

COMMENT

## Maoist Farmers

MAOISTS HAVE LONG BEEN IN search of a massline to suit their underground activities and develop a viable mass organisation without success. Not very long ago they tried to hegemonise a popular independent mass initiative against police atrocities in Bengal's junglemahal and failed miserably, ultimately paying the price in blood. Their frontal outfits are being easily identified by the secret agencies and the rest is done by the regular police and paramilitary forces. Things are somewhat different in Orissa and it remains to be seen how they succeed in combining mass organising with their underground armed campaign.

Orissa's "Chasi Mulia Adavisi Sangh" (CMAS) has recently gained prominence in the media, following kidnapping, hostage crisis and overground dialogue with government emissaries. It is a Maoist frontal organisation, based in Narayanpatna and Bandhugaon blocks of Koraput district. The Chasi Mulia Samiti was a pro-Maoist organisation of peasants, which was banned in 2006. Another banned organisation, Ryot Kuli Sangham is based in Parvatipuram of Andhra Pradesh. Fellow Maoist peasants from both the organisations formed the CMAS in 2006. The abduction of Jhina Hikaka, the BJD Orissar MLA, has led to demands from the CPI (Maoist)'s Andhra Orissa Border Special Zonal Committee for release of CMAS activists from custody, and the withdrawal of cases against CMAS activists. The CMAS captured 50 acres of non-tribal land in the Padapadar gram panchayat in 2006. The CMAS members, led by Nazhika Linga, a former bonded labourer, have formed a 'Ghinua Bahini', of men wearing red shirts and armed with traditional tribal weapons, like bows and arrows. Since 2008, the armed struggle has resulted in 44 civilians killed and many injured.

In truth the very name of Ghinua evokes a return journey to colonial India and Santhal rebellion against oppression. Bhagawati Panigrahi's immortal character Ghinua Santhal in his famous story 'Shikar' (The Hunt) is known to the progressives around the world, thanks to Mrinal Sen's epic film *Mrigaya*. Ghinua did justice against gross injustice perpetrated by the system by killing a notorious oppressor and British collaborator. Whether 'Ghinua Bahini' (or red shirts) can carry on their armed campaign, even with traditional tribal weapons, without being adequately supported by ordinary masses of different walks of life, is open to question.

Despite limited successes of CMAS in some areas, for the maoists it is the same old question of how to develop a popular peasant organisation without being identified as maoist. Maoists farmers may have a different agenda to pursue but they must be recognised as farmers in the first place, not as maoists. □□□