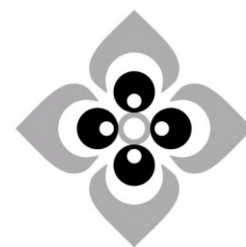


HISTORY



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Topic No. & Title : Part- 4
Communist Movement in China:
1921 – 49 (Part II)

Abstract: *In this part, we propose to discuss the circumstances leading to the historic Long March, the formation of the Second United Front between the CPC and the KMT against Japanese aggression, the changes brought about in the bordering regions of Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia, known popularly as the Yen-an phase, as a result of new social experiments which turned everything upside down. It also deals with the medical missions sent to China from Canada and India to fight with scalpel in hand against 'those who make the wounds' i.e, the Japanese aggressors.*

Long March (1934-35)

In our first lecture on this theme, we have pointed out that after formation of 11 red bases on the Chingkangshan Mountains on the Hunan-Kiangsi bordering area by Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh, there was opposition from the CPC leadership. The leadership was in favour of attacking cities from the rural areas at that stage which Mao opposed. There were also five 'encirclement & suppression campaigns' by Chiang Kai-shek and lakhs of his troops which the Red Army found it difficult gradually to withstand. These forced the CPC to undertake the historic Long March. Thus divisions within the CPC and the mounting pressure from the KMT constituted the immediate causes of the Long March.

However, Mao Tse-tung had another long-term objective in view. In 1931, Japan had captured Manchuria in the north-east and established the puppet Manchukuo government. In 1932, the Japanese army attacked Shanghai and attempted to turn it into a second base for colonizing China. Although the army and civilians repeatedly repulsed the invaders, Chiang Kai-shek spared no efforts in undermining the resistance and also banned the anti-Japanese movement throughout the country. In October 1931, eight lakh workers of Shanghai set up the

Resist-Japan-and-Save-China Association and demanded that the KMT should send troops to fight Japan at once and supply arms to the volunteers which they had organized.

Thus it was quite clear to Mao and his comrades that the centre of political activity had already shifted towards the northeast and that there was the need of starting an anti-Japanese war. It was both these factors that forced Mao and the CPC to begin its Long March from the south to the northeast, to the new theatre of war.

The Long March was one of the greatest exploits in military history. Edgar Snow has provided a passionate description of it. It was a journey from south China to northeast China across some of the world's most difficult trails, across the longest and deepest and most dangerous rivers of China, across some of the highest and most hazardous mountain passes, through the country of fierce aborigines, through the empty grasslands, through wind, heat, snow and rainstorm, and pursued by half the White armies of China and fighting its way past the local troops of Kwantung, Hunan, Kwangsi, Kweichow, Yunnan, Siking, Szechuan, Kansu and Shensi. At last the red Army reached northern Shensi in October 1935

and enlarged its base in China's northwest. In 370 days from 16 October 1934 to 20 October 1935, the Red Army under Mao walked on and on to cover a distance of 7,500 miles.

In one sense, this mass migration was the greatest propaganda tour in history. The Reds passed through provinces populated by 20 crore people. In every town they occupied, they called mass meetings, gave theatrical performances, heavily taxed the rich, freed many slaves, preached 'liberty, equality and democracy', confiscated the property of the big landlords and officials and distributed their goods among the poor. They exclaimed the aims of the agrarian revolution and their anti-Japanese policy.

One of the most important developments during the Long March that proved to be a real turning point in Mao's political career as also for the future history of the Chinese revolution was the holding of the **Tsunyi Conference** at Tsunyi in the Kweichow province from 6 to 8 January 1935. Besides other things, the conference decided to hand over the task of leading the operations to Mao and also voted him the Chairman of both the Polit Bureau of the central committee of the CPC as also of the new Revolutionary Military Council. At

that conference, the decision was also taken to go northwards to fight Japan.

