Congress or the Congress Party

This paper is a part of a collection of selected papers from the 2014 Critical Approaches to South Asian Studies Workshop, organized by the South Asia Research Group at York University. Methodologically diverse and locating themselves in a multiplicity of sites, these papers challenge the borders of 'South Asia' and expand the concerns addressed within, including: challenging US hegemony through an Islamist critique of liberal citizenship in Pakistan, queering the heteropatriarchal family in India, critiquing exclusionary statist narratives of peace and transitional justice in Sri Lanka, and examining the Indian state's responses to subjects who trouble borders both physical and legal - Naxals in the 1960s and female migrant domestic workers in the Gulf today. These papers are written by both graduate and undergraduate students, and represent exciting works in progress within the field of South Asian studies.

The South Asia Research Group (SARG) aims to bring together researchers with an interest in South Asia and its diaspora, and build a network for the exchange of ideas and resources. It organizes the annual Critical Approaches to South Asian Studies Workshop, as well as lectures, movie screenings, and academic and non-academic events for York and the broader community.

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Nabila Islam completed her undergraduate studies in Political Science and History at York University. An aspiring researcher in the area of South Asian politics, Ms. Islam has collaborated on a number of projects with professors from DePaul University, Loyola University Chicago and Brown University. This paper is based on her research on the Naxalite movement in India as part of her history honours thesis requirements.

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