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## Domestic Conflicts in India: The Changing Dynamics of Causes and Responses

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## **Domestic Conflicts in India: The Changing Dynamics of Causes and Responses**

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The Indian state has, owing to its history, the sheer size of its population and the diversity of its people faced significant challenges to its post-independence consolidation, as the state-nation building process marginalized voices and demands in the grander narrative of the nationalist leaders. Bringing together lands and peoples into a broader Indian national identity had to be achieved through an emphasis on common characteristics to gain wider appeal. A centralized structure emerging from the legacy of British rule, compounded by a strong and centralised Congress Party period of government in the immediate aftermath of independence, privileged a centralising nation-building project, as a way of unifying these diverse peoples into a cohesive, overarching Indian identity. This was, however, not an easy task as people had strong local identities leading to political demands bound up with them. The tussle over identity and rights can be said to underlie much of the conflict that erupted in independent India.

India is also an unusual, possibly even unique case, as it has faced at least one, and often more, armed insurrections within its territory continuously since independence, while maintaining a system of democratic rule and an independent judiciary with powers of government oversight throughout that period, with one brief exception – during the Indira Gandhi declared ‘emergency’ of 1975 to 1977. This combination of continuous armed challenge with a relatively resilient democracy, makes India a very interesting case in the post ‘war on terror’ and Arab Spring era of continuing global democratisation combining with widespread and protracted civil conflict.

### **The Existing State of Knowledge**

The dominant literature on India’s domestic conflicts and security strategy is sharply divided into two broad schools of thought—one considers the Indian strategy to be largely accommodationist, while the other castigates it for being heavy handed and dominated by excessive securitization of political disputes. The former, espoused by Atul Kohli and Maya Chadda for example takes Indian federalism as the biggest factor in support of their argument.<sup>i</sup> Kohli argues that the

institutional arrangements in India's federal polity allows for a greater willingness to negotiate and accommodate ethnic demands for self-determination, within an overall Indian Union.<sup>ii</sup> His analysis of self-determination movements, both regionally-defined and ethnically-defined, focuses on what he regards as the two most crucial variables - institutionalisation and leadership strategy. These he argues are the most important factors in determining the trajectory of such movements and the conflicts of which they are part. Kohli argues that an analysis of the cycles of such conflict, since the early days of Indian independence, shows that effective institutions and willingness of the leadership of separatist groups to accommodate demands through some form of power-sharing and autonomy focused institutions can succeed in resolving conflict. These are issues that the Indian state has been very capable of delivering, in the creation of new states, in local power-sharing arrangements and in new forms of cooperation between the Union government in New Delhi and the periphery.

Chadda argues that the various phases of federal reorganization in India since independence have been part of the Indian state's conscious strategy to accommodate ethnic aspirations. In the early years after independence, the main task for the leadership was to ensure a strong central government for the preservation of India's unity. This was a core principle for the nationalist movement during the struggle for independence; and following partition, the creation of Pakistan and the first India-Pakistan war, it became the most important national objective of the new Indian state. The fear of further partitions dominated all government policy on how to respond to potential and actual separatist and territorially focused political movements. The linguistic reorganization of states in 1956 was meant to simultaneously reiterate the Centre's importance but acknowledge the importance of diverse cultures and allow a degree of regional autonomy.<sup>iii</sup> The reorganization of the north eastern region in the 1970s was less successful, she argues, due to the centralizing tendencies of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Twin considerations of ethnic accommodation and security concerns led to the reorganization of this border region, but the era was marked by increasing populism of, and greater demands for autonomy by, the various caste

and ethnic political parties that ruled the states across the country. The arbitrary use of emergency constitutional provisions by Indira Gandhi to quell political dissent translated into an erosion of the democratic character of the Indian state. The late 1980s and early 1990s marked the end of Congress dominance and emergence of coalition politics in India. Chadda describes the conflicts in this period, barring Kashmir, as evidence of a new relationship between the Centre and states, wherein demands now began to be couched not in terms of autonomy from the centre but of exercising power over the centre. In this analysis the conflict in Kashmir is an outlier, dominated by the India-Pakistan relationship, and not representative of how the state responded to other challenges. This analysis stems from the fact that coalition partners, from regionalist parties now had a stake in the functioning of the central government and could use that influence to pursue their own regional interests. The creation of three new states in the 1990s is further testament to the devolution of power away from the Centre, she argues. However rather than analyse the effects of the policies in terms of simple dichotomies like centralization and decentralization, Chadda defends India's federal arrangement as successful, while criticising centralization and state oppression during the 1970s and 1980s. She argues that without a strong state there can be no democracy, and hence centralization has to precede decentralization.

On the other side of the spectrum, there are those who consider the security strategies of the Indian state to be centred on force and suppression. For Singh, India functions as an ethnic democracy, by which he means that Indian nationalism is a disguise for Hindu revivalism, and points to policies in Punjab, and the denial of Sikh statehood as evidence of majoritarianism and 'hegemonic control'.<sup>iv</sup> The use of anti-terrorist strategies in Punjab led to the establishment of what he terms a 'security state' that depended heavily on strong arm tactics. Further, he argues, that in spite of the "success" of Punjab, core demands that were behind much of the crisis remain unresolved and the state is making a deliberate attempt to legitimize the apparent order in Punjab through the electoral process.<sup>v</sup> The dominant interpretation of the Indian state's experience in Punjab, has been to focus on the 'success' of highly repressive security strategies and to downplay other factors and

this has been used to justify the leading role of military and police responses in other conflicts including Kashmir and the Naxalite challenge.<sup>vi</sup>

In a similar vein, Rajat Ganguly argues that the strategy of the state has some discernible trends and these follow from the “success” of Punjab.<sup>vii</sup> As a first step, he contends, force is used to tackle violence using both state police forces and specially trained paramilitary troops. The introduction of special and emergency laws has then strengthened the powers of the security forces and curtailed civil and political rights. A third dimension of the state’s strategy has been to adopt peace agreements with chosen insurgents. These accords contain measures to address grievances and protect political, cultural or economic rights but, as Ganguly argues, these have either failed to tackle root causes in their planning and inception, or where they seem to address those issues, they have been weakly implemented.

