

Recalling 'Srikakulam'

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NO JUNGLE ROAD TO revolution! Sometimes, some important questions, or even a single crucial question, can be very thought-provoking, revealing and change the entire mindset of an activist revolutionary. It was the time when the peak of the Srikakulam revolutionary movement was melting down and hundreds of cadres and scores of leaders were in jails or underground groping with the impasse. It is difficult to imagine the glory and appeal of that great struggle by the present standards. Not just from the times of the split in the Indian communist movement, but from times even prior to it, careful and assiduous organization and propaganda among people—mainly tribals living in destitute conditions—prepared the ground for the later eruption of rebellion under the inspiration of Naxalbari struggle in West Bengal, which by the standards of Srikakulam was quite a minor eruption. Tribals in hundreds, sometimes thousands, would rally to the party cause openly, with their traditional arms, and sing and dance revolutionary songs, at times even in the course of 'actions', and even children were inspired and would lecture magistrates in courts about the need and effect of the revolution they are bent on bringing about. For some months it appeared as though it was a grassroots revolution with a lot of mass appeal. But in consequence of stern repression coupled with the general drawbacks and impediments in the course of the socio-political-economic developments in the country it gradually began to taper off and then die down. Activists elsewhere were very much worried, at least as then there was no centre or pole to which they could look for guidance and inspiration. In that background, Kondapalli Sitaramaiah, the real builder of the People's War Group (a sort of parental organization of the now Maoist Party) with a lot of experience and wisdom, having actively and effectively participated in the 1946-51 Telangana Armed Struggle period also, during discussions posed a question to this writer: "Sharma, do you really think the largely illiterate tribals living in extremely backward socio-economic conditions, though responded readily and with zeal to the call of revolution till now, have really more social and political consciousness than the peasants and workers of Andhra or Telangana rural or urban areas, who though are not responding to such calls now, have their life experiences in more developed socio-economic conditions and with their experience of having participated in various struggles, including Telangana armed struggle etc., in the past?" And quite naturally this writer was taken aback, stupefied so to put it. Then K S explained that tribal consciousness of moving and acting en masse per social mores and dictates of their chiefs, etc. was much different from and less conducive to individual social consciousness which is more needed when the solidity of the mass breaks up and movements are thrown back to brass tacks to review and restructure their policies and if necessary their goals even. Certainly a more experienced peasant from Telangana/coastal Andhra or a worker in organized industries cannot be said to be at a lower level of social consciousness. That was an eye-opener.

Elsewhere, long back, this writer wrote these lines which, since they cannot be bettered are reproduced hereunder :

"While the government is in its own predicament vis-à-vis the naxalites, the naxalites ... are also in an impasse. Their source of new recruitment has been dwindling of late, their capacity to

strike back has diminished considerably and most important of all their popularity with the masses even in their strongholds is eroding. Maybe they have not done particularly anything against the masses, but the people caught in a crossfire become the real victims in the war-guerrilla war-raging between the two parties-the naxalites and the police (State forces). They cannot forsake their annalu (brothers-affectionate and respectful term by which naxalites are generally addressed in the rural areas) who did so much to bring them back the lost self-respect vis-à-vis the feudal lords, driven out the hated landlords and taught them to look straight into the eyes of the upper classes and dictate terms of popular will. But at the same time they cannot forgo whatever benefits they could get out of the present governmental measures and also cannot totally repudiate the say and authority of the present government. They are not interested in the calls frequently given by the annalu to boycott the parliamentary and other elections but on the other hand want to derive whatever advantage they can by supporting this or that candidate of the ruling or opposition parties in such elections. In one word, they still have considerable faith and confidence in the present system and are not in a position to say 'we can no longer live in this way'. Yet they are now in a terrible crisis-their near and dear mercilessly shot dead by the police and paramilitary forces in real or fake encounters for the crime of making or aiding insurgency and some sections of them are also victims of naxalite violence for various reasons. As such they would be and they are the persons who would derive real relief from any sort of end to this long and what-seems-never-ending guerrilla war in their areas. So they do exert a sort of moral pressure on the underground apparatus of the People's War [now read Maoist] party....

But here comes the real hitch. For so long they propagated and acted as uncompromising fighters against the government. Now if they sit across the table and talk to their enemies, what would happen to this image of theirs? And talk for what ends and what would or could be the compromise like? Is it permissible for a revolutionary to come to compromise with the enemy? Put in a simplistic manner, can there be compromise, can there be peace, between cats and rats? ...this sort of simplistic argument is ridiculous. First of all the situation is not such that one can be deemed a cat and the other rat. No doubt the struggle is in general between the have-s and have-nots but then it would also not be correct to depict it solely as intensified class struggle between certain enemy classes only. There are issues that cut across class lines also that need to be agitated and taken care of. There is the whole human angle to be considered. The real losses - the blood and tears of innumerable people caught in the tangle, the ever present atmosphere of terror, mutual distrust and suspicion, the suffocating socio-economic climate-all these have driven the people in these areas to a stupefied and miserable situation. It may be quite easy for us onlookers to applaud or deprecate the actors-the fighters among the both parties and encourage or denigrate them from relatively afar, but it is not at all so easy or imaginative for the people of the regions and the real fighters and their families and friends to withstand this terrible ordeal.if any group or person can bring about a sort of dignified peace in such areas, even without any real solution for the burning socio-economic issues at stake (but of course with a few sops), that group or person would be idolized by the masses

and hero-worshipped. Such is the present outcry of the people. A revolutionary party cannot overlook this reality situation and override the wishes of the masses.”

