

Kanu Sanyal—the Voice of Indian Revolution

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Kanu Sanyal—the helmsman of historic Naxalbari uprising in May, 1967 breathed his last on 23 March, 2010. He was 81.

Kanu Sanyal was the general Secretary of CPI(ML) which he along with some other leading organizers formed in January 2005 in AP.

With his passing away there comes to an end of a six-decade-long turbulent revolutionary political life that had its beginning in the small town of Siliguri when he was a vibrant youth of just 21.

Kanu Sanyal's end came in Hatighisa village—it is the very village and its adjacent to vast rural belt encompassing Naxalbari area where he spent his entire political life —minus 25 years of jail life, fighting relentlessly to uphold the rights of life and livelihood of the hapless and helpless Adivasi Tea garden workers and peasants subjected to ruthless exploitation by the tea planters and jotedars and usurers.

A devout admirer of Netaji Subhas Ch Bose in his teens, Kanu Sanyal got interested about the communists and communist party when the then Congress government banned the party. He came in touch with Rakhil Majumder, Sunil Sarker, and some other party activists of the Siliguri Town and became a member of the *Janaraksha Committee*.

It was the communist party influenced *Janaraksha Committee* that hit upon the plan to organize a protest demonstration against the then visiting chief Minister Dr Bidhan Ch Roy by waving black flag. The demonstration was organized as a mark of protest against the killings of party members Latika, Pratiba, Amiya and Geeta by the police when they were leading a peaceful rally in Kolkata demanding revoking the ban imposed on communist party.

Kanu Sanyal who then got a govt job at Kalimpong SDO court only a few months back was arrested for participating in the protest demonstration. He had to spend 3 months in prisons in Siliguri and Jalpaiguri respectively and was released on bail. During his jail period he came in close contact with some leading party members of Darjeeling district like Charu Majumder, Souresh Mitra, Khagen Roy Choudhury and Rakhil Chowdhury. When he came out of jail he was offered the membership of communist party. And he accepted it. It was in march 1950.

After that Kanu Sanyal never looked back. Even the persuasive need for providing regular monthly monetary help for maintenance of his lower middle class family consisting of his father, mother and little brother and sisters, that depended solely on the meagre pension of his retired father, could not deter him. Fired by revolutionary dream of socialism young Kanu Sanyal broke off familial and social bonds and opted for a life of struggles and movements to uphold the cause of the have-nots.

He became a fulltime worker of the communist party. It was the time when party did not provide any financial help for the maintenance of ordinary whole time party workers. Rather they had to maintain themselves with whatever

meagre sustenance they could manage to collect from the people they were serving. Sometimes they had to go hungry.

As per party directive Kanu Sanyal engaged himself to organize and expand the party base among peasants of the rural belt of Terai region. From that very time Kanu Sanyal devoted himself whole-heartedly to the cause of Indian revolution. He became an ardent follower of the communist party.

At the beginning he along with his fellow activists Panchanan Sarker, Jogen Muknerjee, Khokon Majumder, Keshab Sarkar, Kadam Mallick, Jangal Santhal worked under the banner of Terai Kissan Samity. Thereafter they carried out their work of organizing the peasants on the basis of the class from the platform of Siliguri Mahakuma Kissan Sabha to implement the call given by the then Krishak Sabha and the party 'Land to the Tillers'. With the connivance of the police, the tea planters and jorders resorted to evicting the poor peasants from their lands and deprive them from their rightful share of the crops. Against the joint exploitation and plunder of the jotedars and tea planters and to establish the genuine right of the peasants on the land and crops they produce Kanu Sanyal and his co-workers carried on a series of struggles at times militant and armed and at other time peaceful. It was a struggle that surged forward through a zigzag course—sometimes involving violent clashes with the jotedars.

The class struggle gradually forged ahead from one higher stage to the next higher one and ultimately it culminated into the uprisings of Naxalbari on 24th May, 1967. And Kanu Sanyal was its helmsman. After the great Telengana struggle the spring thunder over Terai once again forcefully brought to the forefront the correct path of Indian revolution.

The revolutionary message of Naxalbari was very clear and emphatic—in an economically backward country like India with agriculture as its base economy the new democratic revolution can become victorious only by following the path of protracted people's war with agrarian revolution as its axis.

