

CONTINUING CONFLICT

Communalism suits all political parties in a multi-religious society. Communists otherwise secular in their approach to political and social problems these days do not bother to indulge in engineering communal passion, in a refined way of course, if it serves their policy of 'divide and rule'. The Nazification of the official marxist establishment is so complete that the secular agenda focusing on class inequality has been virtually lost in the political wilderness. So the Sahi Imam of Jama Masjid came all the way from Delhi, possibly at the instance of beleaguered CPM, to pacify the Muslims of Nandigram. The Imam, being an important religious leader had nothing to do with the intricacies of the anti-land acquisition movement. After all religion was not the issue. Nor was there any communal flare-up. But all are bound together—the people of Nandigram—despite serious provocations from different quarters. In truth the very presence of Sahi Imam was a provocation. Faced with stiff opposition and defiant mood of the agitationists, the Imam had to make a hasty retreat, only to accuse the Jamat Ulema-e-Hind, a constituent of the Nandigram Movement, of sabotaging Bengal communists' noble efforts under the influence of America. The reality is otherwise. Marxist misrule has failed the state. Now it's people's time to shape Bengal's future. Interestingly the Imam was not treated as an outsider but Medha Patkar had to earn that 'dubious distinction' from the ruling marxists.

Meanwhile, the continuing conflict in Nandigram suggests that the ruling marxists are determined more than ever, despite their overly flexible attitudes, not to allow the challengers to their hegemony to move freely. But freedom of movement is the very essence of democracy. Once the right to move is curtailed all other rights suffer. So the people of Nandigram are suffering and suffering.

Consciously or unconsciously, Nandigram has demonstrated that the development model as prescribed by the World Bank and IMF is not for all; it is inherently unsustainable. The idea of an alternative and sustainable view of development and industrialisation, started much earlier, has now gathered fresh momentum, thanks to rebellions by the subalterns of Kalinganagar, Singur and Nandigram.

With the failure of the Imam's mission to Nandigram, CPM, harried in Bengal and elsewhere, has every reason to talk tough. And they are really talking tough in every possible way. Whether the opposition parties admit it or not the marxist left has nearly isolated the people of Nandigram. Emotion only cannot sustain a movement for long unless it is properly backed by ideological and political orientation to reach a goal. And that goal has been vague right from the beginning. The slogan of 'Save Agricultural Land' is not enough. The slogan of 'punish the guilty' is not enough. What is needed is to continually champion an alternative model.

The rulers know best how to play diversionary tactics. So at the national level they are duelling over 'sweet nothings', showing too much enthusiasm about presidential election. How does election of Indian president affect the common man is anybody's guess. But the official left has developed a habit of voicing disagreement with the Congress, only to support it in the end while eulogising their politics of pressure tactics. They backed Indira Gandhi by supporting her candidate for the presidency. Today they are doing the same "progressive" thing by accepting Sonia Gandhi as their natural leader in deciding the fate of presidential post. And they call it their triumph in coalition family.

But changing guard at the top is meaningless to the people resisting the assault on critical thinking. And this assault today is nowhere so sharp as in Nandigram and other places where they are out to implement their 'development and displacement' programme.

If they succeed to have their way in Nandigram, the possibility of which does not seem remote, because of casual approach by the opposition, witch-hunt may begin in Bengal and its neighbouring states. They are now talking about maoists and 'outsiders' but soon they will talk about all shades of naxalites. The far left, not to speak of rightist and centrist opposition forces, has failed to convert the spark into a fire. They have not been able to float a common broad-based platform with the aim of winning people's confidence. The double dealing of the marxists precipitated the urgent need for mass independent action. And it happened in the wake of Nandigram. But solidarity movement is not developing in depth. As in the past the far left remains divided over how to view the 'independent mass action' phenomenon. As usual there are still many groups that think CPM is still a lesser evil and their cautious move in effect embolders the CPM in pursuing in a limited way though, its nefarious policy. As the solidarity movement is not threatening the CPM ideologically as it did immediately after the naxalbari upsurge, conflicts resulted from anti-state agitation in Nandigram and elsewhere may finally be resolved in favour of the ruling dispensation. □□□