

A saga of struggles ... and treachery

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The past hundred years of the Communist Party of India were years of mobilisation and organisation of the masses; mainly the workers, peasants and youth. They were years of intense class struggle, heroic sacrifices and glorious achievements. This included the seizure of political power at the local level and establishment of people's rule. The Sholapur Commune and the Praja Rajyam of the Telangana armed struggle may be recollected here. In the recent period this took the form of Janatana Sarkars and Revolutionary Committees.

The history of the communist movement in India is also a history of betrayal; betrayal by its leaders. Hence this history has been one of struggle between the line of class struggle and the line of class collaboration and treachery. Within this, the armed agrarian rebellion of Naxalbari of 1967 marks a decisive turning point. Therefore we can and must divide the century long history of the communist movement in India into two periods. Before and after Naxalbari.

From the very beginning, the revolutionary ranks of the party repeatedly came forward in struggle against imperialism and feudalism. On each occasion the revisionist leadership betrayed these struggles and forced the ranks to surrender to the class enemy. Time and again the party ranks rose up in open revolt against the betrayal of the leadership. They constantly fought for a revolutionary and proletarian internationalist line in both theory and practice. They played a glorious role in unleashing and conducting struggles. Thus they kept the flame of class struggle burning throughout India's struggle for liberation from imperialism and feudal bondage. They bore the brunt of bloody repression. Thousands of them fell martyrs to the cause of the Indian revolution. Fired by the highest ideals of communism and closely linked with the suffering masses, the party ranks represented the revolutionary urge of the people throughout this period. But despite their valiant struggle they failed to overthrow the revisionist leadership. They were not ideologically equipped to take up that task.

That is where Naxalbari was different and made a difference. It was not just another revolt against the leadership. Not just another heroic assault on the ramparts of reaction. No. It was now a revolutionary breakthrough in all senses. It became so because it was guided by the new heights attained by proletarian ideology – Marxism-Leninism-Maoism (MLM). Marxism-Leninism was brought to our land by the cannons of the October Revolution. Its new, higher, stage, MLM, was brought to us by the Great Debate, the historic ideological struggle led by Mao Zedong against Krushchevite modern revisionism. This was then deepened and consolidated through the lessons of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. That enabled the revolutionaries within the party to go deep into the ideological reasons underlying the repeated betrayals of the leadership, to take up the task of analysing our society and forging a revolutionary line. Charu Mazumdar, Kanhai Chatterjee and several other comrades all across the country were involved in this, often unknown to each other. Ideological, political texts like the Historic Eight Documents penned by Charu Mazumdar, gave guidance to this determined effort to expose, attack and demolish revisionism and centrism. Naxalbari gave material form to their ideological struggle. It became the rallying point for a new polarisation and decisive break from revisionism.

Betrayals have taken place after Naxalbari also. That too at the very highest levels of the party. But there is a qualitative difference. The betrayers were no longer able to block the ranks from the path of revolution. There have been situations where the revolutionary leadership was decimated by the enemy. Despite that the ranks have regrouped, thrown up new leadership and continued to forge forward. That was the qualitative break achieved through Naxalbari. That is why Charu Mazumdar correctly observed, "Naxalbari will never die."

The turn to MLM by the pioneers of the new revolutionary movement didn't come from bookish knowledge. It was driven by the firm conviction that the sole reason for their existence as communists was to make revolution, to end exploitation and oppression. Integrated with the masses they had been thirsting to take up this task since long. That is why they enthusiastically rallied behind the leaders who came out against the revisionism of the CPI. The ranks waited in keen expectation for decisive steps from the leadership to take the revolutionary road. But the leaders of the new party, the CPI(M), were engaged in desperate moves to divert the ranks from that road by all means. This is where the ideological clarity offered by MLM proved to be decisive. It helped the revolutionaries see through the centrist guises of the neo-revisionists. It helped them realise that nothing short of a total rupture would do. Thus the way was cleared for Naxalbari.

There is an important lesson for us here. First and foremost, we must firmly grasp our calling as communists – to serve the people, to be the torch bearers of revolution. The setback the Maoist revolutionary movement is facing today certainly calls for serious analysis and necessary rectification. But what is most important and primary is to stand firm on the revolutionary road. In the midst of repulsive scenes of erstwhile stalwarts grovelling before henchmen of Brahmanical Hindutva fascism, in the face of their contortions to theorise away the material reality of this country, their abject plea to give up armed struggle and slip back into the morass of parliamentarianism, this is decisive. Because only those who cherish the glorious heights hitherto achieved and stand firm on the revolutionary path can take up the tasks of analysis and rectification in a meaningful manner. Only then can they be addressed and resolved in a manner serving the people and addressing their striving for liberation from imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism.