From this point of view Kanu Sanyal can well be called the pathfinder of the Indian revolution. On the one hand he waged a relentless ideological and political fight against the right revisionism and on the other hand against left wing adventurist line of terrorism—twin danger of the communist movement and applied the mass revolutionary line of Mao-tse-Tung on the soil of Naxalbari. Thus he became a legendary leader of the communist movement of India.

After the Naxalbari uprising he along with other compatriots like Khokan Majumder, Kadam Mallick, and Dipak Biswas went to China on foot in September 1967, via Nepal withstanding unbearable physical hardships and trekking through difficult hilly terrain with life risk at every step on the path.

They spent 3 months in China. Prior to their return to India they had the opportunity to meet Mao-tse-Tung and got appreciation of Mao for correct application of the mass revolutionary line in Naxalbari. Mao said—if you (in plural) could move forward with the people's support you would be able to make revolution a success.

But after the formation of CPI(ML) in 1969 mouthing "Naxalbari Zindabad" the left adventurist line was pursued and practised with all gusto. And the great revolutionary upsurge created by Naxalbari uprising throughout the length and

breadth of the country was nipped in the bud. Also nipped in the bud was the great possibility of making new democratic revolution a success.

A communist to the core Kanu Sanyal openly admitted his role in this regard in written form in the political and organizational report of the All India convention of OCCR held in Naxalbari in 1981.

The Ideological battle that he along with Keshab Sarkar, Jungal Santhal started against the anarchist line in 1966 and got the line defeated in the meeting of Krishak Sabha at Ram Bhola Jote under Kharibari block in presence of thousands of Krishak delegates and in opposition to this wrong line successfully applied the mass revolutionary line in Naxalbari, could not be carried out by him in the CC of CPI(ML). And he made repeated self criticism regarding his failure to wage the timely ideological and political battle within the organization against the manifestations of the anarchist line such as “annihilation of class enemy is the highest form of class struggle” or “one who has not smeared his hand red with the blood of class enemy cannot be called a Communist”.

Kanu Sanyal always had firm adherence to Marxism, Leninism–Mao-tse-Tung Thought. When split took place in the communist movement of the country Kanu Sanyal waging struggle against revisionism moved out of CPI and opted for CPI(M) in 1964. And in the same way waging ideological struggle against neo-revisionism he left CPI(M) after Naxalbari.

Following the formation of *Naxalbari Krishak Sangram O Sahayak Samiti* and *All India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries*, when CPI(ML) was formed on 22nd April 1969 responsibility of declaring the party formation was given to Kanu Sanyal. And Kanu Sanyal carried out that responsibility by declaring the formation of CPI(ML) in the mass meeting held on 1st May 1969 at Shahid Minar Maidan in Kolkata. It needs to be mentioned here that following the period of Naxalbari uprising Kanu Sanyal and his compatriots remained busy in carrying forward the movement remaining underground. Then they had to go to China. On their return from China Kanu Sanyal was arrested in 1968. So Kanu Sanyal could not be a part of activities that led to formation of first AICCR in November 1967 and then the AICCCR formed on 14th May 1968 and finally the formation of CPI(ML).

Afterwards during jail tenure following his arrest in 1970 he got himself engaged in waging sharp ideological and political fight against the anarchist line of CPI(ML). During his stay in Vishakhapatnam jail in connection with the Parvatipuram Conspiracy Case he put forward his views in the document, “More about Naxalbari”.

After he came out of jail on 9th May 1979 he started establishing contacts and discussions with the communist revolutionary groups and individuals for uniting CR forces. During this period he made contact with the leading party workers of Telegana movement like D V Rao, Nagi Reddy and other CR groups in Andhra who were not a part of either AICCCR or CPI(ML) as well as with the CR forces who were in CPI(ML) but later on came out opposing left deviation line of the party.

His clear understanding was that there is no genuine communist party in the country. And he engaged himself in the task of forming a genuine communist

party under the banner of Marxism, Leninism, Mao-tse-Tung Thought. He was devoted to this his principal task till his death.

During this process of forging unity he formed OCCR in 1979, then COIML in 1985 and subsequently CPI(ML) in 2005. To carry on the task of achieving this unity he went on working hard in spite of ailment and weak health.

Kanu Sanyal attached great importance to build up united democratic movement of the struggling left. Thus he took part in forming *Gana Sangarsh Samity* in 1983, 13- party joint forum in 1990.

