

'LIBERATING MAO...'

For Communists it's after all a small world because internationalism no longer gets priority in their discourse. They have no problem with the system that causes so much misery and oppression, death and destruction, discrimination and injustice, inequality and hatred for so many people throughout the world. Official communists in India never really recognised Mao as the natural torch bearer of communist legacy in the post-Lenin era despite Mao's strategic success in leading the Chinese people in 20 years of armed struggle against the old oppressive social and economic order. No doubt the followers of Trotsky found virtue in Mao's cultural revolution as they viewed it as the vindication of the theory of permanent revolution. As a result Mao got some respectability in the western hemisphere despite his roots in backward Asia. But few events in modern history have been as distorted and demonised as China's cultural Revolution of 1966-76. In India Mao and Mao's writings became popular only after the Spring Thunder Over Darjeeling in the late 1960s. Despite their limitations and poor understanding of the ideological orientations of the time, the naxalites, however, forced the communist party of India (M) to open limited and soft polemics over Chinese line, internationalism and Mao for a short period. But the marxists virtually avoided hard polemics apprehending backlash among their cadres and dismissed the entire political and ideological formulations evolved around the naxalite phenomenon as an infantile disorder. And there ended the matter.

The communist left never accepted the Chinese analysis of national and international affairs. Nor did they ask their party card holders to critically read and examine Mao. Things are pole apart today as Mao is a forgotten chapter in his own country. Barring a section of hardliners in the naxalite camp Mao does not carry weight even in polemical writings of most naxalite groups.

Strangely enough, the communist party of India (M)—CPM—has recently urged its followers in posters and wall writings in Kolkata to liberate Mao from the clutches of maoists of India. Harried by the growing maoist influence in the tribal jangal mahal of West Bengal, the ruling marxists have no option but to re-think Mao, in their own way of course, to counter the maoists. It is a nice development. But it is unlikely for the marxists to duel much on Mao's ideas because they cannot dig their own grave.

For the maoists themselves Mao remains a symbol that does not tally with the ground reality. Emotion and dogmatism cannot work. Individual terrorism was popularised as maoism at the initial phase of naxalite upsurge and the movement in general suffered a serious setback. To many ordinary people Mao appeared as a Chinese aggressor, not as a liberator of the oppressed and the entire maoist project became counter-productive in no time.

The hard reality is that official communists who have a world to lose if the system and the elaborate infrastructure it has built over the years collapse, cannot really counter the maoists politically and ideologically by citing Mao out of context. They can at best utilise Maoist rhetoric to pacify their party workers who have long been in a dilemma as to how to fight the 'maoist menace' politically. In truth the top leadership of marxist party is more interested in invoking 'Salwa Judum', not Mao, to liquidate the maoists as the recent incidents in Lalgarh substantiate. Though the ruling marxists blame it on the maoists for the continuing conflict and violence in tribal West Bengal, the tribal agitationists, however, deny such allegation. They have all along been declining their maoist connections. They see in it a ploy to terrorise ordinary villagers who refuse to obey marxist diktats.

But the tragedy is that the naxalite camp itself is divided over how to define maoism and apply it in the Indian context. They have so far failed to turn the corner. In fact they can't even found the corner right now. Their maoism cannot become a material force in Indian jungles and backward regions unless people see in it an all encompassing liberating message. □□□