

Rights and Wrongs

Not only is terror essential as strategy of governance it is also necessary for electoral success. And yet politicians of all hues never get tired to talk eloquently about India's unique functioning democracy and bright human rights records. The more they talk of human rights, the more disturbing and resentful the rights movement becomes. World Human Rights Day—December 10—came and went without producing any effective mechanism to stop the growing incidence of violation of human rights and betrayal of constitutional culture. Not much was heard about violation of human rights by the rulers of Bengal and Gujarat.

Hypotheticals are different from real life. While addressing the 'Day' the marxist chief minister expressed his pleasure to accept nine out of 59 recommendations made by the West Bengal Human Rights Commission without making a single reference to either Nandigram or Singur. The marxists were responsible for what happened in Nandigram and saffronities in Godhra. But they behaved like atrocities did not happen. They deployed their men in uniform and without uniform to torture people and create an atmosphere of fear psychosis and yet they were not sure whether it was torture.

The persons in authority everywhere violate human rights with impunity. They see it all and act like it's not really going on. The aggressor always poses as the victim. And it is a nice device to defend the indefensible. The saffronites in Gujarat want to turn the reality on its head and claim to be the hapless victim of minority terrorism. So do the ruling marxists of Bengal. They too pose themselves as the victim of democratic tolerance. In truth, they do not tolerate any voice of dissent. Dangerous times need courageous voices. Nandigram is one such voice. Kalinganagar is another.

Surprisingly, this year even policemen observed the World Human Rights Day, in their own fashion of course. While addressing policemen at the West Bengal Crime Control Bureau during a day-long debate on human rights, appropriately scheduled to coincide with the World Human Rights Day, the WB State Director General of Police asked his men to learn from Nandigram and respect criticisms. But he simply avoided the question of abuse of power by his men in Nandigram and elsewhere.

At a press conference in New Delhi on May 22, 2007, Justice Sri S Rajendra Babu, NHRC Chairperson said, 'Protection of Human Rights is the mission of National Human Rights Commission'. The Commission has been deliberating on the concerns for protection and promotion of human rights for long, engaging quite often the chief secretaries and directors general of police, without really succeeding to arrest the growing menace of human rights abuses. Discussing 'rights' endlessly matters little if they remain non-implemented.

Not the problem of implementation, rather non-implementation of law, is not recognised by the rulers. President Mrs Pratibha Patil on human rights day called for effective enforcement of law to deal with the ever rising violence against women. Again the issue of how to empower women like many other issues is an academic one.

In June this year at a meeting in Geneva the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a Resolution for the universal Periodic Mechanism and Special

Procedure for National Human Rights Institutions. Much in the line of UN Resolution Justice Rajendra Babu, NHRC chairperson, suggested that policy-making and delivery method should have a human right aspect to it to ensure health, compulsory education and right to life. But the Modis and Bhattacharjees are not listening. And the point is how to implement pious resolutions. Without mandatory power to compel the authorities to obey law and honour rights, all well-intended recommendations by NHRC will fail to deliver justice to the victims of social and administrative injustice—dalits, women and weaker sections of society.

Also, the response by the civil society to recurrent violation of human rights by different state agencies is so limited—in fact negligible—that those who abuse rights, are hardly worried about their historical destiny.

Nobody, barring a tiny elite club, is safe in a system of vanishing democratic obligations as it is in India. The situation is worsening with every passing day. The socially and economically disadvantaged face fascistic terror for sheer survival day in and day out. Unless non-partisan progressives, democrats and liberals assert themselves at a time when globalisation is devouring democratic values and norms, violation of human rights would be as natural as anything else. What the German pastor Martin Niemoller said during Hitler's witchhunt—"first they came for communists, and I did nothing because I was not a communist"—sounds with a particular resonance today. □□□

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