An uncompromising fighter Kanu Sanyal always raised his voice against attack on democratic rights of the people by the police and state administration. In spite of his ill health he rushed to Kolkata from Hatighisa village to take part in the joint protest movement in Singur. He got arrested on the way along with his compatriots. He was detained for a whole day and was under police vigil. Again when genocide of evicted peasants took place in Nandigram, a deeply anguished and pained Kanu Snyal rushed there to express his and his organization's solidarity with their struggle.

He lent his support to the struggle of Adivasi people of Jangal Mahal for their democratic right. And he came down heavily on joint paramilitary operation and Operation Green Hunt in Lalgarh area and the use of the draconian black law UAPA.

Prior to that following the incident of demolition of Babri Masjid, a mass protest rally was organized in Kolkata against communalism and Kanu Sanyal came all the way from Hatighisha to take part in the programme. Again in the mass protest movement organized against US imperialist intervention and occupation of Iraq(2003) he asked the organization to become a part of it. Long before this when mass killings of peasants of Arwal in Bihar took place in April 1986 Kanu Sanyal took active part in organizing mass protest rally in Kolkata against it.

He always stressed upon the urgency of building up people's real alternative against the sustained and well calculated attack on Marxism by the reactionary forces. He explained in details before the party the reasons behind the failure of spontaneous protest movement of the affected peasants of Nandigram to assume the greater dimension of a mass movement against SEZ and imperialist globalization dictated economic reform policy. His clear analysis was that it failed because of the absence of active and effective presence of communist revolutionary forces in the movement.

Today, disaster in international communist movement and its subsequent negative effect on national plane and the anti-people policies being implemented in present day West Bengal are simply making common people not only getting confused and aghast with left politics but also a section of them including some intellectuals with left leaning are rallying round the anti-Marxist camp. Moreover some of the ML organizations are also rallying round this camp. Side by side in the name of Maoism a practice of terrorist line of individual killings is going on directly negating Mao-tse-Tung Thought. This political line is completely alien to Marxism–Leninism and Mao-tse-Tung Thought. It completely negates Marxist conception of class and class struggle.

In such a confused situation of left politics and the crisis of communist movement Kanu Sanyal's firm adherence to the path of new democratic revolution holding high the red banner was a source of great inspiration to all the bearers of red flag. At this critical juncture passing away of Kanu Sanyal is an irreparable loss. It is not only a loss to CPI(ML). It is also a great loss to the struggle of the toiling masses. It is a loss to the left movement and to the communist movement of the country.

As for some distinctive features of political personality of Sanyal it can be said that he used to go deep into any political or organizational problems and analyze it dialectically to arrive at a solution. To be precise he used to judge and analyze each and every issue delving deep to find out the root to the cause of the issue.

Kanu Sanyal spent his life among the tribal and tea garden workers of Terai with whom he had a direct day to day contact. And they looked upon him as one of them. Kanu Sanyal was a source of great strength to them as he always stood by them in their hours of need.

Kanu Sanyal's entire political life epitomized communist values. He was easy and very simple in his behaviour with the common people around him. He led a Spartan life. He was brutally honest. He used to keep day to day account of every single pie of the money collected from the people. He was really a mass leader-a true communist mass leader. Hundreds of this mass of the people joined him in his last journey.

As a person Kanu Sanyal was very strong willed. He was a man of great resolve. Born in hilly town of Kurseong of Darjeeling District in 1929 the period of his childhood and teens was spent in hilly environment of Kurseong. For that reason perhaps some of the qualities ingredient to the hill people like bearing physical hardship as well as steadfastness to overcome any obstacle in the path of life left a solid impression upon the son of the father Ananda Gobinda Sanyal and mother Nirmala Sanyal. Such distinctive features of his character were seen to be reflected on political as well as personal life of Kanu Sanyal. He was third among brothers and sisters and remained a bachelor.

At the same time Kanu Sanyal as a person was very sensitive and compassionate. The serene beauty of peaceful hamlet Hatighisa with rivulet Manza flowing quietly beside had a placid effect on him. He was very fond of children. The adivasi children of Hatighisa village bear witness to this quality of Kanuda.

However, Kanu Sanyal's life long dream- the dream of socialism, that propelled him to play historical role in the tumultuous history of Indian revolutionary movement remained unfulfilled. The onus, however, lies with communist revolutionaries to fulfil his unfinished tasks.□□□