Writing on India’s security policy in the north-east, Baruah argues that the counter insurgency methods employed by the state have led to the establishment of an authoritarian military regime due to the extent of the powers which have been given to the armed forces.<sup>viii</sup> In treating the region as a frontier region, the security thinking in New Delhi is dominated by the need to protect the borders so as to maintain territorial sovereignty and control infiltration from the east. He also argues that there is a lack of concerted effort at ending conflict, suggesting that the Indian state has managed disorder at a level that it can live with, and therefore it lacks the political will to end the violence. The policy of creating exclusive homelands for particular ethnic groups has, moreover, he argues led to exclusionary politics, with the civil and human rights of Indian minorities being weakened in order to buy off ethno-exclusivist regionalist actors.<sup>ix</sup>

Cohen argues that the roots of most of the political domestic conflicts in India can be traced to the state’s neglect of democratic politics in the early stages of the challenges to state authority. For him, the counter insurgency strategy of the Indian state follows a pattern bereft of historical contexts and past experiences and hence shifts attention away from core issues.<sup>x</sup> Using the same heavy handed

responses in Kashmir in the 1990s as was followed in Punjab and the north east in earlier periods led to heavy human costs and human rights abuses and resulted in the widespread alienation of the local population in the insurgent areas. The state viewed the Kashmiri demand for greater state autonomy as a threat to national integrity, thereby providing legitimacy for the imposition of central rule and a highly militarised response.<sup>xi</sup> The Indian government acted as if Pakistan had invaded and the national state was at risk, with few challenges allowed at central government to this dominant interpretation of events. In contrast to Chadda's analysis, which links centralisation and state strengthening to more flexible policies on decentralisation and autonomy, Hardgrave argues that the Indian state has become increasingly centralized and sees this as a primary cause of conflict.<sup>xii</sup> He observes that 'in its attempts to quell endemic unrest and the challenge of terrorism, India has enacted a plethora of laws that have become instruments of repression; police and paramilitary abuses seem to get worse while all sorts of other violations of human rights are reported with numbing frequency'.<sup>xiii</sup>

These two schools of thought offer very different interpretations of the trajectory of modern Indian approaches to internal security challenges. This chapter cannot provide a summary of these conflicts or the specialised literature on each of them but rather looks at the changes and continuities in the attitude and responses of the Indian state and offers a re-interpretation and possible synthesis of these competing views. Focusing on the most significant challenges to its authority and legitimacy, from the failed / suppressed insurrection in Punjab in the 1980s which has not re-ignited, the Kashmir conflict, the multiple conflicts in the North East and the ongoing Naxalite/ Maoist insurgency this chapter explores the approach of the India states to conflict management and insurgency.

It shows how different categories of domestic conflict have been dealt with differently by the state and points to the multiplicity of factors including cross-border networks and lack of timely and concerted political action that exacerbate violence. Where conflicts have abated, such as in Punjab, scholarly opinion on its 'success' remains divided. The analysis of conflicts and state responses in this

chapter suggests that there is no coherent internal security strategy and while this may be a strength due to its ability to heed to contextual differences, the Indian state has so far failed to capitalize on this for successful conflict resolution.

### **Analysing the Diversity of India's Internal Conflicts**

Broadly, India's domestic conflicts might be categorized under three themes-territorial, developmental and localized communal conflicts based on the demands and issues raised. Without arguing that in each of these, there is only a single 'root cause', these overlapping themes point to the main issues over which conflict has arisen and continues to be fought. Each conflict is inevitably complex and encompasses underlying causes which are territorial, political, social, economic and human rights based.

Territorial conflicts, those conflicts that have at their core the demand for secession or greater autonomy, have been the most common type of armed conflict in India. British colonial rule included a large variety of local forms in India, including a large number of 'Princely states', with a degree of local sovereignty as long as they accepted and did not challenge the British empire. At the eve of independence, these princely states, including Jammu and Kashmir, Bhopal and Hyderabad, as well as parts of the north east, such as the Nagaland who never accepted that they were part of 'British India' demanded independence or various degrees of self-determination. Territorial issues were most potent for the Indian state as it sought to avoid a repeat of the Pakistan partition and to maintain the sovereignty of the state.

#### *Jammu and Kashmir- the early phase*

The very moment of India's independence, saw the origins of its most protracted internal challenge – in Kashmir. The contestation over the precise sequence of events and its relationship to the wider India-Pakistan war is beyond the scope of this chapter, however Jammu and Kashmir's accession to the Indian state was from the beginning regarded as a special case, even by the new Indian government.



While loudly blaming Britain as the colonial power and Pakistan for cross border interventions and ‘occupation’ of part of the former princely state territory, India acknowledged Kashmir’s special status in a number of ways, including an initial acceptance of a role for the United Nations and even a possible plebiscite<sup>xiv</sup> and in 1950 by the guarantee of a ‘special status’ under Article 370 of the Indian constitution such that the state of Jammu and Kashmir would have autonomy over all subjects except foreign affairs, defence and communications.

Though there can be little doubt of Kashmiri’s strong sense of identity, the special autonomy was ratified by an agreement signed between Nehru and the Kashmiri nationalist leader Abdullah in 1952, indicating that solutions other than independence may have been broadly acceptable. However the special status was more honoured in its breach than its implementation and Abdullah himself was to spend lengthy periods in prison as New Delhi saw his popularity as a threat. Various local pressures including some local Hindu demands for complete accession and integration of Jammu and Kashmir under one Constitution, a desire by New Delhi to impose a more centralised form of rule and attempts by Pakistan to use the situation to its own advantage, have ensured that the relative importance of nationalist separatism, development challenges, desire for autonomy, inter-group tensions between Hindu’s and Muslims and later between the demands of secularists and Islamists has never been tested, by a meaningful offer of enhanced autonomy and socio-economic development.

