

## THE GOD THAT IS FAILING-I

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In November 1949 came out a book in the USA that brought to the ken of the non-communist world the disillusion about communism of six renowned Western writers. Called 'The god that failed', it was an anthology of experiences of communist society of Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone, Richard Wright, Andre Gide, Louis Fischer and Stephen Spender who became ardent members of communist parties of their respective countries- Germany, Italy, USA, France and Britain, but quit out of frustration. It became an instant best-seller for its revelation of the workings of communist parties and governments of five countries. Alfred Hitchcock's 'Torn Curtain' (1966) was a celluloid revelation of the same in East Germany. This disillusion became a *deja vous* in works of many other writers and artists in countries where communism thrived. In Soviet Russia, two great writers—Boris Pasternak (1890-1960) and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008) shocked readers with the persecution and honors that their protagonists experienced in two novels—*Dr Zhivago* (1957) and *Gulag Archipelago* (1973), the second a trilogy, describing a forced labour camp for dissidents in Siberia, which fetched them Nobel Prizes in literature in 1958 and 1970. A German writer, Herta Muller, awarded Nobel Prize in 2009, revealed to the world through her poems, novels and essays the oppressive regime of President Nicolae Ceausescu of Romania where she was born. Ayn Rand was equally frank about the effects of communism in Germany in "We the Living".

Some 40 years later, the collapse of communism started from Poland and spread to Hungary, East Germany, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Romania; the last overthrew it violently. Although Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 did not bring about any political change in China, images and news of students' courageous defiance of communist authorities in Beijing spurred revolts against Marxist governments in other parts of the world. Albania and Yugoslavia gave it up between 1990 and 1992, after which the latter, comprising Serbia and Montenegro, split into five States—Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Soviet Union disintegrated in end-1991 when Russia and 14 other countries of the USSR declared their independence; socialism disappeared from Cambodia, Ethiopia, and Mongolia. The USA did not let communism enter. In 1919-20 a Red Scare was led by Attorney General A M Palmer. After the 1917 Russian Revolution, the USA feared a 'domino effect' and adopted a policy to halt communist expansion, known as 'containment'. The McCarthyism of the 1950s further bolstered anti-communism and many of the accused lost their jobs, or were blacklisted. The Reagan and Kirpatrick doctrines of the 1980s advocated US support to anti-communist regimes around the world.

Transition to various forms of market economy of capitalist countries brought rise in living standards in these post-communist countries and business oligarchies came up in some of them, which was unthinkable in communist regimes. Many of these countries joined the NATO for security and forged stronger economic and social integration among them. Although in many post-Communist countries, Marxist institutions survived, non-communist parties seized power. An anti-Communist movement surfaced in the PRC too during the Beijing Spring of 1978, but it fizzled out. Nevertheless, a manifesto, called 'Charter 08', signed by over 8100 intellectuals, is in circulation since 10th December

2008, calling for greater freedom of expression and free elections. A host of communist and socialist organisations in East European countries are now guided by norms of social democracy. The sun has set on the communist empire, probably never to rise again; only twilight persists in a handful of countries which are also veering to capitalism. Communism has bowed out from countries where it flourished except in a handful of countries—North Korea, Leh, Cuba, Vietnam and China. The world no longer deems the PRC and Vietnam communist countries because of their U-turn to capitalism. When this writer asked Arthur Dunkel, famous for his draft for the WTO in Singapore in 1999, he retorted, "Who says, China is a communist country?" Vietnam is befriending the USA which virtually destroyed it in a decade-long war and has resumed trade and commerce with it.

