

Of Masses and Massline

Dipanjan Rai Chaudhuri

A chapter in the struggle of the people of Jangal Mahal closes with the murder of Sasadhar Mahato and the efforts of Chhatradhar Mahato to stand for election to a Vidhan Sabha seat. The struggle of the people of Jangal Mahal for democracy has suffered a setback and quite a few of the brave leaders have been killed by the paramilitary forces of the government and the Harmad mercenaries of the CPI(M). But the people will rise again. Tens of thousands attended the early meetings of the PCPA. How can the participants forget the hopes and dreams of those heady days? Out of these multitudes there will develop a new set of leaders, who will embody the lessons of the setback. Even now, no doubt, there is going on, among the people, review, criticism and self-criticism, planning for the future. What were the cardinal errors and what are the chief lessons? It would be presumptuous for distant well-wishers like this writer to issue solutions. However, the lessons of older struggles should be resurrected.

One is reminded of a small meeting with Charu Mazumdar, just after activists from the student movement of the sixties had started work in the interior villages of Gopiballavpur. This was before Charu Mazumdar publicly announced the line of 'class enemy annihilation'.

He said your task is not to propose economic movements. You must tell the toiling peasantry of the toilers' raj and the political struggle for state power. Perhaps, after a time, they will come and say, yes, you are right, but now let us take a deputation to the BDO for our immediate demands. You will say, Nothing will come of it, but you will assist them in taking out the deputation. At that time, Charu Mazumdar was trying to teach us the massline, and was not against mass movements. But, he was terribly worried about the way to keep mass movements on the path of political struggle and prevent the drift of the political activists into economism.

The experience of the Gopiballavpur peasants' struggle also showed that it was in the areas of mass movement that the political struggle flourished. Even 'class enemy annihilation' had a greater impact (which, of course, was temporary and with deleterious influence on the initiative of the people), in an area of mass struggle. Mazumdar was a veteran of the Tebhaga movement in north Bengal. He had the experience of being concealed by the peasants in their huts with pots supplied to urinate in during the daytime. At times, he had to bind himself to the branch of a tree to avoid falling off while asleep. He talked about the rules of work for political workers in rural white areas, based on the class line:

Go to the village without any belongings or money. Stay only with landless and poor peasants, eat with them, starve when they starve, take part in their labour.

Talk, at first, only to poor and landless peasants. Tell them your political line right from the start. They will do the rest.

Never show yourself to a class enemy. Never go to a market or a fair.

Later, in the period of white terror, he advised all mass leaders, known to the class enemy, to leave the area under combing by enemy forces, and start work outside the periphery of such an area.

In his later writings, one finds emphasis on unleashing the initiative of the landless and poor peasants, and much worry about this initiative being stifled by party workers, especially

those with middle class origins. (But, the annihilation line actually destroyed this initiative and prevented the emergence of a massline.)

One must regard reactionaries as paper tigers in the long run, but in every step of actual struggle they must be regarded as real tigers. Laxity on the part of the political worker arises from an underestimation of the protracted nature of the struggle and from a sense of easy victory. The Indian workers lost one of their most important and charismatic leaders, Sankar Guha Neogy, due to lack of vigilance and watchfulness.

Sankar Guha Neogy's thesis of Sangharsh and Nirmaan, has been misunderstood as reformism . Reconstruction (*Nirmaan*) by the people when struggle (*Sangharsh*) drives the whites away, even temporarily, gives the people tangible assets to fight for when the whites return. They identify easily, at that time, with the call "Defend the fruits of the revolution".

Yet Neogy's murder left a vacuum. There was disorder and disunity. It took a long time for the people to regroup. The reason was that Neogy had been made into a *Masiha*, and, the people felt headless in his absence. There is no substitute for the initiative of the masses.

History shows that tactics must be flexible and the strategic line grasped firmly. Both are necessary especially when retreating and regrouping. After the dictatorial regime of Mrs Gandhi was overthrown by the people in the 1977 Lok Sabha elections, Santosh Rana was elected MLA from Gopiballavpur, and the mass organizations and political structures began to be set up again. But, the political line of competing with the CPI(M) for economic benefits dominated, and the CPI(M) obviously won this competition by the propaganda line :

if you come with us, you will get all the economic benefits painlessly, as the government is ours. If you go with the extremists you will have to face repression, jail and lathi, to gain the same benefits. Now, choose.

So, participation in elections had a positive influence in reviving the networks and enthusing the people - the movement restarted, but the post-elections political line (what is to be done after the elections?) was not adequate for winning over the masses and restoring their mobility.

The real point is to be good at learning. So many best sons and daughters of the country have lost their lives. Learning from their deaths is a duty owed to them. □□□

[source : sanhati.com]