After the breach with Abdullah New Delhi appointed a puppet government which passed and adopted in 1954 a resolution that affirmed Kashmir as a part of India and enabled New Delhi to implement in Kashmir those constitutional provisions that had not previously been applicable to it. It is this amendment to Kashmir’s constitution that paved the way for greater intervention by New Delhi including the suspension of fundamental liberties and the extension of the Supreme Court’s jurisdiction in Kashmir.<sup>xv</sup> When in 1956 India officially withdrew the plebiscite offer, it cited this constitutional amendment as one of the reasons for the changed circumstances. Even as Pakistan went to the UN to request it to intervene, and

though the UNSC affirmed its earlier position calling for India and Pakistan to make arrangement to include the views of the people of Kashmir in talks on their future, India continued to reject the UNSC's proposals. State elections in 1957 and 1962, in which the Congress-backed candidate won, were widely believed to be farcical, given the suppression of political opposition in the state. In 1964, two important legislations were extended to Kashmir—Article 356, which empowers the Centre to dismiss elected state governments and impose President's Rule, and Article 357 that enabled the Centre to take over all legislative functions of the state. By then, the autonomy that was promised to Kashmir in 1950 was almost completely eroded in practice.

The 1970s and 1980s were dominated by attempt by New Delhi to impose ever more centralised control on J&K. Local politicians were only allowed a role in running the state, if they accepted a clear subservient role. Elections in 1977, widely held to be fair brought to power a government led by the National Conference leader.<sup>xvi</sup> However their demands to revert to the pre-1953 status and ensuring Kashmir's autonomy were rejected by New Delhi. In the late 1980s, the Centre continued to dismiss governments at will and the elections in 1986 which brought the Congress and NC into a coalition government, were widely alleged to be rigged. The turnaround of the NC, with Farooq Abdullah (son of the first chief minister Sheikh Abdullah) declaring that to remain in politics he had to stay on the right side of the Centre, was met with a rise of militant groups such as the JKLF in 1987.<sup>xvii</sup> With this began a phase of increasing militancy and violence that was met with severe repression by the State and discussed further below.

### *The North East*

Amongst the earliest challenges that the Indian state had to face, were those that rejected the very terms of their accession into the Indian Union. The Naga tribes in the north-east for example considered the merger of the Naga inhabited areas into the Indian Union as contentious, and sought to claim an independent homeland of their own. The run up to India's independence was marked by successive claims of independence and self-determination by the Nagas, and on 14 August 1947 they

declared their independence.<sup>xviii</sup> In spite of talks between Indian political leaders at the Centre and Naga leaders over the rights of the Nagas to remain autonomous, the Hills were incorporated into the Indian Union as a district within the state of Assam in India's far north east. This decision, and the subsequent indifference of the Centre to the demands of the Naga people led to growing alienation of the Nagas.<sup>xix</sup> Even as the moderates within the Naga movement gradually entered the Indian political system and achieved their demand for a separate state of Nagaland within the country in 1963, there remained sufficient support for independence to sustain an armed challenge, which was met with brute force by the Indian security forces, leading to spiralling violence and deepening distrust between the Centre and the people of this region.

The wider North East is a good example of the complexity of over-lapping territorial claims and the difficulty, even in the best of circumstances of finding well-balanced solutions. Manipur and Tripura in the north east were princely states that were incorporated into India after its independence. The Meitis in Manipur however made a demand for independence soon after. The fact that the earlier demand of the Naga tribes for independence of their territory included parts of Manipur led to inter-group hostility, and added to the multidimensionality of conflicts in this region. In Tripura, violence erupted in the 1960s, and was triggered by large scale migration of Bengalis from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) which radically altered the ethnic demography in the state and led to the creation of militant organisations demanding protection of their rights and territories from these 'outsiders'. In adjoining Mizoram, Mizo tribes fought an armed conflict, both in protest at the existing chieftain system, which had been in place before 1947 and which effectively oppressed the Mizos at the hands of the powerful chiefs and what they characterised as economic and political neglect by the Assam state government – dominated by the much larger Assamese population. The trigger to the conflict came in the aftermath of a widespread famine in the region in 1959 and the neglect of the state and central government in responding to the crisis. An attempt by New Delhi to deal with this conflict via the creation of the state of Mizoram in 1972 (full statehood being granted in 1987) led to conflict de-escalation

in Mizoram but to intensified political disputes with Assam over the division of its state territory by the centre.

Assam itself saw political tensions break into armed conflict in 1979. Though framed as a demand for complete independence, most analysis sees the conflict as triggered by a combination of issues, each of which were, from the beginning, capable of being dealt with, by solutions other than sovereign statehood – including the relative economic underdevelopment of the region despite its ample natural resources, the fall out over the breakup of the state of Assam to deal with the above mentioned conflicts, without consulting the elected state government and the issue of large scale illegal immigration.<sup>xx</sup> The creation of ULFA (the United Liberation Front of Assam) as an armed organisation added to the intensity of the conflict and the movement itself provided a trigger to non-Assamese minorities in the state to demand greater autonomy for fear of being side-lined by the Assamese. A highly militarised response alienated many moderate voices and deepened ethno-national divisions, and the underlying linkages of identity, migration and economic development actually became clearer over the years as ULFA increasingly focused on anti-Bengali rhetoric in efforts to mobilise support.