And then there was a quote from Lenin—who in turn quoted approvingly Engels decrying Blanquists for their so-declared ‘non-compromising non-stopping march on the road of revolution’—mainly from his piece on “On Compromises” and from his “Leftwing Communism : An Infantile Disorder,” for example, that—

“The term compromise in politics implies the surrender of certain demands, the renunciation of part of one’s demands, by agreement with another party.

The usual idea the man in the street has about the Bolsheviks, an idea encouraged by a press which slanders them, is that the Bolsheviks will never agree to a compromise with anybody.

The idea is flattering to us as the party of revolutionary proletariat, for it proves that even our enemies are compelled to admit our loyalty to the fundamental principles of socialism and revolution. Nevertheless, we must say that this idea is wrong. Engels was right when, in his criticism of the Manifesto of the Blanquist Communists (1873), he ridiculed their declaration: “No Compromises!” this, he said, was an empty phrase, for compromises are unavoidably forced upon a fighting party by circumstances, and it is absurd to refuse once and for all to accept “payments on account”. The task of a truly revolutionary party is not to declare that it is impossible to renounce all compromises, but to be able, through all compromises, when they are unavoidable, to remain true to its principles, to its class, to its revolutionary purpose, to its task of paving the way for revolution and educating the mass of the people for victory in the revolution.” {Lenin, *On Compromises*, Selected Works, Progress Publishers, Moscow, Vol. 2, p. 171, emphasis ours}.

Further,

“...to reject compromises “on principle”, to reject the permissibility of compromises in general, no matter of what kind is childishness, which it is difficult even to consider seriously. A political leader who desires to be useful to the revolutionary proletariat must be able to distinguish concrete cases of compromises that are inexcusable and are an expression of opportunism and treachery; he must direct all the force of criticism, the full intensity of merciless exposure and relentless war, against these concrete compromises, and not allow the past masters of “practical” socialism and parliamentary Jesuits to dodge and wriggle out of responsibility by means of disquisitions on ‘compromises in general’.” {Lenin, V.I., “*Leftwing*” *Communism—An Infantile Disorder*, Selected Works, Progress Publishers, Moscow, Vol. 3, pp. 304-305}

And further,

...It would be absurd to formulate a recipe or general rule (*‘No Compromises!’*) to suit all cases. One must use one’s own brains and be able to find one’s bearings in each particular

instance. It is, in fact, one of the functions of a party organization and of party leaders worthy of the name, to acquire, through the prolonged, persistent, variegated and comprehensive efforts of all thinking representatives of a given class, the knowledge, experience and—in addition to knowledge and experience—the political flair necessary for the speedy and correct solution of complex political problems. {Lenin, V.I., *“Leftwing” Communism...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 328-330}.

For one thing all said as quoted above still applies in today's circumstances in the background of Jangalmahal or Chattisgarh-Odisha developments. Though the Maoist revolutionaries have developed far more in fire power, militancy and extent of control and influence in several States since the times of Srikakulam, etc., their mindset has not changed considerably, especially their strategy and tactics still hark back to those of the Andhra State Committee's formulations during 1946-51 Telangana Armed Struggle and their characterization of Indian State and Society are basically faulty, effectively overlooking the vast and rabid capitalist development that has taken place and is still taking place all over India. In truth not only Maoist revolutionaries, but almost every party and group on the Left, are missing the bus to take advantage of the ever changing socioeconomic conditions and popular discontent, and from time to time it is the other 'bourgeois or petty bourgeois' parties, groups or persons who emerge as the 'grim reapers' in difficult times. Maybe the areas and terrain of the regions under control or influence of the Maoists now are quite vast and disturbing, even menacing to the ruling classes, but they ought not to forget that either in terms of proportion of population or more in terms of their socio-economic developmental and awareness impacts those are of minor proportion only, and unless real communists are able to influence the vast masses throughout the country with their ingenuous policies and tactics, and step by step educate the educators also and strive for popular movements for various reforms and changes under their or at least general left leadership, attuning themselves to 'think out of the box' or 'without the box' embracing the more universal vision and policies directed to a sort of eco-socialism too, there can not be any real prospects of at least moderately successful revolutionary movements in India. □□□