

EXERCISE IN ESCAPISM?

MARSHAL SPEAKS OUT

[Wanted by the West Bengal Police on several counts of murder, 33-year-old Maoist area commander Gurucharan Kisku, alias Marshal, who has recently formed a 150-strong splinter group, spoke to TUSHA MITTAL about the need for a tribal revolution. Excerpts :]

Q. Why did you join the CPI (Maoist)? Tell us about your personal journey.

A. I joined the MCC (Maoist Communist Centre) in 1988. I felt there was a need for self-governance and self-pride for Adivasis. But two years later, I left the party to support my family. After some odd jobs, I joined the Ananda Margis [a controversial Hindu organisation], and remained a sanyasi with them until 1996. I left to learn spoken English for three years. I joined the PWG (People's War Group) in 1999. In 2000, I went underground into the forest with a People's War squad.

Q. Why did you leave the MCC after the initial two years?

A. My father was a poor farmer who cultivated rice on a four-acre plot and my mother is a housewife. My understanding of the problems that beset my community and the necessity of revolution was still very raw.

Q. What made you rejoin?

A. I rejoined at the behest of a leader named Asit Sarkar. Our area is so hilly and remote that no benefits of government policies ever reach the villages. I wanted to be part of the revolution again to preserve our community, cultural identity and language. We needed a revolution to bring development to our society. Initially, we were told that the arms given to us were only for self-protection. We were to build a people's revolution, create a free zone in this region and give the government a jolt.

Q. Why did you quit the party again?

A. When the MCC and PWG united to form CPI(Maoist), the party produced an 18-page, 24-point agenda for the upliftment of Adivasis, dealing with the preservation and enhancement of our language, culture and education. There was no mention of class struggle. Since 2003, I started realising that we were moving away from the agenda, and told the party to stick to the original charter. When I kept insisting, the party began avoiding and sidelining me. They said that they would not go back to a communitarian line. In 2005, the party officially disowned its original Adivasi agenda.

Q. On the ground, how are the Maoists acting against the Adivasi agenda?

A. Instead of the existing gram samitis (village councils), the party started creating alternative committees within the village consisting of people who were either close to or members of the party. The party's declared objective was that all activity—social, cultural and economic—would be controlled by these committees. However, the leadership is non-tribal, and does not understand what it means to be Adivasi. The Adivasi identity is based on our village life, language and customs. I felt that this way, our culture was being destroyed.

As long as the Maoists are here, the oppression of Adivasis will continue, because the State is going to bring down more brutality on us. The Maoists are making things worse for us. This area will explode and ultimately we, the tribals, will be displaced from our land. Whatever links we have to our culture will then be lost forever. We don't want a revolution that will make us refugees. A small Adivasi group like ours cannot survive the onslaught of the State; we need other ways of improving our lot.

Q. You are a most-wanted fugitive in West Bengal, accused of several murders. Do you regret them?

A. The party taught us that armed revolution is the only way. Yes, I do regret the murders. I have realised that if the party line is clear, there is no need for unnecessary killings. Ultimately, most of the dead people are tribals themselves. Whenever a tribal raises his voice against the Maoists, he is killed.

As Maoists, we had been fighting for a greater idea of India. Within such an all-encompassing struggle, some unfortunate incidents are bound to happen. But if this is a struggle for Adivasi rights, what end does it serve by killing tribals?

Q. Did you oppose the killings by the Maoists? What were you told?

A. I don't advocate the killing of people. But who is going to listen to me within the party? The majority view rules. Whenever I opposed the killing of Adivasis, I was told to think of the person we were killing not as an Adivasi but as a cadre of the CPM.

Q. Are you still a Maoist?

A. Complicated question. If you apply Maoist theory, then I am the real Maoist. If you consider Maoist as someone who kills police officers and innocent people, I am not one. I am the one following the party line. They [Kishenji's group] have wavered.

Q. What is the agenda of your group?

A. It is important for the people of India to understand the difference between the demands of the Adivasis and that of the Maoists. We have started uniting the tribals of [West] Bengal, Orissa and Jharkhand. We are yet to decide on a formal name for our group and the direction our struggle will take. We are going to decide soon what our next steps will be. Wherever there are Adivasis, we will start our movement there. We don't have any radically new agenda to offer. Within our tribal societies, we have our own democratic structures and we will let that take due course. Our immediate objective is to bring back the primacy of our language and culture in our society.

Q. What is your strategy of making tribals a part of the mainstream?

A. Our first goal is to wean tribals away from Maoists by highlighting differences between Maoism and Jharkhandism (Adivasi rights). For us, agriculture and food are of prime importance. For that we need water and irrigation. Once our stomachs are full, we want education, but in our own languages. We want the Adivasi languages to command the same respect as

Bangla, Oriya and Hindi. We want self-rule within the traditional village structures we've always had. We want to build our own society on our own terms. We are not beggars, we don't need charity.

Q. Do you believe in the Constitution and the democratic process?

A. To get what the Indian Constitution promises us, like what the 5th Schedule promised us tribals, we need a popular uprising. Where is it written that the police can inflict such brutality on us? I don't believe in elections or panchayats. Adivasis cannot expect justice through the existing democratic process. I also don't believe in the Maoist description of the Constitution. For the self-esteem and self-respect of Adivasis, we need to have our own systems and structures in place. No one wants the extensive bloodshed we are witnessing now.

Q. Then why do you insist on keeping arms? When would you use them?

A. We have no plan to use them if our revolution can be successful without arms. But we have so many enemies that we need something for our own protection. We will only use arms in self-defence. If the State uses repression, we will be forced to take up arms.

Q. Are you afraid your life is in danger?

A. Even when I was in the party, there was a secret plan to assassinate me. Just as I was suspicious of their true design, they were conscious that I was questioning their real motives. Ever since I left the party, I know they will shoot me if they get a chance.

Q. Are Maoists losing tribal support?

A. The Maoists would often put up posters in the dead of the night. Later, the police would torture those villagers whose houses displayed the posters. Now, Adivasis have begun telling the Maoists not to use their walls for these posters. They say if you have to get us killed, kill us yourself.

Q. What is your position on extortion by the Maoists?

A. The party doesn't extort money from the poor, only from big contractors. And we never extracted so much from contractors that it would affect their business. But yes, I accept it is wrong to extort. It is true that the levy is collected by the party under duress. □

[Source: <http://www.tehelka.com>]