The conflict in Assam including an international dimension, during periods when relations between India and Bangladesh were poor as Bangladesh sought to increase its negotiation leverage by allowing ULFA and others to establish training and logistics bases in its isolated regions. The intervention was very different to that with Pakistan however, as Bangladesh in addition to more credibly arguing that such isolated areas inherently difficult to police, also never sought to diplomatically make common cause with Assamese fighters. The Indian response to ULFA still mirrored the ‘borderland’ policy evidenced earlier in Punjab and Kashmir, seeing ULFA as offering a credible threat to the territorial integrity of the state. Securitisation, the successive appointment of former security chiefs as state governors, and de-facto security primacy in all local political decisions led to widening alienation of the local population. The military tactic of refusing to negotiate centrally with the ULFA leadership on core issues and instead seeking to

persuade individuals or small groups of ULFA fighters to ‘surrender’, with financial inducements (and according to reliable local sources) with a blind-eye to subsequent criminal activity by what were called S-ULFA groups (surrendered-ULFA) while tactically success to some extent, was strategically disastrous in extending the conflict and the degree of lawlessness in the region. Ultimately a failure by ULFA to make progress, the closure of cross-border bases as India’s relations with Bangladesh improved and an anti-ULFA crackdown in Bhutan in 2003 by the Government there, at India’s request, together with a limited shift in strategy by the Indian government, including the opening of negotiations with a weakened ULFA saw a move towards conflict de-escalation. Talks between ULFA and Indian Government approved mediators in 2005-6 led to a ceasefire. While that ultimately collapsed, a new ceasefire in July 2011 and an agreement between ULFA, the Indian Government and the state Government of Assam in September 2011, seems to be holding at the time of writing.<sup>xxi</sup> While this agreement seems to point to a de-escalation in Assam, the equivalent and longer-running process with the Nagas has thus far failed to lead to an enduring peace and so the wider North East remains a zone of conflict.

### *Punjab*

Though Jammu and Kashmir and Nagaland saw conflict from the 1940s, the former was primarily seen as an inter-state issue with Pakistan and Nagaland was perceived as remote and peripheral from New Delhi. The upsurge of armed insurrection in Punjab was therefore the first largely internal armed insurrection faced by India post-independence. In the 1970s, the demand of the Akali Sikhs in Punjab for the creation of a Punjabi speaking state, which had begun in the 1950s, grew in strength. What had made matters worse was the division of Punjab in 1966 which created a new state of Haryana. This reorganisation also led to the division and transfer of control of Punjab’s water resources in what the Sikhs felt was an unfair division. However unlike the linguistic challenges in the South, discussed in the next section, this demand was characterised by the Centre as a fundamentally religious demand rather than a linguistic one – as a demand for a Sikh ‘homeland’.<sup>xxii</sup> The Punjab case did have this added dimension and Akali Sikhs did

focus on what they say as the failure of the Indian state to fulfil rights ‘guaranteed’ to Sikhs at the time of independence.<sup>xxiii</sup> It was not a straightforward ethno-national movement based on religion or religiously defined culture, as most Sikhs did not support the demand for Punjabi independence. The Akalis did however become increasingly frustrated by first, the failure to secure a Punjabi speaking state in the initial re-organisation of states in the late 1950s and subsequent to that, the treatment by the Centre towards Punjab

Jugdep Chima argues that the socio-economic conditions in Punjab in the 1960s produced levels of dissatisfaction and tension, led to a transformation of societal organisation which in turn affected political consciousness culminating in the Akali movement.<sup>xxiv</sup> Political repression under Indira Gandhi in the 1970s across the country was felt bitterly in Punjab where she dismissed elected state governments in order to check the rise of the Akalis. Though ultimately the demand for ‘Khalistan’ became a classic separatist demand based on a form of Punjabi-Sikh nationalism, the prior trajectory of the conflict and the limited social basis for the national movement means other factors, remained crucial. While initially the ethno-nationalist movement was broadly based on the demand for greater autonomy, the rise of an extremist Sikh politics within it advocating violence and secession was countered by use of the armed forces and a massive army operation on the Golden Temple in Punjab in 1984 aimed at flushing out Sikh militants had repercussions for both communities, as well as for the future for the conflict.<sup>xxv</sup> The dismissal of elected state governments and imposition of President’s Rule, recurrent features in the preceding years of political mayhem in the state, continued even after the signing of the peace accord in 1985 owing to high levels of militancy in the state. The end of the 1980s and first few years of the 1990s saw heightened levels of violence by both militants and security forces, with massive human rights violations on both sides. The end of the violence, largely an effort of police and military force, signalled to the State the end of the crisis in Punjab.

Punjab has entered the Indian state discourse as evidence that a harsh security strategy – most famously in this case led by the police commander KPS Gill – was

sufficient to end a militant insurgency, with very limited political concessions. The attack on the Golden Temple and the security crackdown after the assassination of Indira Gandhi added to this interpretation that Punjab was solved through a security dominated counter-insurgency approach. However this narrative neglects the repeated negotiations with Sikh nationalists, the normalisation of state-Centre relations and the change of political circumstances, after the assassination of Indira Gandhi which made achieving broad political support for an escalation of armed action more difficult.

### *Linguistic Based Demands*

Over-lapping with the armed challenges in the border regions of the North East and North West, other territorial conflicts have taken identity markers such as language to define themselves vis a vis the Indian state and demand territorial autonomy. This was sparked by a post-colonial desire by the Congress Party elites in New Delhi to replace the colonial language English with Hindi as the language of the central state, of internal inter-state communication and of public schooling. There was widespread opposition and violence in the south in particular, where Hindi is not widely spoken and where it was seen as the language of the 'North' and at the height of the crisis, the demand for secession was raised.<sup>xxvi</sup> With the rise of the DMK in Tamil politics as a major political force and its calls for secession of southern states, the central state had to respond.<sup>xxvii</sup> Although political leaders were arrested and there was widespread police brutality and months of strikes and protests continued, the state never sought to characterise the conflict as an existential one and it was ultimately resolved with the maintenance of English as an official language and withdrawal of compulsory learning of Hindi in schools. This ability by New Delhi to separate the linguistic issue from the demands for separatism and to respond with a linguistic solution, was to be a widely copied precedent which saw the reformulation of states throughout India on largely linguistic grounds and the later creation of new states and new official languages. The process of state formation in India is not over; new states have been created on various grounds, such as Jharkhand, Uttaranchal and Chattisgarh, and demands continue to be made in other places such as Telangana and Gorkhaland, but the

process of state machinery to deal with such demands has prevented such demands from becoming armed insurrections. Neither does the government of India see the demand for new states as an existential threat to the state. They may resist the demands, for political reasons, but the level of contestation is ultimately within the frame of normal politics, not outside it and there is no underlying fear that unrest and rioting will lead to full armed conflict.

