

Calcutta Notebook

MP

Armed 'Marxists' are fighting armed Maoists. Almost a re-run of the '70s? The police and para-military forces are right on the top. That the Maoists are retreating is a fact of life. They are on the defensive, at least in junglemahal of Bengal. Also, adjoining Jharkhand doesn't offer a better haven for the Maoist guerillas. The recent arrest of some of their top activists including state committee and central committee leaders shows the depth of penetration into the Maoist ranks by the intelligence agency. In truth the arrest has a all too familiar ring and reminds one of the early phase of the movement. Faced with massive repression and superior fire power, they have shifted to cities, particularly Kolkata and get easily trapped into police net. Experience shows how difficult it is to maintain underground shelter without mass support. Mass organisations under the sway of even some loose mass platforms with Maoist tag do not exist in urban areas. Nor is their fragile presence in mass organisations controlled by the so-called mainstream parties matters. They never tried factional work in parties and organisations that oppose them politically and ideologically. Their appeal to the middle class intellectuals and academics is too weak to protect them against police onslaught. Yenon model is yet to take concrete shape in 'liberated' Chattisgarh. And their shifting guerilla zones in junglemahal and Jharkhand cannot provide them with adequate manoeuvring space. They have lost their guerilla zones in Andhra and now Bengal goes the Andhra way.

When the police crashed the naxalite movement in Bengal in the seventies, they first allowed some infantile disorder, as some activists indulged in, to flourish, with a view to isolating them from ordinary people. Then they tried to infiltrate into their ranks and succeeded without much difficulty. In some cases their paid agents used to participate in group meetings as it was revealed later. And these people were more enthusiastic in executing annihilation campaign even in urban areas. To the utter surprise of the leaders many of their cadres later turned out to be double-agents with dual loyalty. Maybe, an identical scenario is unfolding in the junglemahal. It is not known how much political schooling the squad members, or for that matter militia members had, during their jungle life.

No doubt the Maoists had some propaganda advantage at the initial stage, thanks to technological advance. Despite the arrest of some of their top leaders at the state level their press hand-outs didn't stop reaching the news editors' desks. For the first time they find it hard to reach out to the media and present the story other than what is dished out by the police authorities.

The '70s witnessed pipeguns and crude bombs and the police had little trouble in defusing them in no time. Things are pole apart today. On the one side it is landmine and on the other it is AK47. Even before the merger of PWG and MCC into CPI (Maoist) the former developed enough skill to prepare landmine devices on their own. But the police and para-military have now superior fire-power. Also, in terms of number they always outnumber the Maoists. In a sense they are following the Maoist dictum of pitting ten against one while the Maoists are far behind in military strategy. Mere hit and run cannot pay dividends all the time. Nor can it demoralise the security forces to the level of passivity.

In Bengal it has always been doubly difficult for the naxalites to spread their idea of revolution because of the presence of strong revisionist trends. In the seventies CPM cadres acted as vigilante groups and police utilised their service to ban naxalites. The same tradition continues today. It suggests among other things that Maoists continue to suffer mass isolation.

Before his arrest, Kanchan being the WB State Secretary of CPI (Maoist) issued dozens of leaflets and press statements criticising the authorities, in a language couched with typical Maoist jargons and slogans without any impact on the people. The concept of utilising bourgeois press for the naxalite cause is as old as the movement. But the big-business controlled newspapers don't give coverage to the naxalite movement out of love. It is too dangerous to rely on them. Then they get easily trapped by the media. What all they highlight about the naxalite movement is motivated, sometimes aimed at misleading the people, because most of their reports reflect police version. Also, half-truths abound in respect of naxalite movement and life-styles of some Maoist leaders.

Ever since the setback in the seventies the naxalite movement in general has remained fragmented and disoriented, ideologically, 'split within split' has been going on since then with no possibility of a unified showdown even in the distant future. Old dogmatism continues to rule the roost. No departure from the early stereotypes—minor adjustment here and there cannot wash.

The present setback can be guessed from the hard fact that jails are now overflowing with undertrial Maoist prisoners and sympathisers. The situation is so desperate that they are now on hunger strike in different jails and yet, there is no appreciable movement outside. Issuing press statements by human rights bodies is too weak to win mass support against inhuman prison conditions and early release of all political prisoners who are implicated falsely in several cases under trumpeted charges. □□□