

Vote CPI(M)- Strengthen the Left

For the Defence of Adivasi Rights

The CPI(M) is committed to fight for the rights of adivasi communities. In the last five years it is the CPI(M) and the Left that has taken up the issues of tribal communities both inside parliament and outside. Numerous struggles have been launched to defend and protect tribal rights that are being bulldozed by Governments headed by the Congress and the BJP.

At the same time as the economic onslaught, the democratic rights of adivasis to be consulted on each project in areas inhabited by adivasis has been openly violated by both Congress and BJP and the issue of consent of tribal communities through their gram sabhas has been given a burial.

Tribal languages and cultures have also been denied recognition and support. The critical issue of recognition of tribal languages in the eighth schedule and recognition by State Governments has also been ignored.

In this situation Tripura under the Left front has shown that a democratic and progressive pro-adivasi alternative is possible. With an adivasi population of thirty per cent, Tripura under the Left Front Government is the only State where the legal framework for adivasis is being protected and strengthened. The language of Kok Borok spoken by tribals is recognized and promoted. It has achieved the best record in implementation of the Forest Rights Act, in implementation of MNREGA in adivasi areas, with the provision of 90 days a year, a record in the country, the strengthening of autonomy and decentralization of power under the proper implementation of the Sixth Schedule, the constitution of elected village committees throughout the Sixth Schedule areas, aiding the development of tribal held land and so on. As a result tribals in Tripura have achieved levels of development which are the highest in the country.

While it is essential to build adivasi unity against the ferocious assault on their lives, livelihood and cultures, the RSS is active among Adivasis through various front organisations. Its prime objective is to “Hinduise” Adivasi communities and to create divisions on the basis of religion. This weakens the resistance movement of adivasis and helps the interests of the corporates.

At the same time Maoist violence in many States has created a most difficult situation for Adivasis caught between the repressive policies of the State and armed forces on the one hand and the Maoists on the other. Hundreds of innocent Adivasis are languishing in jails. The CPI(M) while fighting against the terror politics of the Maoists has demanded and struggled for the release of innocent tribals. The Maoists in West Bengal joined hands with the TMC to target and kill Left Front cadre particularly adivasi cadre which helped the anti-tribal forces.

Non-Fulfillment of Reservation Quotas

An important Constitutional guarantees relate to the reservation for Scheduled Tribes in Central and State Public Services. However these legal provisions are not implemented and there is a deliberate

policy of discrimination on specious grounds not to promote SCs and STs. As of 2012, only 16678 or 57.4 percent of the positions were filled up in the Central Government, mostly in the lowest pay-scale. In any case, under the regime of privatization and a ban on recruitments, the number of jobs in the Government and public sector are getting reduced affecting job opportunities for tribals and scheduled castes. While fighting for timebound filling of all vacancies, the CPI(M) is committed to fighting for reservations extension to the private sector.

Shortfalls in Tribal Sub-Plan Allocations

There are continuing and increasing shortfalls in allocations of plan funds to the TSP which should be proportionate to the share of STs in the population or at least 8.2 per cent of expenditure. However in 2013-2014 alone there was a shortfall of 20,983 crores rupees. Several Ministries have been arbitrarily exempted from expenditures through TSP. Further, the expenditures themselves are questionable and are not directed towards the benefit of adivasis.

Living in Extreme Deprivation

This failure to provide public resources is reflected in poor socio-economic conditions. In 2011, only 1 per cent of rural Adivasi households had treated tap water, electricity and a latrine in their houses. Only 2.6 per cent of rural Adivasi households had an indoor kitchen and access to smokeless fuel (kerosene, LPG, biogas, etc)

The gap between ST students and those of other social groups is still high. Over 50 percent of rural Adivasi women and 32 percent of rural Adivasi men were illiterate in 2011; the corresponding proportion among persons belonging to other social groups was about 32 percent for rural women and 17 percent for rural men.

In BJP ruled States, educational institutions are being used as platforms to inculcate young minds with Hindutva ideology. In Chhattisgarh Sewa Bharati and Vanvasi Kalyan Parishad get Government grants to run Ekalavya schools. Sewa Bharati has almost 5000 projects in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh which are at least partly Government aided. In Gujarat the Central scheme of Ekalavya Model residential schools is implemented in the PPP model. This hands over schools in Adivasi areas to education-industrialists close to the Sangh Parivar- thus in this case privatisation and “Hindutva-isation” go together.

Pro-corporate Policies Transform Cultivators into Casual Worker

For the first time since independence, according to the Census 2011, a smaller number of Adivasi males (57 per cent) are dependent on cultivation as compared to wage labour. Only 41.6 per cent are cultivators in 2011 as compared to 51 per cent in 2001. Among Adivasi females the change is as stark. In 2001 42.6 per cent were cultivators which came down to 31.3 per cent in 2011. Studies have also shown an increase in migration among Adivasis including Adivasi women as short term migrants.