### *The Naxalite Challenge*

Even if territorially based conflicts have clear causal factors other than separatist demands or even linguistic or national identity which makes the seeking of a single explanation for conflict a futile endeavour the Indian state has faced other serious armed challenge where territory and separatism have played no significant role at all. This has been most obvious in the 'developmental' insurgencies of the various Naxalite movements and also in the repeated upsurges of caste or sectarian violence.

Protesting against the land ownership and tenure system, in 1967 a group of peasants revolted and triggered a movement of peasants and landless labourers.<sup>xxviii</sup> This movement spread to other parts of the country as well and took its name from the district in which it started-Naxalbari. The Naxalite movement has in its various phases of activity been described as a developmental conflict, a law and order problem and a left wing (usually called Maoist) guerrilla movement. There has been an increase in Naxalite activity in recent years, with the Indian prime minister terming it the gravest internal security threat.<sup>xxix</sup> Naxalite groups now operate in over 200 districts and this left wing extremism, as it is described by New Delhi, has seen acts of violence against security personnel and officials on a higher scale than before. Notwithstanding its protracted nature and the extent of territory affected, and indeed the level of popular media coverage within India itself, the Naxalite insurgencies have not received the same degree of academic analysis as separatist conflicts, especially by academics outside of India. There is little dispute that the conflicts are driven by poverty and underdevelopment at the macro level but it is the precise nature of the causes in the different districts which is hotly disputed. In



its earlier phases two competing narratives were visible in Indian discourse. Firstly they were dismissed as armed agrarianism, a resort to localised violence by poor and uneducated people against local landlords and those elements of the state, including police who they saw as upholding the position of wealthy landowners. Secondly and in contradiction they were characterised as being the result of a planned Maoist rebellion. This was portrayed as being aided by China, after the breach in India-China relations as a result of the 1962 border war with China, and when being linked to China could be presented as being anti-national. Later as relations with China improved, allegations of external involvement usually focused on the powerful Maoist guerrilla movement in Nepal. However these attempts by the state to blame external forces were never taken as seriously as similar allegations against Pakistan and were usually seen as self-serving. An alternative explanation for the insurgency sees them as a loosely connected series of conflicts around land and poverty, in which Maoist movements have become involved, without a doubt, but which at the heart are caused by issues such as the appropriation of land belonging to or historically used by marginalised communities, including tribal groups, for the purposes of mining, the building of dams for hydro-electric power and other aspects of industrial development. Armed conflict is argued has become widespread due to the perception by such groups that they have no ability to influence decision-making and due to a long record of promised compensation in cash and alternative land not being delivered on. This interpretation is articulated not simply by the hard left, but also by civil society groups focused on human rights and by prominent personalities such as Arundhati Roy.<sup>xxx</sup> Maoists in these circumstances have offered arms, some local leadership and a cadre able to articulate a message to outsiders and the media, but that is a very different role than that suggested by those who see the 'cause' of conflict as being ideologically inspired hopes of vanguard led revolution. It also suggests a response short of revolution might well resolve the armed insurgencies.

The state response to the Naxalite conflicts highlights the tensions around internal security strategy. The numbers of deaths and the degree of insurrection is by any measure a greater security challenge that generated by ULFA in Assam, but the

level of military response while significant, has not reached those levels and in particular the degree of securitisation of civilian government is much lower. The reasons for the different approach are complex and no consensus exists among analysts, but certainly the earlier attempts to explain the ‘Maoist’ uprisings as being engineered by China have no credibility even amongst those close to the central government and therefore the more traditional ‘external threat’ justification used in Punjab and especially Kashmir to push through a highly militarised response has no real resonance.

There is a minor precedence for this tension between government pressure and military perspective. During the 1975-77 emergency Indira Gandhi reportedly ordered the army to shoot at unarmed female protestors in Gujarat in the so-called ‘Thali Revolution’ over poverty and food shortages, but the army refused to act. The importance of developmental rhetoric in Indian government discourse from the early days of the state to the present also makes it more difficult to reject as unreasonable or threatening a demand for sustainable economic development or for protection of environment resources such as forest land.<sup>xxxii</sup> Whatever the most important causes, and without diminishing the human rights issues raised by ‘anti-Maoist’ security operations, it is clear that a different approach is being taken in this case compared to the territorial conflicts in border areas. In response to high profile campaigning by Indian civil society groups against army operations in Naxalite areas – commonly referred to in the media at the time as ‘Operation Greenhunt’ – Minister for State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Shri Jintendra Singh, in written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha denied any such Operation Greenhunt existed.<sup>xxxiii</sup> The Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah recently commented on the difference in approach, when querying why the army were insisting on maintaining the full use of emergency legislation in the Armed Forces Special Powers act in J&K, while not seeking to use it in areas dominated by Naxalites.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