Taken as a revolutionary stance, standing firm can never be something static. It must be dynamic. And that dynamism comes from ideology. Just as the pioneers forged their revolutionary urge into weapons of revolutionary action in the blaze of MLM, we, their heirs, too must deepen our ideological grasp. Only then will we be able to meet head on the new bunch of traitors and the naysayers who rush in with their refrain of 'we told you so'. So let us examine some of the arguments now being advanced to negate the path hewn out by Naxalbari.

Starting from the betrayal of the Telangana armed struggle in 1951, the 'Indian path' has been a favourite of revisionists of all hues. It was buried and forgotten once parliamentarism became the guiding light of the CPI's strategy and tactics. Later the CPM revisionists revived it in the 1960s to confuse the revolting ranks. It is now being dusted up and presented once again by Sonu and his clique of capitulators. Neither the Russian path of armed insurrection nor the Chinese path of protracted people's war, such has been the explanation about this 'Indian path'. But what exactly does this call for? In the former, the task of taking up arms comes up only when a revolutionary crisis emerges. In the latter, it is there from the very beginning, in view of a continuous revolutionary situation albeit with its ebbs and flows. Since the so-called Indian path is neither of these, does that mean eliminating armed struggle altogether? Does it mean that the proletariat and its allied classes can seize political power in India by peaceful means alone? Let us note that Sonu has in fact ruled out the possibility of armed struggle in India in one of his letters. He went on to criticise the 'boycott of elections'.

Some of the proponents of the 'Indian path' may protest that this is not what they mean. They may argue that armed struggle still has a role in their vision of strategy and tactics. Very well, let us take them at their word. Since this path of theirs is not that of insurrection, armed activity must be taken up early on itself. Yet it cannot be aimed at seizing power locally because protracted people's war has also been ruled out. So then what would this armed activity be? Armed resistance to defend the gains of mass struggle and fend off suppression. This might be coupled with participation in elections to utilise

legal opportunities. But hasn't this already been tried out over several decades in this country? Hasn't its futility been verified in practice, at the cost of hundreds of valuable lives? Thus the so-called Indian path turns out to be either a ruse to abandon the revolutionary road or a dead-end.

This exposure of the 'Indian path' helps draw attention to two aspects we must consider. The first is the objective dynamic emerging from any form of armed activity of the people against their exploiters and their state. The exploiters simply cannot allow it. That is the bottom line. Those who take up arms may see it as a temporary or partial measure. But the state of the exploiters will only consider it as a dangerous precedent that must be stomped out. It must retain its monopoly over the bearing of arms and using them. Therefore, once the oppressed and exploited take up arms it sets off a dynamic of war with its inevitable logic – 'preserve one's forces, destroy that of the enemy'. This is an objective dynamic. It will kick in irrespective of the subjective desires of the participants. Hence resistance must either advance beyond defence of partial gains to offensive actions, or else fail.

The second aspect is this. Why does armed activity become a necessity even for those whose thrust is on mass work? It emerges from the nature of our society. From the raw violence that is omnipresent in it, particularly in the rural areas. This is one of the concrete manifestations of semi-feudalism in our country. The norms of bourgeois democracy— rule of law, civil rights, responsible government etc.— are a facade barely covering up the hideous presence of caste-feudal relations and values. The moment a mass struggle starts confronting any vital interest of the exploiters, the armed goons of the local landlords, of the dominant ruling class political party, or the armed might of their state, swing into action with all brutality. This is the norm in rural areas. Even in urban centres, the 'rule of law' is something reserved for the better off layers of the middle class and members of the exploiting classes. The masses are well aware of this. Ruling class violence is ever present in their lives. Its threatening presence is getting amplified as Brahmanical Hindutva fascist forces become increasingly aggressive. The agenda of violence is preset by the ruling classes. Those choosing to stick to the revolutionary road cannot but reckon with it.

