

The many shades of Reds leave Left pale

SAP Bureau

Soon after getting expelled on the charges of molestation from the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM), a former state secretary, quite 'coolly' knocked at the doors of Motibagh Palace in Patiala and joined the Congress two years back. Earlier in 2002, two CPI MLAs followed the suit, when the CPI tried to maintain distance with the Congress government, which it was supporting at that time. These were not just cases of defection, they indicate towards the state of Left in Punjab.

The Left parties in Punjab, which once became the hope of 'another world is possible', in the state seem to have lost to the splits, degeneration of its leadership and losing its path to too much of parliamentary politics.

Going by the electoral records, the best performance of Left parties in Punjab was when communists were united and had only one party called the Communist Party of India (CPI). While contesting against the alliance of Congress and SAD, the CPI was able to get around 14 per cent of the total votes and emerged as the main opposition in the state.

Another aspect is that this performance came just after PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab States Union) Mujahra Movement, which, of course, was one of the most glorious land struggles in the history of Punjab.

But now the scene has completely changed, the Left had to struggle a lot even to get candidates for the seats they are contesting. According to the records of the Election Commission of India, in last state assembly elections, all the Left candidates from all parties including CPM, CPI, CPI (ML) CPM Pasla could hardly get 1 per cent of the total votes.

One of the many other reasons of decline of Left in Punjab is cited as too much of parliamentary politics. Agrees Mangat Ram Pasla, a leader who broke away from CPM and formed a new party, CPM (Punjab), "Too much of parliamentary politics and opportunistic alliances with the ruling parties has pushed the traditional Left parties into this situation."

When analysing the Left leadership in Punjab, you see so many examples of leaders playing opportunistic and leaving or being expelled from the parties only to join the ruling class parties.

There were times that if one would become a communist, he would die as a communist, but, would never join any other party.

But how did the left leadership degenerate to such levels? According to observers, the lack of class struggle has left the Left leaders out of work. In the absence of class struggle, ideologically they are very weak. Meanwhile, the CPI tried to organise the youth on the issue of employment and rural workers on the issue of MGNREA, and various CPI ML groups which contest election tried to organise them on the issue of rural housing and caste oppression.

However, today, you will hardly find the Left parties organising people on class issues, quite unlike in the past. Instead of emphasising on class issues which spring out of agrarian crisis, they are seen much more active in the election days. And most of the Red flags are seen only during election days as compared to any other occasion. What does that indicate at? Is it not the parliamentary path which they are toeing? How right Lenin was when he called the bourgeois parliament Pigsty!

Party of splits

1964: The first split came when terming the CPI leadership as revisionist, the CPM was formed.

1967: The Naxalite movement took away a large section of youth from CPM. Some Naxalite groups came back to electoral politics, some are still toeing the line of election boycott.

1994: Having left the CPM over the issue of understanding of Khalsitani movement, central committee member Jagjit Singh Lyallpuri formed his party MCPI, but could not attract mass base.

2001: This was perhaps the most major split in the party. Majority of the cadre went with former secretary of Punjab unit, Mangat Ram Pasla, who was allegedly cornered as he went against the wishes of Harkishan Singh Surjeet and opposed Jyoti Basu's candidature for prime ministership.