Anti-Japanese National Liberation War, the Second United Front and the Yen-an Phase (1937-45):

In 1931, the Japanese aggressors captured Manchuria and set up the puppet 'Manchukuo' government there. From there they started a general invasion of China and seized all the major industrial and railway towns of north China. Iris Chang wrote in her book *The Rape of Nanking* that in December 1937, the Japanese army swept into the ancient city of Nanking and within weeks, more than 3 lakh Chinese civilians and soldiers were systematically raped, tortured and murdered—a death roll exceeding that of the atomic blasts of Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined. They even inflicted medical experiments on the Nanking people. In April 1939, they started conducting research on human guinea pigs whom they called *zaimoku*. To Chiang Kai-shek, it was far more welcome to have the Communists massacred by the Japanese than to fight the foreign aggressors themselves. So he adopted the military policy of waiting. Since then, the struggles of the CPC changed its character. The strategic

principle remained the same—prolonged armed resistance aimed at the creation of small insurgent bases, of which the main social base was necessarily the peasantry. However, from then on, those bases were devoted to resistance against Japan—a task which took priority over the fight against the landlords. In this way, the **War of Resistance Against Japanese Imperialism** began and the **Second United Front between the CPC and the KMT(1937-45)** was formed.

Problems of forming a United Front:

To forge a united front was not at all an easy task. The CPC led Red Army had to fight against five “encirclement and suppression” campaigns against the KMT not long ago and they had just thwarted attempts by the KMT to forestall their Long March towards the northeast with thousands killed in the process. Thus there was a definite opinion within the CPC against the formation of any such front with their sworn enemy. In December 1935, the Political Bureau of the CC of the CPC met at the Wayaopao plenum where Mao placed his standpoint in defence of his proposal for the formation of the united front. One group within the CPC was dead against it.

There was another group consisting of varied opinions which was in favour of not only the formation of the united front, but also of handing over the leadership of the front as well as that of the Red Army to Chiang Kai-shek. Both Chang Kuo-tao and Wang Ming, another advocate of the 'left' line were in favour of this line. Mao had to fight against both these erroneous tendencies and win over his comrades to his stand.

Mao's arguments, as it appeared in *On Tactics Against Japanese Imperialism*, **were as follows:**

Japanese encroachments had been converting the status of China from that of a semi-colony shared by several imperialist powers to that of a colony of Japan alone. That had sowed dissension within the ranks of the KMT.

On the one side there was the patriotic section which had been raising its voice in favour of a resistance war against Japan.

On the other hand, there was another section which still favoured a policy of appeasement towards Japan. The Communists should, Mao argued, take advantage of this internal contradiction within the KMT ranks and form a broad united front with all anti-imperialist forces. The struggle

against the Japanese aggressors will be led by the CPC under the umbrella of this broad united front.

How was the anti-Japanese war to be conducted?

Mao wrote four important essays each of which deserves to be treated as one of the leading essays in this field hitherto published. These were-

Problems of Strategy in Guerrilla War Against Japan(May 1938) and *On Protracted War*(May 1938), *Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War*(December 1936) and the *Problems of War and Strategy*(November 1938). The war, in Mao's vision, would be fought on Chinese territory with the Japanese troops entirely surrounded by a hostile Chinese people. It implies that large areas of China would have to be conceded to Japan in the initial stages of the war, while Japan, being a small country, would not at all be able to spare enough personnel for the effective control of the occupied territories. That would naturally create power vacuums behind enemy lines, giving scope for the Chinese guerrillas to carry on mobile warfare against the Japanese aggressors. Mao's strategy was the strategy of guerrilla warfare, not of mobile or positional warfare. There was no fixed boundary here; it would be a shifting and indefinite front spread over a wide area. The fundamental basis of this mobile warfare or

people's war would be mass support, the mobilization of the people, entirely depend on them and fight against the foreign invaders. When the enemy is numerically inferior, attack them with a superior force and wipe them out; when they are more powerful, then avoid conflicts and wait for the most opportune moment to wipe them out. Through this protracted war, the guerrillas would cause decline in the enemy's morale and fighting spirit and the time would be ripe for a counter-attack along the entire front and the protracted war of attrition could then be won. The Red Army used to say; "The enemy has attacked us with clinched fists. Our first task is to open that fist by attacking it, and then cut off the fingers one by one". In this way, Mao believed, the national war could be won. It is pertinent to point out that this tactics was applicable not just to the case of anti-Japanese war, but also against Chiang Kai-shek.