The pioneers of the revolutionary movement launched by Naxalbari were well aware of this essential feature of our situation. Their choice of the path of protracted people's war factored in this aspect too. The leaders of the Telangana armed struggle had arrived at it through the course of that struggle. They succeeded in imposing it over and against the Trotskyite sabotage of Ranadive. But, they failed to stand firm and persist on that path despite the overwhelming support of the ranks and the testimony of practice. This teacher by negative example was both a warning and lesson for the pioneers of the new, Maoist, revolutionary movement in the 1960s. Hence they consciously chose the path of protracted people's war, firmly anchored in class analysis. India as a semi-colonial, semi-feudal country. New democratic revolution as the stage of revolution. Working class as the leading class and the peasantry as the main force. These were the essential elements informing their choice.

The Janatana Sarkars and Revolutionary Committees didn't fall out of the sky. The Adivasis of Bastar, Jharkhand and Bihar didn't get to exercise power over 'Jal, Jangal and Zameen' and lay the foundations of a new society due the benevolence of the exploiters' state. All this didn't materialise from wishful daydreams on 'integrating the task of building People's Communes like embryonic forms of people's political power from the pre-revolutionary period itself'. It came from determined armed struggle and revolutionary mass struggle, adhering to the path set by Naxalbari. Several decades of revolutionary practice have demonstrated its efficacy.

That experience has also revealed several issues that emerge from a protracted struggle. One of them has been touched upon in what has been described by the media as a circular of the CPI (Maoist) Politbureau. It draws attention to the change in class character of some among the leadership in the

organs of power. One is reminded of a lesson of the Cultural Revolution. People like Deng Xiaoping were important leaders of the Chinese revolution. But after the revolution succeeded they failed to take the socialist road. Why did this happen? The Maoists in China analysed this as follows: "When they accepted to varying degrees the Party's minimum programme, that is, the programme of the new-democratic revolution, they did not associate it with the Party's maximum programme, that is, the winning of socialism and communism. In other words, their world outlook is not a proletarian communist world outlook but a bourgeois one. Furthermore, this bourgeois stand and world outlook have not been remoulded in the course of protracted revolutionary struggles. When the revolution advanced from the stage of the new-democratic revolution to that of socialist revolution, their ideology failed to keep pace with the revolutionary advance. On the contrary, although they had physically entered socialist society, ideologically they were still in the stage of the democratic revolution. This determined their inevitable conflict with and even opposition to the socialist revolution." ('From Bourgeois Democrats to Capitalist- roaders', Chih Heng. <https://archive.org/details/and-mao-makes-5-lotta-1978-all>)

Obviously, the situation here does not correspond to the one described above. But the point made about getting stuck ideologically in a condition that has been surpassed in practice is extremely important. Let us consider its implications when political power can be exercised locally in a relatively stable manner. The call to take control of 'Jal, Jangal, Zameen' would have played a crucial role in the struggle to achieve that power. But if that was grasped in isolation, in an absolute manner, separated from the tasks of making revolution in the whole country, from the world socialist revolution, from the communist task of emancipating the whole of the humankind, then that slogan would play a negative role. It would induce a status quo-ist mind set. The transformations that have taken place in production relations under the impact of revolutionary class struggle has been noted. It must be extended to analyse their ideological impact and the challenges this poses.

This, and host of other ideological, political, organisational, technical issues thrown up in the course of the past several decades of revolutionary practice, mainly of this country but also of others, must be deeply analysed and the lessons summed up. This must be done in close relation to ongoing practice. That is how the setback can be overcome. Not by abandoning the path set by Naxalbari, but by synthesising the lessons of revolutionary practice. As Mao teaches us, synthesis is eating up, digesting and absorbing what is of value.

Contrary to this the capitulators and naysayers cry out for a 'new' path, a 'different' path. This demand invariably collides with the guiding points established by the pioneers in the 1960s. The CPM leadership tried then. We saw it (and continue to see it) in the various hues of revisionism that have come up from within the broad M-L camp. And now, the present day clique of capitulators too are trotting out similar arguments. They talk of the growth of capitalism, of urbanisation. They even distort the words of party documents to validate their views. From official writings available in the public domain it is clear that a clear distinction was being made between the distorted capitalist relations seen here and those in capitalist countries. The casteist entanglements of this capitalism, and the bourgeois class engendered by it, was well noted. How Brahmanism has been transformed to suit these new interests was underlined. Yet for the capitulators this is only capitalism, period. They insist that we remain at the threshold of appearances. They don't want us to go beyond it and get to the essence underlying it. This essence is that of a capitalism that is intertwined with imperialism and feudalism. One that serves both of them. A capitalism that always regenerates one or the other form of feudalism even as it transforms feudalism in the course of its growth under imperialist impulses. Hence a capitalism that will never eliminate feudalism. A capitalism properly named by Mao Zedong as bureaucrat capitalism.

