

THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT IN ANDHRA PRADESH

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How we look at an historical event depends upon what we have expected from it. This principle applies also to the Communist experiment that had its hey day in the century now past, and is for the present almost wiped out.

If the Communist experiment is understood as a force that stood against the Capitalist system and the mode of life it offers to humankind, its victories and its failures take on one meaning. They take on a different colour if we understand it as an experiment to rebuild human existence on a basis of equality and cooperation. From the second view point, failure is the judgement one passes on the Communist experiment. It is true that it has given us some knowledge of what is to be done to build a society based on cooperation and equality, but it has told us more of what is not to be done. If it is said that that too is knowledge and we should be grateful for it, then so be it.

But from the first view point, it must be acknowledged that the communist experiment has done great service. Those who desire socialism cannot but regret today that not even one Soviet Russia is there to oppose the aggressive assault that Capital is making on the world in its eagerness to subordinate everything to its domination. The events unfolding before our eyes during the last decade make it evident that if the communist experiment had never taken place in this century, the position of the workers, the other oppressed people and the backward countries would have been much worse.

These observations that apply to the communist movement world wide apply also to the history of the communist movement in our State. From one view point they are even more true. While the communist movement as a whole has failed to give knowledge about how a new society is to be built, in other countries there are communist leaders and theoreticians who have proposed some new ideas and tried to put them into practice. Lenin and Mao within the tradition that gives centrality to violence as an instrument of change, and Gramsci within the tradition that gives centrality to social intervention, have done so. But not only in our State, in our country as a whole there is not one leader or theoretician who has contributed a single new idea to the communist experiment. Not only party leaders, even among intellectuals within Universities and outside, there are perhaps some who have exhibited some capability at interpreting Marxist theory more or less competently, but there is not one who has made a creative contribution to it.

As we suffer from no lack of intelligence, the reason for this must be sought, not in lack of intellectual capabilities but in our country's philosophical traditions. The brahminical intellectual tradition is a tradition of interpreters. There is not one brahmin scholar who has

said: ` This is my opinion ` , or ` I am saying this ` . As conditions have been ever changing, they too could not help saying new things once in a while, but even then they were wont to declare that they were only interpreting the Vedas. There is no legitimacy for original thought in the brahminical tradition. This has entered all political movements and found a new basis in notions such as discipline and commitment and taken firm root. Excepting only the extraordinary efficiency developed by the People ` s War in the use of violence (if that can be said to be useful for the building of a new society), the communist movement in our State - or the entire country for that matter - cannot be said to have made a single original contribution to the problem of how to achieve the goal of the communist movement.

But this does not mean that the communist movement in our State, or in the whole country, has achieved nothing at all. We only have to look at our neighbouring States such as Orissa and Madhya Pradesh to realise how much good has come from there being a communist movement in our State. Notions such as exploitation, oppression, resistance and rebellion, and the mode of thought that divides society into rulers and the ruled and analyses society on the basis of their different interests, have become part and parcel of the social idiom of our State. It is only when we look at people who are not familiar with this idiom that we realise its value. It is one thing if people, inspite of being acquainted with this idiom are unable to overcome oppression. It is quite another thing if people cannot even name the situation of oppression they are facing, and experience it as a nameless dissatisfaction. Today these ideas are familiar to all the movements in our State, but it was the communists who introduced them to the people and made them familiar ideas at the cost of great suffering.

It would be wrong to think that it does not matter if the words are unfamiliar, when the meaning is known. We need not go so far as the post-modern view that language is all, but nevertheless if it is realised that language is not merely a means of expression of what we already ` know ` , and that it has a role in not only expressing external reality but in bringing it into our awareness, we will be able to see that the language made available to the people by the communists has played a major role in making people recognise oppression for what it is and not suffer it as a vague dissatisfaction.