Behind these figures is the reality of violence and exploitation of Adivasis at a time when Government's pro-corporate land policies have led to widespread agrarian distress affecting agricultural workers and vast sections of the peasantry. The Adivasi communities are the worst hit which is reflected in all Government statistics. Vast masses of the now dispossessed Adivasis have been forced into the labour force at the lowest rung. Only 8 percent of Adivasis are regular workers,

while 44 percent are casual workers.

Adivasi Women

It is adivasi women who have borne the brunt of these policies reflected in the increase in adivasi women's migration in dismal conditions. The high prevalence of malnutrition among adivasi women points to extreme levels of deprivation. Violence against adivasi women by contractors, supervisors, forest guards are directly linked to their terrible conditions of work. This violence is most under reported. One of the worst cases of how adivasi women are exploited is from Birbhum district in W.Bengal which even the Supreme Court was forced to take note of, when local goondas of the ruling TMC, gave sanction for the rape of a young adivasi woman as "punishment" for daring to choose her own partner. The links between adivasi exploiters and ruling parties, is exemplified in this instance from TMC ruled Bengal. It is only the Left parties and movements which have taken up the issues of the security and economic and social rights of adivasi women.

Anti-Tribal Legal Provisions

The Government's own Twelfth Five-Year Plan noted that of the estimated 60 million people displaced by development projects since Independence, a whopping 40% were adivasis; five times their share in the total population which has been around 8%. The new Land Acquisition Act, will only further the forcible takeover of Adivasi land. It exempts 16 Acts from its purview including those Acts like the Coal and Mining Acts which affect Adivasi communities the most. Even worse it legalises takeover of land in the name of "public purpose" without taking consent of affected Adivasi communities. Combined with the amendments proposed to the Mining and Minerals Act, which fortunately have not been adopted by Parliament yet, it constitutes concerted assault on tribal rights.

The amendments to the Mining and Mineral Act are designed to open up all mineral rich areas including in the Fifth Schedule without any reference to the question of consent. The amendments permit leasing to private companies and also encourage foreign companies to survey land for minerals. An initial proposal to ensure 26 per cent of all profits of mining companies to tribal land and resource losers was eliminated. Thus the Government is putting in place a framework to legalise gross violations of the Constitutional rights of Adivasis.

Diversion & Takeover of Forest Land and Adivasi Habitat

Aggressive takeover of Adivasi land for mining, irrigation, power in Fifth Schedule areas, land grab of tribal land in Non-Scheduled Areas by real estate mafia and others, diversion of forest land used by tribal communities as common property resources for collection of Minor Forest Produce, or for cultivation have taken place in an unprecedented manner. According to MoEF's own records the area of forest land diverted every month has gone up considerably. Between January-April 2013, MoEF cleared 12,571 hectare (ha) of forest land, an average monthly figure of 3,143 ha. In 2012, MoEF had cleared 26,595 ha with a lower monthly average of 2,216 ha. Thus the area of forest diverted has registered a 42 per cent increase. Of all forest area diverted in 2013, 42 per cent was for mining, 22 per cent for irrigation projects, 10.5 per cent for roads.

BJP and Congress led State Governments have both followed the same policies.

In **Andhra Pradesh** in the single district of Vishakhapatnam 1.15 lakh acres of land, much of it forest land was leased to mining companies mainly for bauxite and also for clay mining without consent. In **Madhya Pradesh**, private power projects were given the green signal over 13,000 hectares of forest land in a single year in the Fifth Schedule area, again without consent. In **Chhattisgarh** also there have been licenses given to companies like Reliance for coal projects in Fifth Schedule without consulting the Gram Sabhas. In **Jharkhand** in total violation of the Constitutional and legal provisions all the Governments since the formation of the State in 2000, whether of the Congress, the BJP or regional parties like the JMM have signed agreements with mining and power companies in Fifth Schedule areas. The **Orissa** Government led by the BJD has violated provisions of the Forest Rights Act as in the POSCO and Vedanta projects.

In **Gujarat**, thousands of hectares of land in Fifth Schedule areas and forest lands have been forcibly taken over by the Government. In Umargaon, Bhilad, Sargam land is being handed over to industrialists. Benami transactions encouraged by the Government is leading to large scale alienation of adivasi land.

It is only where the adivasis fought back that they could protect their rights.

No Protection Outside Scheduled Areas

There is no protection of Adivasi land in areas outside the Fifth and Sixth Schedule since Land Transfer Regulation (LTR) Act 1/70 does not apply. The Adivasi population living in States with no scheduled areas, according to Census 2011, is around 19 percent of the total Adivasi population. In addition there are substantial numbers of Adivasis outside protected areas in Fifth Schedule States. In Andhra Pradesh “plains tribals” constitute around 52 percent of the Adivasi population and 80% of them have become landless.