Yenan Phase (1937-45)

The period 1937-45 is known in the history of China as the Yenan phase. It was the capital of Shensi-Kansu-Ninghsia(Shen-Kan-Ning) base area. The importance that Yenan enjoyed was more than that of Ching Kang-shan. It was not just a base area, not just a new government or a new

social system. It was in reality the model of a future China based on anti-Jap war of resistance, honesty and justice. From 1936, thousands of youth and students braved their way through hardships and repressive measures from the KMT and reached Yen-an to integrate with the struggle against the foreign invaders. In fact, a number of base areas were created in the northwest, all of which were situated on inter-provincial boundaries, in areas which were relatively easy to defend. For eight years, armed struggle against Japan was carried on by these bases. It is regarded as one of the most perfect examples of a 'peoples' war' based on the unity of the armed forces with a peasant population which gives them complete political and military support. In the new situation, the demands of the agrarian revolution were temporarily suspended and replaced by the policy of resistance against Japan and the policy of 'national salvation'.

Concept of New Democracy

In an important essay entitled *On New Democracy*(1940), which is regarded as one of his main contributions to Marxism-Leninism. The theory behind the new alliances was propounded by Mao in that essay. It was based on the alliance of the 'four revolutionary classes'—the proletariat, the

poor and middle peasants, the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie. These four classes were associated together in the same historical mission: to defeat imperialism by fighting the Japanese and to defeat feudalism. In the 'liberated areas', local governments were set up on the 'three-three-three' principle comprising three Communists, three members of the centre parties which eventually included KMT and three non-party progressives. In the later period, the scope for political alliance was extended further to include patriotic landlords who were encouraged to participate actively in the struggle against Japan, despite their social position as the natural enemies of the peasants.

In the opinion of Mao, this New Democratic Revolution was a bourgeois democratic revolution; but it was not the bourgeois revolution of the old type. It is the bourgeois democratic revolution of a new type, the essence of which is an agrarian revolution. It was not to be led by the bourgeoisie, but by the working class. In China, as in many other underdeveloped countries, as a result of the emergence of imperialism at the turn of the 19th century, the whole world had come under the control of some imperialist power or other. In such a situation, the bourgeoisie of the underdeveloped countries had been divided into two sections—the national (small and

middle) and the comprador(big), the latter tying up with foreign capital. In such a situation, the big bourgeoisie could never give leadership in a bourgeois revolution directed against feudalism and imperialism. And the October revolution had also brought the indigenous big bourgeoisie closer into the arms of imperialist capital. That is the reason why in China, the revolution was to be led by the working class, and not by the bourgeoisie. This was a major departure from other bourgeois revolutions and constitutes one of Mao's major contributions to Marxism-Leninism.

The French historian, J. Chesneaux held that the agreements between the Communists and the KMT meant applying a brake to the agrarian revolution, in theory at least. Thus temporarily, for the sake of unity against Japan, the CPC agreed to renounce their radical agrarian policy and the confiscation of landlords' holding without compensation. But what is important is that in exchange, they obtained from the KMT a fundamental concession—the right to preserve their own armed forces, the Eighth Route Army and the New Fourth Army, to fight against Japan. This meant, in effect, the right of the peasants to keep their arms and the possibility of continuing at a later date their struggle for land.

John G. Gurley expressed the same view in his book *China's Economy and the Maoist Strategy*. In his opinion, the period of anti-Japanese resistance was not one of total retreat for the peasant movement. In fact, the policy of rent reduction and interest reduction was still pursued with the intention of reducing the economic power of the landlords.

According to Chesneaux, even more important is the fact that the development of armed resistance against Japan led to a radical change in the political balance of power between the gentry and the poor peasants. Taking arms against Japan and contributing to the main war effort, the peasants inevitably became conscious in their own strength. They knew it well that their arms could serve in the future to defend their class interests and not just their country.

Yenan Society

The peasant society in Yenan in one sense was a military society, in which the armed resistance was closely integrated with the everyday life of everyone, and in which the traditional aspects of peasant life were adapted to military purposes. The land was dug, not merely for planting crops, but also for making tunnels and mines.

The Yen-an society was also a democratic society. In the old society, there is a traditional opposition between the organs of power—military as well as civil. In the recent period with the onset of revolutionary struggles, contradictions developed also between members of the Party and the ordinary people. All these differences were reduced to the minimum in the newly created democratic society. The civil and military cadres shared the simple life of the peasants and soldiers, lived like them in the caves and bore no insignia of rank or power. In fact, the insignias of rank which are an integral part of armies in all the previous societies, would not be found in the Red Army or the Eighth Route Army. If one goes through the pictures of Communist leaders such as Mao Tse-tung, Lin Piao, Chou En-lai, Teng Fa and others in Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China* or Jack Belden's *China Shakes the World*, one will notice the absence of any such symbol on the dress of any one of them. All the previous armies exploited the peasantry and lived at their expense whenever they entered the countryside. But the character of the Red Army was entirely different. They integrated themselves with the peasants, helped the peasants in the fields and paid for everything they took from them. In fact, Mao prepared a long list of what the Red Army soldiers should and should not do.