### *Religion and Caste defined conflict*

With more than 80% of its population identifying themselves as Hindus, and a strong minority population of Muslims (11-13%), Sikhs, Christians, Jains, Parsis and tribal faiths, India accords all religions equal legal status and rights. However, tensions between religious groups, known by the nomenclature of communalism in India, have been frequent, though localized.<sup>xxxiv</sup> The politicization and mobilization of caste and religion have only strengthened the forces of communalism in India, as politicians vie for community-based votes. At the time of the framing of the Constitution, the debates about the role of religion played an important theme of debate. While the Constitution upheld the secular character of the Indian state and assured religious freedom and protection of its minorities, the manner of implementation has sometimes led to contentious policies. On the one hand, there have been allegations of minority appeasement while on the other, it has been suggested that India is a majoritarian democracy due to a strong Hindu cultural presence permeating various aspects of political life.<sup>xxxv</sup> Majoritarian mobilization and its manifestation of violence, as in Punjab in the 1980s and in Gujarat in 2002, reflect a lethal combination of religion and politics. One of the most violent periods of inter-communal relations was the demolition of the Babri mosque by Hindu activists in 1992 and the subsequent eruption of riots between Hindus and Muslims across the country. Local communal riots between Hindus and Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, and between caste groups have been frequent occurrences and vary in scale and location. Caste conflicts have taken various dimensions; apart from caste conflicts between high and low castes, there have also been instances of two castes at the same hierarchy fighting over political reservations and caste-related benefits.<sup>xxxvi</sup> While these are clearly part of the wider picture of domestic conflicts in India they are not further addressed in this chapter as they have never developed into a sustained, armed and organised conflict, in the same manner as the others discussed above.

### *Jammu and Kashmir from the 1990s*

While the conflict in and about Jammu and Kashmir defined the early years of Indian independence it was the renewed upsurge in armed activity and street violence within Kashmir from the late 1980s, which brought Kashmir back to world attention. The collapse of any meaningful local autonomy with J&K saw a decline in support for the National Conference and the rise of more militant voices. Initially these were mostly indigenous to the Kashmir Valley, but a combination of Pakistan's desire to take advantage and insurgents need to arms and external support saw a shift towards a greater leadership role for militant groups trained in Pakistan which then infiltrated into Kashmir and the movement was split between separatists and pro-Pakistan militant groups.

The stationing of army and paramilitary troops in the state, and the levels of military deployment along the LOC make Kashmir one of the most heavily militarized regions in the world.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Since the 1990s, there have been human rights violations on both sides. Anti-India sentiment has grown as a result of these military excesses-disappearances, killings, detentions, instances of rape and desecration of holy shrines. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to detail the narrative of the insurrection from the 1990s onwards. There have been periods of intense violence and other times when circumstances seemed favourable for political progress. In the most recent period the elections of 2008 with a relatively high turnout in most parts of Kashmir except Srinagar (compared to previous widespread boycotts) was followed in 2010 by renewed street clashes in response to security force killings and then high turnout at 2011 *panchayat* elections.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Nonetheless while street clashes are frequent in urban areas, the level of sustained armed insurgency is at a low level compared to the 1990s and while no formal talks have begun and stalemate still characterises the overall situation there are some small signs which one could be optimistic about.

It is difficult to see any political progress inside J&K in the absence of an improved relationship between India and Pakistan. As long as one or both states see the other as offering a real and present danger to their very existence then using

Kashmir as a weapon against the other will always be preferable to the risky business of peace negotiations. Likewise internal militants, both separatists seeking independence and the Hindu right demanding unrestricted integration with India, have no incentive to moderate their demands to take account of the internal diversity within Jammu and Kashmir as long as they can rely on powerful external supporters in New Delhi or Islamabad. (While Kashmiri Muslims form the majority in the valley and adjoining areas, the state also has a significant Hindu population in Jammu and a Buddhist population in Ladakh. Therefore any solution required an internal agreement as well as agreement between India and Pakistan).

India's approach to Kashmir has followed the perceived 'success' of a security-dominated strategy in Punjab in the 1980s, with centralisation of power and a massive deployment of troops and paramilitary police. The alternative interpretations of Punjab, that it was successful only when the centre moved from an exclusively security response to incorporating local voices, or indeed that it remains problematic because of excessive centralisation remain marginal voices in government.<sup>xxxix</sup> This approach has alienated much of the public, has made it impossible for local moderate voices to strengthen their popular support and has allowed separatists to maintain a political position that negotiations with New Delhi are impossible.

Efforts by the Centre have been short-sighted, and the setting up of five working groups in 2006 to deal with Centre-state relations, improving relations across the LoC, economic development, release of detainees, rehabilitation of militants' families and better governance has remained at best an insincere intention as recommendations of these groups have been slow to come, and when suggested, have not been implemented.<sup>xl</sup> Some debate about lifting the notorious Armed Forces Special Powers Act from parts of Kashmir has begun in political circles in Delhi as a confidence building measure in the region but opinion remains divided. Inaction by the Centre on crucial political issues has been the *bête noire* in Kashmir.

The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century suggests a shift in the Centre's discourse on Kashmir. In the period following September 2001, attempts were made, albeit unsuccessfully, to link Kashmir with the global jihadi network. While this was understandably raised again in the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks, the India state has since 2010 sought to re-open talks with Pakistan on the one hand and with Kashmiri separatists on the other, though the appointment of three 'Interlocutors' and some reductions in the security presence.<sup>xli</sup>

The street protests and violence of 2010 show how easy it is to trigger mass upsurge in Kashmir. Amidst the glaring silence and failure of the Centre to respond, autonomy once again became a hotly contested term in parliamentary debates in New Delhi after PM Manmohan Singh raised the issue as a possible solution so long as it was within the ambit of the constitution. Even as the Kashmir state government insisted on autonomy as a solution, opposition parties in Delhi criticised the government for bringing it up, effectively demonstrating the lack of consensus on the Kashmir issue.<sup>xlii</sup>

The report of the interlocutors has called for constitutionally guaranteed greater autonomy in Kashmir through devolution of power and limited the powers of the Centre to intervene in matters not pertaining to national security, measures which it acknowledges are not radical or new.<sup>xliii</sup> However, what remains to be seen is how New Delhi would respond to these recommendations.

