

‘QUIET NOISE’

June comes, June goes. It is brutal irony for the leftists that they are enjoying the company of the party that imposed internal emergency in 1975. The end of emergency was also the beginning of coalition politics. And the legacy continues. But the post-emergency euphoria didn't last long as the Janata coalition experiment collapsed without really unleashing forces for further democratisation of institutions that matter in running constitutional obligations. And the left's stand on 'Emergency' might be called that of a cautiously opportunist. Neither a starry-eyed apologist of Indira Gandhi's authoritarianism nor a virulent critic, the left never really challenged the vanishing democratic space. Thirty-two years later, the emergency-related demolition drive looks insignificant when weighed against 'development'-displacement. Also, the people of North-east and Jammu and Kashmir never felt the impact of lifting emergency. Civilian dispensation notwithstanding they have no respite from being haunted by the emergency syndrome—extra-parliamentary methods to silence voice of dissent. Talking about human rights and democratic culture for the people of Manipur makes no sense as Disturbed Areas Act, Armed Forces Special Powers Act—all are meant to continue 'Emergency' by other means.

Police atrocities are multiplying with every passing day, in all states irrespective of colour of the ruling parties. Social mobility is denied to a large number of people even in the absence of 'Emergency' rule. There is no official press censorship but a kind of self-censorship, prevails hopefully to oblige the powers that be, because of extra-parliamentary exercise—a product of 'Emergency'—by all political parties, left or right.

There is a Congress Government in Andhra Pradesh but it does hardly differ from its predecessor—Telegu Desham Government—in eliminating naxalites and silencing the opposition. While about 180 women activists belonging to different mass organisations under the sway of naxalites were killed during Chandra Babu Naidu's nine-year rule the Congress government led by YSR in just 2 years killed 60 women mostly in fake encounters. But Congress came to power in Andhra, basically promising restoration of democratic rights for all. For the aggrieved and dissenters it is the same emergency rule, rather police raj. Andhra apart, the fake encounter syndrome seems to have gripped Narendra Modi's Gujarat otherwise not plagued by naxalite violence.

Chattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam or left-ruled Bengal—everywhere 'democracy' is being championed by denying civic and human rights to the underclass. Today the police can detain or liquidate anybody anywhere in the country in the name of curbing terrorism. In Bengal police barbarity against unarmed civilians under the marxist dispensation has virtually surpassed emergency excesses. The marxists can boast of running the showcase of democracy in a state that tops the list in custodial deaths. After the Nandigram episode it is futile to talk about emergency-induced all pervasive fear-psychosis and trauma that the society witnessed after the imposition of Indira Gandhi's emergency.

1975 emergency was aimed at silencing opposition. Now they have dozens of legal and extra-legal devices to silence the voice of dissent. Armed cadres (or militia) are always ready to do the dirty job of terrorising ordinary people. Perhaps they—the rulers—think Indians enjoy too much democracy and it is bad for the common man. With caste violence, communal violence and other sectarian violence rising ordinary people have no option but to live with insecurity all the time. Democracy does not provide democratic cover to the subalterns. Fear-psychosis that was the hallmark of Emergency Rule is now affecting all communities and yet it is the largest democracy of the world.

For workers emergency was a nightmare as they virtually lost all hard-earned rights. But things are no better today, the working conditions under neo-liberal regime are equally nightmarish for them. Nobody was safe then. And nobody is safe now. There is constitutionally guaranteed right to assemble but this right can always be curtailed simply by pronulgating sec 144 as the ruling marxists of Bengal did it during the Singur anti-land grab agitation, to woo the Tatas. Rights are for the privileged.

The way the state is viloently reacting to peaceful protests and marches of the displaced and deprived across the length and breadth of the country illustrates among other things that emergency is not yet over, the legacy of denying democratic rights to masses continues unabated. This is the bitter reality they want to deny. Singur may be the worst single displacement of rural people this year anywhere in the country but they are not ashamed of deriving comfort from the ritualistic marking of June 25. □

25-06-2007