

Confusing the Maoist Cause

As the Centre and state Governments step up counter-insurgency operations in the much publicised 'Red Corridor', the Maoists struggle to project a future. Not that the ruling authorities solely depend on fire power to combat what they call 'maoist menace'. A popular mass upsurge can be defeated even by splitting the rank and file of the movement through dubious means. The time-tested policy of 'Divide and Rule' works. While 'Operation Green Hunt' is in full swing, the persons in power are doing everything possible to create a wedge between the leaders who in the main happen to be non-tribals and foot soldiers who are mostly drawn from local tribal youths. It is simply misleading, if not conspiratorial to dub the Maoist movement of much more recent phase, as the liberation struggle of tribals. There is a deliberate ploy to obliterate the class question involved in the on-going Maoist rebellion. Also, a well orchestrated campaign in the media is going on to show the world how poor tribals are being utilised by the Maoist party in their strategy of capturing power.

The hard fact is that it is not that easy to earn political support from any community, tribal or otherwise in a situation where toilers are bombed with misinformation and disinformation from vested interests all the time. The cadre-based parties that now enjoy political power know it well. If the naxalites have support base among tribals in most backward regions which are again very rich in mineral wealth, it is because they try to address the basic needs of the poor without waiting for government intervention.

The tribals of Tripura were once with the communists because they trusted the communist left as their saviour in their struggle for survival. But the communists left them in the middle and the unfinished agenda of their struggle against deprivation and despair led to the formation of different insurgencies challenging the very communist establishment that now rules that hapless state where original inhabitants today are a group of ethnic minorities in their own homeland.

What ultimately matters is how to equate the tribal question with the peasant question. Alienation of tribal land has reached a bursting point everywhere and, the ruling circles are in no position anywhere to resolve this thorny issue in its entirety. So long as politics commands the gun the Maoists won't have much problem in facing the challenge barring some setbacks here and there. The crisis begins when gun commands politics. It is quite possible some armed deserters from the Maoist camp, with specific tribal identity, will be too willing to work at cross-purposes. They may be lured by the administration to create divisions among the rank and file and spread confusion with a view to betraying the cause of the have-nots. It's an international phenomenon.

The rise and fall of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) is often cited by the critics of Indian Maoists as an example of how too much dependence on tribal soldiers, rather ethnic minorities, finally ruined the CPB. Once upon a time CPB was a 'Communist Party that had a force of 50,000 regular soldiers, this was a party that controlled large swathes of territory, this was a party that enjoyed great prestige in the international communist movement'. Many attribute the collapse of Burmese Communist Party to tribal mutiny in the party's military

establishment. In truth the emergence of several ethnic rebel armies from the old communist party-led liberation army was mainly due to sharp political contradictions inside the party. The 'White Flag' treated the 'Red Flag' as class enemy and in due season the powerful communist party in Burma went up in smoke.

Many see a close parallel between Burma's communist insurgency of yester years that nearly wrested power after independence, and today's Maoist movement in India because of some tribal dissidence in the Maoist rank and file. Ever since the formation of the CPI (Maoist) about 11 splinter groups, made up mainly of tribal fighters, are said to have emerged. Again half of these armed bands are in Jharkhand. Not that political and ideological differences prompted them to engineer split within spilt. Nor did ethnicity really played any significant role in challenging the orthodox leadership of CPI (Maoist) by Marshal (real name Gurucharan Kisku) in the junglemahal.

The security strategists are now planning to recruit tribal youths in West Bengal's state police force as part of the home department's programme to revamp the intelligence network in the state and across the Jharkhand border for fighting the Maoists. They have already tried this nefarious game plan in Chattisgarh, pitting tribals against tribals. And quite naturally dissenters in the Maoist ranks would be the first choice. □