The Hurriyat remains opposed to direct talks with New Delhi unless Pakistan is also involved on a three-party basis. India is unwilling to have Pakistan discuss 'internal' matters. India also continues to refuse any offers of international assistance, seeing such a development as a threat to its own position. There also appears to be a move towards locating the conflict in terms of the youth and their economic concerns such as development and employment, but whether this is part of an effort to promote a potential 'peace dividend' or a return to a failed strategy of seeking to pacify Kashmir with investment but without a political solution remains unclear.<sup>xliv</sup> There has been increasing voices within India looking for some

flexibility<sup>xlv</sup> and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, has stated his belief that the Indian 'Constitution is a remarkably flexible instrument, capable of accommodating a diverse range of aspirations'.<sup>xlvi</sup> However Kashmir has been the conflict where in reality the least flexibility has been shown and where military power and centralised rule have dominated strategic thinking and the potential for a negotiated solution has not been seriously tested.

### **Analysing the Trajectory of State Responses to Insurgency**

The 1947 war with Pakistan and the characterisation of the Kashmir dispute since then as an Indo-Pakistan conflict, led to the emergence of the Indian military (and later special police units) as among the most important institutions in the state, notwithstanding the relatively marginal role of armed groups in the nationalist movement and in the post-independence nation building project. This new prominence was seen to some extent in the repressive response to the Naga rebellion, but was subsequently to be strongly re-enforced by the dominance of special police forces in the Punjab and the dominance of the military (along with paramilitaries and police) in Kashmir in the 1990s.

India has been most successful in dealing with linguistically-based challenges. They have (if you exclude Punjab, where other dimensions of the conflict were more important) been successfully contained within the Indian institutions, and while it is a dynamic process leading occasionally to high-level street protests, such demands and protests have never been treated as a threat to the Indian Union itself. The North East has occupied a middle ground position. It shares some of the characteristics of Kashmir, as a border-zone (from the perspective of New Delhi), but after 1971, even in those periods when relations with Bangladesh were poor the conflicts in the North East were never seen as fundamental to the state. A heavy handed military led strategy along with centralisation of power and human rights abuses has dominated on some occasions. At other times, the formation of new states, negotiations with armed groups and development strategies have been added to the approach of the centre. In response to the obvious military and political stalemate, a ceasefire has proved possible in Assam, while intermittent negotiations

and occasional ceasefires has occurred in Nagaland, even if they are yet to provide a solution.

Kashmir and the Naxalite situations remain the two most critical conflicts for the Indian state. Kashmir, notwithstanding some signs of potential change remains fundamentally constrained by being viewed as first and foremost a product of external interference by Pakistan. This perception has allowed a caricature of the Punjab strategy – focused almost exclusively on military led counter-terrorism strategies – to dominate the response of the centre. Despite widespread human rights criticism, inside and outside of India, even minimal confidence building measures such as the partial withdrawal of the draconian Armed Forces Special Powers Act have not been taken.<sup>xlvi</sup> Neither is there any proactive strategy to offer a process of negotiations that is attractive to other actors in the conflict. There is therefore no pressure on internal actors to shift from the status quo. Kashmir remains in a stalemate, requiring a new initiative from India and Pakistan to move it. The Naxalite conflict offers an interesting counterpoint to India's response in Kashmir. Despite being listed by PM Manmohan Singh as one the gravest security threat faced by India – along with cross border terror and religious fundamentalism – the security response has been more balanced.<sup>xlvii</sup> The role of the army is more limited, local state elites are part of the political and security response and there has been a clear (if limited) acceptance that more needs to be done to deal with underlying environmental and poverty focused grievances.

The trajectory of Indian responses to conflict therefore offers some support for each of the dominant schools of analysis, but the context within which each approach is followed in practice is very different. In linguistic based conflicts the flexibility of the Indian response as outlined by Chadda and Kohli is clear. However in the conflicts of the border zones, this is seldom seen – and almost never so in Kashmir, where the critiques of Sumit Ganguly, Gurharpal Singh are all too visible. State responses in Kashmir have been centralised and too little informed by the reality of local threat levels. Of course cross border infiltration occurred and Pakistan's ISI did seek to use situations to their advantage, but the



response of the India government added to the alienation of Kashmiri's and offered no credible political alternative to the rhetoric of the Hurriyat and others. No autonomy was accorded Kashmiri political actors; everything was analysed through the prism of Pakistan. The tensions between these two aspects of India government strategy on internal conflict has never been resolved. The Naxalites cannot credibly be dismissed as foreign infiltrators, so the full military response seen in Kashmir is not politically possible. However the state has not developed the strategies to integrate a more positive political and development engagement, with a more appropriate security response and so the Naxalite conflict is caught in the middle and has moved from the margins to the mainstream of Indian political life.

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- <sup>iii</sup> Chadda, 'Integration through Internal Reorganisation', p.50
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- <sup>v</sup> *Ibid.*, p.420.
- <sup>vi</sup> See below PP for brief introduction on term Naxalite
- <sup>vii</sup> Rajat Ganguly, 'Democracy and Ethnic Conflict', in Sumit Ganguly, Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (eds), *The State of India's Democracy*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2007, pp. 45-66.
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- <sup>xiii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.
- <sup>xiv</sup> In a speech to the Constituent Assembly in November 1947, Indian Prime Minister Nehru justified the help extended to the Maharajah and his accession as follows, "We made it clear that as soon as law and order had been restored in Kashmir and her soil cleared of the invaders, the question of the State's accession should be settled by reference to the people." (Jawaharlal Nehru, *Independence and After: A Collection of Speeches 1946-1949*, reprint, New Delhi: Ayer Publishing, 1971.)
- <sup>xv</sup> See for example, Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2005 and Sumit Ganguly, *The Kashmir Question: Retrospect and Prospect*, New Delhi: Routledge, 2003.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Sumantra Bose regards this as "the first reasonably fair democratic elections after thirty years of being a 'constituent unit' of a democratic republic. (Bose, *Kashmir*, p.37). The National Conference is a Kashmiri nationalist party, founded by Abdullah. While advocating a nationalist position it has for most of its history not been explicitly separatist, in that it pursues autonomy positions short of independence.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Navnita Chadha Behera's extensive interviews with Kashmiri insurgents suggests that the reason they took to violence and militancy was due to state injustice and the closing of alternative channels. See her book *State Identity and Violence: Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2000.
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<sup>xx</sup> The states of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh were eventually carved out from Assam. For a detailed narrative on the insurgency on Assam, see Sanjib Baruah, *India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999.