The same kind of equality was to be found in the relationships between men and women.

Except for those who had joined secret societies in the earlier days, peasant women had always been kept in a situation of family dependence and social subordination. Confucian ideology sustained patriarchal ideology and served as the basis of women's subordination. In the new Yen-an society, however, they were made free from the clutches of patriarchy and feudal fetters and they fought hand in hand with men against feudal social oppression and foreign aggression. They participated actively in the work of the peasant committees, in guerrilla operations, in the production campaigns and formed Women's Associations.

To add to these, a new kind of culture bloomed in the Yen-an society which was fed by peasant tradition and at the same time integrated with the revolutionary struggle. A forum of writers and artists was created in Yen-an in 1942. Urban intellectuals were encouraged to come to the villages, integrate with the peasants and reflect their struggles and aspirations through their writings, songs, poems, operas and other mass media. One can have a detailed idea of how that

new culture was in an essay by Mao written in May 1942 entitled *Tasks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art*.

Medical Missions to China from Canada and India

Dr. Norman Bethune was a prominent Canadian thoracic surgeon. He was a member of the Communist Party of Canada and was sent by the Communist Parties of Canada and the USA to China. Dr. Bethune came to China to fight beside the Chinese revolutionaries against 'those who make the wounds, and treat those who got wounded in battle. Before this journey, he went to Spain to join the international brigade formed to fight the fascist general Franco. The Spanish experience helped him formulate the theory that if mobile hospitals could be built up very near the battlefield, fully 75% of serious battle casualties would survive if operated on and blood transfusions carried on immediately. He arrived in Yen-an in 1938. Mao commissioned him to organize a mobile operating unit and this brought Bethune to the "centre of the centre of the earth" in the Wutai mountains in the Hopei province of China. The abysmal and desperate conditions under which Bethune had to work is attested by one of his reports he sent to general Nieh: '...Think of it; 200,000 troops here, 2,500 wounded always in hospital, over

1,000 battles fought in the past year! And to handle all this, no medical supplies, only five Chinese graduate doctors, 50 Chinese *untrained* "doctors", and a foreigner(Ted Allan and Sydney Gordon, *The Scalpel The Sword The Story of Dr. Norman Bethune*,pp.289-90). Here he worked for almost two years, eighteen hours a day, sometimes operating for forty hours straight without sleep, within minutes of the front lines. His extraordinary devotion to duty became a legend throughout the region and eventually throughout China. He died of septicemia contracted when cut himself while operating under great pressure as the Japanese advanced to within ten minutes of his operating room. The person who had been treating and curing thousands of soldiers did not have any sulfa drug to treat himself Ted Allan and Sydney Gordon have written a most moving and passionate account of Dr.Bethune's life. After his death, Mao Tse-tung wrote a short essay entitled *In Memory of Norman Bethune* where he stated: "Comrade Bethune's spirit, his utter devotion to others without any thought of self, was shown in his great sense of responsibility in his work and great warm-heartedness towards all comrades and people. Every Communist must learn from him". Dr. died in Tanghsien, Hopei on 12 November, 1939.

The Indian Medical Mission that went to China included Dr.D.S.Kotnis, besides four others. The team went to China to fight, like Bethune, "those who make the wounds" in 1938. Kotnis was the only one who could not return to India. He died of epilepsy at the age of 32 in the battlefield. After his death, Soong Ching-ling, the wife of Sun Yat-sen, sent a condolence message to the members of his family, portions of which we reproduce below:

"...Dr. Kotnis leaves behind him a Chinese wife and a child in whom our two peoples have blended...I hope...that you will remember your son and brother not only with sorrow but with pride. He gave himself wholly to what he believed in, he did great good, and lived and died as he wished. His memory belongs not only to your people and to ours, but to the noble roll-call of the fighters for the freedom and progress of all mankind. The future will honour him even more than the present—because it was for the future that he struggled..."(An Indian Freedom Fighter in China; A Tribute to Dr. D. S. Kotnis).