Has the predominantly agrarian character of the country changed due to the growth of bureaucrat capitalism? No. Has the position of the peasantry, particularly the landless and poor peasants, as the main force of revolution been eroded by this growth. No. In fact, the slow down in the economy has led to an increase in the rural population. The dire state of affairs in the agrarian economy has forced many peasants to either take up non-farm occupations or migrate. But their precarious existence does not indicate a moving out from agriculture. They remain part-peasant, part-labourer. Most importantly their thirst for land remains strong, for both economic as well as social reasons. Ownership of land is still very much a matter of caste privilege and, hence, of caste oppression. That in itself is a strong indicator that caste-feudalism is the present, not some transcended past.

And what about urbanisation? The cities have grown bigger. New industrial centres have emerged. But has urbanisation become the predominant trend? The appearance provided by Census reports would indicate that something like this is happening. That picture changes once we get into the essence. Data on the urban population seen in the Census is inflated by inclusion of Census Towns. These are not really urban centres. They are statistical constructs created by setting up some indices like population density, number of males engaged in non-agricultural activities etc. A highway intersection with a chain of shops mainly servicing commuters and truckers would easily become one of them. This would add to urbanisation data. But far away from what's actually seen on the ground. Let's not forget that this ground reality is what counts while figuring out the way forward.

There is one aspect one must consider while dealing with this issue. This is the spread of urban culture and of consumerism, even to remote rural areas. It started with the gradual spread of cable TV. It now advances in an accelerated mode with smart phones. Job migration becomes a facilitator. Neo-colonial comprador culture gets promoted through this. The impact is quite contradictory. It loosens up certain caste-feudal values and tightens up some others. The outcome is a hybrid. The old persists in core values. A consumerist thirst for aggrandisement co-habits with it. But that is not all. The spread of these instruments also brings the whole world into the remotest corners of the country. It helps broaden the vision of the masses. It has expanded the political sphere and made it a live presence. Social media offers a powerful means of political intervention. The explosive potential of these new social instruments have already been demonstrated, all over the world and in our country. It must be factored in. Similarly, the potential of labour migration, precarity in employment, IT and new patterns of worker concentration too must be addressed.

The appearance/essence dialectic is equally applicable in analysing semi-feudalism as it exists and chalking out suitable tactics. Those who argue that capitalism is now predominant in agriculture rule out the anti-feudal struggle. The resolution of the land question then becomes a matter of nationalisation and collectivisation, or co-operativisation. Thus the crucial role that the seizure of land and its distribution among the real tillers has in the struggle to destroy feudalism and annihilate caste is negated. In effect, the momentous task of grappling with relations and contradictions that affect the great majority in this country, the peasantry, is simply avoided. This is an example of how analysis stops at appearances. We must insist on advancing to the essence. But that alone won't do. How does it manifest today? Despite all the changes that have taken place since the 1960s, the ideological, political positions adopted then still remain valid. The stage of revolution is new democratic. Semi-feudalism continues to exist. The anti-feudal struggle remains as one of the key planks of the revolution. The agrarian revolution remains the axis. All that is true. But how? The manner in which semi-feudalism exists today, its present-day dynamics and forms of exploitation, has to be identified concretely. So too the forms and mechanisms of the exercise of power at the local level. Without such analysis, without grasping this concrete appearance, the anti-feudal struggle cannot be waged successfully.

Naxalbari was a turning point, a leap. It was the answer to the decades old demand of revolutionaries and the people, the demand that the Communist party acts like one. It was the answer to the revisionists and centrists, who time and again subverted the cause of revolution. It was the answer to betrayers who traded what was won with the blood of countless daughters and sons of the country for a seat at the table of the exploiters and their imperialist mentors. Every revolution proceeds by bringing up and confronting a powerful counter-revolution. It also brings up dregs of the old society within its own ranks. This is why Marx drew attention to the cleansing role of armed struggle. It not only sweeps out the refuse of old society. The cleaners too get cleaned. This precisely is what we see in the churning going on in the Maoist movement today. Every setback, every betrayal, is a bitter matter. It is also a prompt to renew our pledge to serve the people, reaffirm our ideological commitment, review, take lessons and persevere.