<sup>xxi</sup> See press releases July to Sept 2012 from Interior Ministry

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<sup>xxii</sup> Pritam Singh, *Political Economy of the Punjab: An Insider's Account*, New Delhi: MB Publications, 1997, pp. 7-29.

<sup>xxiii</sup> For the promises made to Sikhs see for example *Constituent Assembly Debates*, New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1989; Ram Narayan Kumar, Amrik Singh, Ashok Agrawal and Jaskaran Kaur, *Reduced to Ashes: The Insurgency and Human Rights in Punjab*, Kathmandu: South Asia Forum for Human Rights, 2003; J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; Pritam Singh, *Federalism, Nationalism and Development: India and the Punjab Economy*, Delhi: Routledge, 2008.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Jugdep Chima, 'The Punjab Crisis: Governmental Centralisation and Akali-Centre Relations', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 34, No. 10, 1994, pp.847-862.

<sup>xxv</sup> The army operation of 1984, called Operation Blue Star, not only killed innocent civilians along with militants, but also inflicted heavy damages on the Golden Temple, one of the holiest shrines of the Sikhs. This caused a lot of pain and trauma for Sikhs in the country and in 1985 two Sikh bodyguards of PM Indira Gandhi assassinated her in order to exact revenge. This was followed by anti-Sikh riots in Delhi and other northern states.

<sup>xxvi</sup> On the rise of Tamil nationalism and the Dravidian movement, see Marguerite Ross Barnett, *The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976; Robert Hardgrave, *The Dravidian Movement*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1965.

<sup>xxvii</sup> There had been a strong anti-Hindi, anti-Aryan current within Tamil politics since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and this was aimed at the almost exclusively North India-centric political leadership at the Centre. For a historical account of Tamil politics see for example, Eugene Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: the non-Brahman movement and Tamil separatism 1916-1929*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.

<sup>xxviii</sup> For more on the roots of Naxalism, see Sumanta Banerjee, 'Sting of Betrayal', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 18, no. 6, 1983, pp. 175-177; Ajay Mehra, 'Naxalism in India: Revolution or Terror?', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 12, no. 2, 2000, pp. 37-66; P.V. Ramana, 'The Maoist Movement in India', *Defence and Security Analysis*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2006, pp. 435-449; Rabindra Ray, *The Naxalites and their Ideology*, Oxford University Press, 2002.

<sup>xxix</sup> <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/naxalism-gravest-internal-security-threat-to/609303/>, accessed on 26 April 2012.

<sup>xxx</sup> Arundhati Roy, *Field Notes on Democracy: Listening to Grasshoppers*, Haymarket Books, 2009.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Successive statements by government officials indicate that development is identified as a factor in the conflict and as part of the solution. See for instance PM Manmohan Singh's remarks in 2012 on <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/pmreleases.aspx?minicode=3> (accessed 26 April 2012), Home Minister Chidambaram's statement in 2010 on <http://mha.nic.in/pdfs/HM-DGP-Conf-240810.pdf> (accessed 26 April 2012),. Navlakha argues that though the state has recognised development and socio-economic issues as crucial to the problem, it has not been able to address root causes through the right mechanisms. See Gautam Navlakha, 'Maoists in India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 41, no. 22, 2006, pp. 2186-2189.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Interior Ministry press release, 23 August 2011.

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<sup>xxxiii</sup> *Times of India*, 22 April 2012.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> For more on communalism in India, see, for example, Paul Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, Washington: Washington University Press, 2003; Donald Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, California: University of Berkeley Press, 2002; Sudhir Kakar, *The Colours of Violence*, Viking, 1995 and Asghar Ali Engineer, *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India*, Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 1991.

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<sup>xxxvii</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The CIA World Factbook 2012*, Skyhorse Publishing Inc., 2011.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> *India Today*, 14 April 2011. <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/j&k-citizens-snob-boycott-call-given-by-the-separatists-vote-in-panchayat-polls/1/135175.html> accessed on 5 April 2012].

<sup>xxxix</sup> See Gurharpal Singh, 'The Punjab crisis since 1984: A reassessment', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 18, no. 3, 1995, pp. 476-93, for an analysis of the 'unresolved' nature of Punjab.

<sup>xl</sup> Suba Chandran, <http://www.ipcs.org/article/india/kashmir-search-for-a-consensus-and-the-elusive-starting-point-3229.html> accessed 23 April, 2012.

<sup>xli</sup> Hindustan Times 25 September 2010.

<sup>xlii</sup> <http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/BJP-challenges-PM-on-Kashmir-autonomy-issue/658987/> accessed 23 April 2012.

<sup>xliii</sup> Praveen Swami, 'In Kashmir, Some Hot Potatoes', *The Hindu*, 23 April 2012,

<http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/article3342926.ece?homepage=true>, accessed 23 April 2012.

<sup>xliv</sup> This is reflected in the way Indian leaders in New Delhi have been stressing on development and the lost decades of progress in Kashmir vis-à-vis the rest of the country. See 'PM reviews progress of jobs plan for Jammu and Kashmir', September 26, 2010. <http://pmindia.nic.in/pressrel.htm> [ accessed 5 April 2012].

<sup>xlv</sup> See for example G Parthasarathy and Radha Kumar, *Frameworks for a Kashmir Settlement*, New Delhi: Delhi Policy Group, 2006.

<sup>xlvi</sup> PM's address at the CMs' Conference on Internal Security, February 1, 2011.

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<sup>xlvii</sup> See comments by Indian Army Chief, Gen V K Singh, *The Economic Times* 16 April 2012

<sup>xlviii</sup> PM's address at the CMs' Conference on Internal Security, February 1, 2011.

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