

'Operation Lalgarh'

Strange as it may sound, the ruling communists of Bengal have their own way to tell the world that they seriously believe in the 'Capitalist Manifesto'. They are hungry for 'more capitalism, not less'. And to protect their faith they can go to any length. At the time of writing their much publicised 'Operation Lalgarh' was in full swing, aimed at teaching the nameless tribals of the most backward region, traditionally known as jangalmahal, a lesson or two. The demand of the revolting tribal people was simple : an apology from the persons in uniform who committed brutalities and raped women during night raids in the name of combating Maoists. But the marxists instead of conceding the demand, are now paying them with the same medicine—more repression.

For more than three decades it has been a crime for anybody to defy CPM dictates in rural Bengal. Even Left Front partners tasted the bitter pill of being lesser human beings and had to face humiliation from the big brother when it was the question of collective decision-making. But the poor are challenging the CPM authority politically and organisationally in more than one region. One Nandigram is not enough. So they are all set to create another one. To enforce virtually one party-rule, cadres, rather agents in league with the administration and police conducted armed raids of the kind people saw in Nandigram and elsewhere in the recent past.

But the crisis that began in the CPM-led left camp after the shocking defeat in the 15th parliamentary poll continues to deepen through two channels : mass isolation and spontaneous popular outbursts against the party in power in some regions. Communists in the left-ruled states of Bengal and Kerala began to believe that they were actually running two republics of their own. As a result they resorted to unprecedented dictatorial governance silencing even the feeble voice of dissent with iron fists. But no polity ever remains unchanged of course, and certainly not after the emergence of broad consensus against anti-people measures of the Marxists.

Meanwhile, Lalgarh has been in the news for the past several months for a tribal rebellion under the banner of Police Santras Birodhi Public Committee—a popular independent mass initiative having no allegiance to any political party. But the authorities have been systematically trying to identify their movement with that of the Maoists with a view to unleashing a rein terror. And to some extent they are successful because urban intelligentsia and civic society are yet to react the way they reacted during the Nandigram carnage. The party in power is isolated from the agitating tribals but progressives and democrats too look equally isolated from them. The absence of solidarity is taking its toll.

Not that Salwa Judum phenomenon is restricted to Chattisgarh only. It is being replicated by different state governments in different forms. A similar tactical manoeuvring yields similar results. CPM is wise enough to float resistance committees, rather variants of Salwa Judum, apparently involving local people to confront anti-establishment violence that sometimes targets party office—the symbol of tyranny and extra-judicial source of power. Under the cloak of resistance committee the Marxists have long been mobilising notorious anti-

socials to suppress popular protest movements. Any counter-resistance by the people as it is the case in Lalgah—earlier it was the same scenario in Nandigram—is being dubbed as a machination of the Maoists but they have every right to propagate their politics of alternatives. After all they are not yet officially banned by the state government in this part of the globe, albeit the Centre has just banned them under a fresh law.

With Lalgah agitation spreading to newer areas and catching the imagination of more tribal people elsewhere, the Marxist mandarins get panicked only to precipitate the crisis further by way of seeking solution through more state terror. So they have requisitioned 5 companies of Cobra—special paramilitary units—to silence the voice of the voiceless for ever. Cobra forces are specially trained to combat naxalities. And special training means barbaric technique in extracting confession from the so-called terror suspects, brutalities against the innocent and rape, rather gang rape. Maybe, rape is now an essential training part in police curriculum. In truth the on-going Lalgah movement against police atrocities arose from the bone-chilling night raids by the state police—a British legacy—in the tribal belt of jangalmahal. While the poor tribals are agitating for right to life and dignity, the left government is trying to curtail their fundamental right further and marginalise the already marginalised allowing security forces to go on the rampage. Exodus of villagers from Lalgah region in the wake of joint operation by central and state police forces speaks volumes about the state of affairs.

A spectre is literally haunting the Marxists—the ghost of Mao. It's the irony of history that if the Marxists don't take a hand now, the Maoists might foist a democracy on them. The problem is they want things to stay as they are but things will have to change. Faced with the decision to underreact or over-react, most governments choose the latter and, the CPM-led left government is no exception. □□□ 22-06-2009