

‘Emergency’ Again

Tragic, but it is autocracy all the way. And India, being a prospective member of League of Democracies as proposed by American presidential hopeful John McCain, does fit well into the narrative of autocratic culture that the so-called mainstream parties, left and right alike, have accepted far too easily. This biggest showpiece of democracy has a chequered history of denial and non-compliance in reporting to the UN human rights system undermining their claims of being committed to human rights. The deliberate mis-representation of facts on the misuse of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, a draconian legislation that has been an instrument for violation of the basic rights of communities in the North East for the last half-century and has not been repealed yet despite being labelled “an instrument of discrimination and high-handedness”. Also nothing is heard about India’s position on the Convention Against Forced Disappearances. The persons in authority are busy round the clock to spread half-truths and lies in respect of human rights violations by the police and dozens of security establishments. The main activity of the National Human Rights Commission has been reduced to doling out compensation to a few victims rather than ensuring prosecution of violators.

For quite some time only civil society groups have been vocal against ever increasing incidents of human rights violations. Of late liberties and human rights activists are under attack from the state. It has become fashionable for the established and big media to discover Maoist danger in human rights movements. And they are doing it at the instance of different security agencies. As every bomb-blast in any part of the country is being attributed to some Islamic terrorist group based in a neighbouring country, human rights defenders are being increasingly identified with maoists for their voice of protest against state repression. The intelligence agencies of different state governments seem to have launched a well orchestrated campaign to placate human rights activists with maoists (or naxalites). It all started in Andhra where the police became notorious in liquidating civil liberties movement organisers by deploying hired goons. It is a general pattern now.

After Andhra Chattisgarh is the new paradise for state police and para-military forces as the people in uniform could arrest any person, otherwise highly placed in society, without warrant and keep him behind bars without trial for an indefinite period. Dr Binayak Sen has been in Raipur Central Jail for more than a year for his alleged naxalite connections. T G Ajay, a member of the State Executive Committee of People’s Union for Civil Liberties—Chattisgarh, has also been in jail for almost a year because “a threatening knife was recovered from his person, while he was trying to meet Dr Binayak Sen” in court.

Encouraged by Chattisgarh model, Bengal police and intelligence departments too have launched a campaign against human rights activists for their ‘covert’ links with maoists. What they want to tell the world in so many words is that intellectuals and civil liberties organisers are pawns in the hands of maoists based in Bengal and Jharkhand, somewhat unknowingly. The message is simple: if they continue to fight for injustice, they may be incarcerated. It does not matter

whether they are dramatists, film personality, journalists or writers. Right now they are creating public opinion against those who refuse to kowtow to government diktats. And it began in a planned way with the unleashing of state terror on the agitating villagers of Nandigram. Torture, rape, burning, looting, murder—all went unprotested for long. Then intellectuals, social activists, civil liberties watchers—in short, civil society coalition, braved all odds, exposed the real face of Bengal's social-fascists masquerading as Marxists. No doubt the rise of civil society in the wake of state barbarism has added a new dimension to the troubled polity of present times. And the police cannot tolerate this for long. So this tirade against human rights organisations?

Civil Rights Movement in India is not very old. It precipitated and took a general orientation during the Emergency. Strictly speaking the human rights bodies are mere watch platforms, having very little resource to sustain a prolonged agitation against human rights abuses. Yet the feeble voice of dissent against injustice and police high-handedness as expressed by these organisations, having no political affiliation and aim, is not tolerated by the powers that be. As for 'islamic' terrorists, real or imaginary, things are doubly agonising because rights bodies do not get lawyers to challenge the authorities if they are at all produced in court of law because communalisation of politics has eroded values and professional ethics as well.

The late Indira Gandhi declared Internal Emergency to curtail democratic rights and protect her extra-constitutional powers. But today the situation is worse than emergency because the ruling dispensations, notwithstanding their colour and flag, are enjoying extra-constitutional powers to suppress any voice of dissent without officially declaring Emergency.