

NOTE

Maoist Panic in Gujarat

Prasad Chacko writes :

Avinash Kulkarni, a widely respected activist who has been working on the human rights of Adivasis in Gujarat was arrested last month. His contribution to the formulation of the Forest Rights Act and later on in monitoring its implementation by enabling a large number of Adivasis to claim their land rights is well known. Avinash is now languishing in jail, with charges of fomenting Maoism, waging war against the nation and a host of other false charges slapped on him.

The diabolic strategies of the Modi government to decimate human rights activism in the Adivasi areas in Gujarat; are simply machiavellian by any standards and now the Gujarat Police have arrested another highly respected Dalit activist Amrit Vaghela (known as Ambubhai), Srinivas Sattayya Kurapati (Kishore) and Kishore's wife Hansa (Ambubhai's niece, who is an employee of SEWA, Ahmedabad) on charges that they are Maoists!

Ambubhai has been a cultural activist par excellence, who founded the Lok Kala Manch in 1980, which has since produced and performed several plays on Dalit issues, on women's issues, political satires, particularly productions on communal harmony and the dangers of the ideologies of communal hatred. He has been active in countering the Sangh Parivar and the Modi brigade long before 2002 and more intensely after the 2002 carnage. His activities definitely did create a major setback to the strategy of VHP-Bajarangdal-BJP vis-a-vis Dalits. It is a known fact now that the Parivar which had some Dalit presence, particularly in Ahmedabad is now faced with significant desertion of these communal outfits by many of the Dalit cadres. Recently he led a major grassroots level movement known as Swabhiman Andolan against the bootleggers in Gomitpur area of Ahmedabad, exposing conclusively the well-known nexus between the police and the bootleggers. His courage and integrity has always posed a threat to the police and the political establishment of the BJP.

Srinivas (Kishore) hails from a remote village in Andhra Pradesh; he had migrated to Surat in search of employment and had become quite active in the trade union movement in Surat. He worked in Surat from 2000 to 2006 and then joined *Darshan*, an NGO in Ahmedabad which promotes socio-political awareness through theatre and cultural activism. He was working as a computer operator there. It was really horrendous to see the Gujarati TV channels such as TV-9 airing the ridiculous police version how this simple NGO worker and trade union activist being described as the mastermind of the Maoist strategy in Gujarat, and even linked to the Maoists who perpetrated the Jhargram railway sabotage! Hansa, Kishore's wife, is a grassroots level worker in SEWA, and her only involvement has been in the cultural programmes and theatre of Lok Kala Manch in recent times!

The office of *Darshan*, the NGO where Kishore has been working was raided and their computer taken away by the crime branch. The Director of *Darshan*, Hiren Gandhi had been summoned for questioning by the crime branch. Unconfirmed reports from

confidential sources reveal that the police have listed out all the NGOs which have been working towards justice for the Muslim victims of the genocide and would be investigated for their suspected Maoist links!

For one thing the Modi administration has been highly disturbed by the convictions in a number of 2002 cases, the various rulings on the cases by the Supreme Court, and most recently on the SIT and the encounter cases. The arrest of Abhay Singh Chudasma, the rogue police officer who the CBI has identified as the chief mastermind of the Sohrabuddin encounter, the magisterial inquiry report on the Ishrat Jahan encounter case and a number of other judicial pronouncements have resulted in a number of skeletons rolling out of the cupboard. It is imperative for Modi that certain diversionary tactics have to be deployed for political damage control. It is established now that the recent Shahpur riots were a creation of the highly nervous crime branch group owing allegiance to Abhay Singh Chudasma hands in glove with the VHP cadre in Shahpur. There is no doubt among the human rights activists in Gujarat that Modi is trying to get maximum leverage out of the high pitch alarmist reactions being orchestrated by the media under the watchful eyes and careful manipulations of the Central Home Ministry. Modi would be a political novice if he did not create Maoism out of thin air in Gujarat, in the current hyped up anti-Maoist propaganda that pervades the whole country! □□□