However, the struggles led by the communists have also provided many material benefits. It is not necessary to list out the benefits achieved in each village and each factory, but it is necessary to refer to the changes wrought in government policies. The struggles led by the communists are the main reason why land reforms took statutory form in India. And the naxalite movement is the proximate reason for the amendments made to land ceiling laws in the 1970s reducing the upper ceiling limit. P.V.Narasimha Rao boasts that it was he who suggested to Indira Gandhi that the ceiling should be lowered, but it was the naxalite movement that gave him the idea. And in our State, the constitution of the Girijan Cooperative Corporation, the Integrated Tribal Development Agency, and Regulation 1 of 1970, all of which are measures that have benefited the tribals to some extent, are a consequence of the Srikakulam tribal struggle.

However, the impact that the communists had on people's consciousness and on government policies was not merely a reflection of their physical strength. The communist movement had a moral strength over and above that. It was believed that they stood for justice, that they would not compromise with corruption, that they did not fear sacrifice and that they had no fear of repression. It cannot be said that the opinion is no longer current at all, but it has certainly become very weak. And to the extent that it has become weak, the influence of the communists has also become weak.

This began from the time the CPI joined hands with the Congress. One does not know what the CPI gained or lost organisationally (that is to say in numbers, in organisational strength, in commitment and in the impact of its agitations) from this alliance, but it lost a lot in terms of moral respect and recognition. The same thing happened again later, when the CPI and CPI(M) went about hand in hand with the Telugu Desam Party for about a decade. Those parties found it difficult to even recognise this fact because the moral concern has no clear place in the theoretical world view adopted by the communists. The moral dimension has no independent place in the communist world view but only an instrumental role in debunking the ruling classes and attracting the masses. There is no ethical standard that can explain why the 'exigencies of the struggle' are not above moral concerns. For this reason, CPI and CPI(M) not only found it possible to have an alliance with the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), but also on many occasions take the side of that party's leader in the internal conflicts of that party and abuse his opponents as enthusiastically as his cadre. It does not appear to have struck them that all this may not be necessary for a mere electoral alliance.

It is because of the germination of these traits in the CPI in the sixties that when the naxalite movement came up it attracted as much moral support as political following. The fact that the CPI later all but merged with the Congress, and in our State likewise in subsequent years the CPI and CPI(M) identified themselves almost totally with the TDP led to an increased attraction on this score for the naxalite movement. In Telangana one could hear it said about the naxalites right up to the nineties: 'I differ with their theoretical view point but I respect their values and integrity'. Today the likelihood of such sentiments being expressed about the naxalites has decreased a lot. It is needless to quote instances and examples.

It is necessary that all the Communist Parties regain this lost strength. The CPI and CPI(M) are working independently after a long time. If they can convince the people that this is not a short term tactic but a principled decision (if indeed that is so) they will regain the moral right to criticise the system. The strength that will accrue to them thereby is not slight. The naxalite parties too should learn to follow certain basic values in the collection of funds, in the use of force, in the tactics they adopt to resolve problems, in the methods followed for tackling differences among themselves and in the way they deal with others working among the masses. If the communists are to stand by the poor and oppressed people and help them confront the problems created by economic restructuring, this is very essential.

These changes pertaining to their method of functioning are, however, not sufficient if the communist movement is to advance towards its goal of an egalitarian society. That would require theoretical rethinking. But none of the communist parties has succeeded in giving a satisfactory answer even to the main theoretical doubts raised in recent times. Not only the parties, but even the intellectuals whose main vocation is to work in the theoretical field have not been able to do so. The questions of caste and gender can be taken as two examples. They are giving some answers to the question as to how historical materialism understands these issues which appear to satisfy them, but their explanations have not been able to carry conviction with others - with even a few others.

I do not know whether the communist movement can ever overcome this theoretical lacuna, but let us hope that it will regain the material strength and moral legitimacy required to stand by the poor and help them fight capitalist exploitation, which task it has amply proved it can effectively play in the course of the past century. This will be very necessary in the coming days.