

“PLOWSHARES INTO SWORDS”

In a proverbial red citadel like Bengal which is under severe onslaught from the forces of globalisation, ruling marxists can appear far more complex and authoritarian than is suggested by hundreds of reports in the foreign and Indian media. Maybe it is a “functioning anarchy” as Galbraith once said about India. In times like these even sporadic and isolated outbursts for challenging the status quo is a welcome relief from all the hypocrisy and lies. The only thing more inspiring is the vision and message Nandigram presents to the hapless people because nothing frightens them more than the dark. And the marxists with their hidden neo-liberal agenda symbolise the dark. The voice of the oppressed of Nandigram must be heard far and wide today.

Back in 1967 peasant upheaval in Naxalbari too was violent but it was less violent than what happened in Nandigram in March 2007. Nor was globalisation knocking at the doors of revolting peasants of Naxalbari in those turbulent days. The scope of the movement was local with enormous impact on regional and international communist tendencies. But Nandigram erupted so violently that it shook the very social-democratic foundation of CPM-ruled left regime.

And the way the marxists suppressed the rebellion from the roots against forcible acquisition of farmland for domestic and foreign investors, surprised even their liberal and democrat supporters, both here and abroad. Because of spontaneity Nandigram finally failed to produce desired political polarisation that Naxalbari did. In Naxalbari there was a vertical split in the communist movement with a political goal to reach, both nationally and internationally. Nandigram too witnessed a vertical split in the ruling marxist establishment without any iota of two-line struggle. The issue was land and social-democrats were happy that it ended in land without a bigger political conflagration. Forced into desperation for sheer survival, villagers in Nandigram—small, marginal and landless peasants and middleclass people as well—revolted against the party that they voted to power hoping that they would see a better tomorrow under the red dispensation. They never thought brutal repression would come from the ‘party of the people’. They never imagined that one day they would have to face a civil war live situation and live in perpetual danger of being evicted and killed. They failed to understand the number game in parliamentary democracy. Nor did they realise what it’s all about.

No doubt Nandigram flare-up was a localised event and yet, it took place against a broader perspective with international significance and some rightist forces like Trinamul Congress, Jamyait-ul-Ulema-e-Hind, BJP etc. were forced to support the movement.

For the aggrieved peasants in Bengal and elsewhere, Singur was a lost case even before the anti-land grabbing movement developed into depth because people’s own independent initiative got bogged down in the middle while some opposition parties that joined the fray at later stage worked at cross-purposes only to weaken the very purpose of the movement. But Nandigram moved in a different course without allowing opposition parties to manoeuvre to their sectarian advantage. Also, class composition in Nandigram was in favour of sustaining the movement even in the face of massive repression which was not really the care in Singur where babus had their own limitations

to go beyond a certain point. Opposition parties like Trinamul, SUCI etc were busy to cash in on popular discontent without really making it a do or die agenda.

Surprisingly enough, the role of naxalties in the on-going anti-land acquisition struggle didn't cross the border of tokenism. The problem with most parliamentary naxalite groups aspiring for sharing power someday through electoral means is ideology—rather lack of it. They have been wandering in political wilderness for several decades while failing to get rid of the eternal stalemate.

Ever since the CPM-led left front came to power in 1977 riding on the anti-emergency sentiments, the naxalites allowed themselves to become mellowed and virtually toed the CPM-line in respect of mass movement. They justify, rather theorise their strategy of inaction because of political exigencies arising out of the changed context—after all a lesser evil in the form of CPM is in power. Yet it is an evil and people cannot live in peace without fighting it. It is a tragedy that some fire-brands of yester years have come out openly to defend CPM's indefensible anti-people measures. But after Nandigram, only the most myopic or callous among so-called progressives on the far left can deny the catastrophic consequences that may befall the poor and have-nots if the ruling marxists are allowed to go ahead to implement their neo-liberal agenda.□