Furthermore, there are serious discrepancies in demarcating Scheduled Areas and often village boundaries are not followed, resulting in ambiguities. There are often tribal villages with a substantial proportion of ST population adjacent to the existing Scheduled Areas which are not declared as Scheduled Areas. For this reason, some of the tribal villages surrounding the Scheduled Areas have high land alienation.

Subverting The Forest Rights Act

Having been forced to pass the Act in 2006 under pressure from the Left parties, the UPA -2 has done everything in its power to sabotage and weaken implementation of the Forest Rights Act as it is seen as a hindrance in opening up forest areas for mining and infrastructural projects.

Till September 2013, 3.5 million (35.39 lakh) individual and community claims had been made for title deeds (patta) in occupied forest land. Of them, only 1.4 million (14.06 lakh) claims were accepted and title deeds issued. The number of community claims was over 71,000 of which the number accepted were just 18,000.

At the State level, the best performance in terms of acceptance of claims continues to be that of the Left Front Government in Tripura (at 66%) followed by Kerala (at 62%) and Orissa (60%). However,

the States of Madhya Pradesh (37.3%), Jharkhand (36.4%), Maharashtra (29.8%) Assam (27.5%), Gujarat (22.3%) and West Bengal (22%) have performed well below the national average.

In the case of Other Traditional Forest Dwellers, the burden of proving their residency for three generations, or 75 years, has become the biggest impediment to access their rights. In most cases, OTFDs are tribals who have not been scheduled in one or the other State and a large numbers of whom belong to the Scheduled Castes, and are Dalits. This stringent criterion has meant huge rejections of claims, and Madhya Pradesh alone has reported that it rejected 96 % of all OTFD claims.

Paid a Pittance for Minor Forest Produce

Evictions from forest land and non-recognition of community property rights over natural resources curtail the right to gather non-timber Minor Forest Produce like grasses, bamboo, seeds, plants, roots, leaves, honey, gum, etc. The Planning Commission held that half of all Adivasi households were involved in collecting MFP. The Panchayat Raj Ministry estimated that between 20 per cent and 40 per cent of the incomes of forest-dwellers came from MFP. Clearly therefore the issue of pricing for MFP is critical for the livelihoods of Adivasis. At present they get extremely low prices exploited by traders and middlemen. In most States, tribal Corporations are running at losses because of lack of adequate funds. They are in some instances in connivance with traders to give Adivasis low prices.

Inflation and Hunger Cause Malnutrition

The relentless price increases have had a devastating impact on the health of Adivasis. Since most essential commodities like salt, sugar, edible oils etc. have to come from the plains to hilly tracts where there are Adivasi habitations, inflation is even higher in Adivasi areas leading to severe distress for Adivasis. An overwhelming 88.5 percent of Adivasis suffer from calorie deprivation while the levels of malnutrition are 15 percent higher than other social groups. As many as 68.5 per cent of Adivasi women suffer from anaemia compared to 55.3 percent in other social groups.

Prevention of Atrocities

The last three years have seen an increase in crime rates against the STs by about 2.9 percent. What is even more significant is the fact that in the last year alone the crimes under the Schedule Caste and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act have gone up by 13.6 percent. Violence against tribal women by contractors, forest officials, landlords and the rural rich as well as their increasing victimisation in urban areas where they are employed as domestic workers, are linked to their extremely precarious working conditions.

Discrimination Against Genuine Adivasi Communities

It is shocking that in State after State genuine tribal communities have been struck off the ST list and denied recognition as tribals. At the same time there are those who have bribed officials and have got false certification as adivasis and have illegally grabbed benefits which should go only to adivasis. This discriminatory policy has meant that the constitutional provisions for protection of adivasis are being violated. The CPI(M) has demanded the setting up of a timebound commission to go into all these issues and to undo the injustice being meted out to genuine adivasi communities.

The CPI (M) stands for social and economic justice for adivasis by filling all job vacancies, protecting land rights; restoring alienated land; implementing the Forest Rights Act in full; giving MSP for MFP; extending PESAA to all development blocks with high tribal concentration in all urban and rural areas India; protecting and developing tribal languages; providing employment and food security; expanding public services and infrastructure for health, education, water, sanitation, irrigation, electricity, connectivity, rations, etc. It is committed to provision of 35 kgs of foodgrains at two rupees per kg for all adivasi families

The BJP and the Congress are following the same anti-tribal policies.

Only an alternate set of economic and land policies represented by the left can ensure the protection of the rights of adivasi communities

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