This momentous fall of communism did not much affect its fortune, or status, in India. The revisionist CPI retained its loyalty to Moscow, but the anti-revisionist CPI(M), born in 1964, following ideological differences with the CPI after the Chinese aggression on Arunachal Pradesh, announced its loyalty to the Chinese communist Party. However, it modulated the Marxist goal of ultimate Revolution to reforms in Parliamentary democracy, if it ever joined any rightist government in the Centre, or any State. As Jyoti Basu said on 5th January 2008, supporting CM, Buddhadev Bhattacharya's *volte face* to capitalism, "Socialism is a far cry. It is our political agenda—but capitalism will continue to be the compulsion for the future". The CPI(M)'s convention in Tenali, Andhra Pradesh in July, that year, declared its pro-Chinese stand. By the time it came to power in West Bengal on 21st June in 1977 by riding the groundswell of anger against the Congress over the Emergency (1975-77) excesses, it has shed much of its classical communist flavour; after all, a communist State in a federal democracy is a misnomer. However, its somewhat unexpected but massive victory in the Parliamentary poll in 1976 and Assembly election, next year and the euphoria that followed made it a 'godly' party in the eyes of the poor and exploited people; it is this 'god' that is failing now, as it did in Russia in the last days of Mikhail Gorbachev. The outcome of major polls from three-tier Panchayet election on 19th January 2008 to the municipal poll on 30th May, this year, showed its free fall which no bonanza by the Front government or party is likely to check. Intelligence reports by Central and State agencies are predicting its certain exit from power through the 2011 Assembly election, due in May-June, next year. The State Committees and the Politburo are also anxious about the party's future in West Bengal and Kerala; in the August'10 Politburo meeting in Vijaywada, the party's General Secretary, Prakash Karat even postulated winding it up in West Bengal and relocating it in some other State.

Why is the 'god' failing in West Bengal? Why are the legion that were once so enamoured with the CPI(M) are so disenchanted now? Of course, even after its eventual exit from power, there will still remain a hardcore of sympathisers and supporters who love it, 'warts and all'; they adore it, as one does one's mother, 'sober or drunk!' The Left Front's first Finance Minister, Dr Ashok Mitra even foresees internecine recoil by cadres and comrades, if the TMC alone, or in coalition with Congress, removes it from power. Battle lines are being drawn by the CPI(M); on 31st August, the Chief Minister and three of his colleagues—A R Mollah, Kanti Ganguly and Susanta Ghosh—called upon cadres and comrades to prepare for a bloody battle with the TMC and fight to the finish. The same day, the Union Home Minister confirmed the presence of camps of armed cadres in *Jangalmahal* whose number has been given by Mamata Banerjee to be at least 93.

How and why did communism enamour so many people in West Bengal, Kerala and later in Tripura in 1978? Curiously, East Bengal which became Bangladesh in 1971 after remaining a Pakistani province for 24-years, did not dally with it much. A separate communist party for East Pakistan was formed in 1968 which became that of Bangladesh after 1971. It played a vital role in 1969 upheaval for freedom and raised a special guerilla force to fight the Pakistani army but played no significant role thereafter.

If India's communist parties stood up, leaning on the stick of land issue, they are now falling by letting it go. Their growth in these three States was largely due to their governments' achievement in land reforms. In 1946-47, before Independence, the CPI's peasant wing, *Kisan Sabha* spearheaded *Tebhaga* movement in Midnapur, Birbhum and north Bengal districts; it agitated for raising the share-croppers' share of the yield from the land they tilled from barely half to two-thirds. After 1977, the issue returned on the Left Front government's radar and taking advantage of two Acts, passed, but not fully implemented, by the previous Congress regime, it got legally excess land of intermediaries vested in the State and distributed them among marginal and landless farmers. By an irony of fate, the disenchantment too grew out of another land issue, that of acquisition of arable land for leasing it to private entrepreneurs, paying a pittance in compensation. Brutal police action on the protesting farmers and owners of Singur and Nandigram in 2007 panicked land-owners who feared that the Front government will eventually take away their land and livelihood too, as plans of future acquisitions leaked to the media.

Another section that was enamoured of communism is the idealistic intelligentsia that dreamt of an egalitarian and an exploitation-free society, envisaged by its founder-preacher, Karl Marx. Before and after the 1947 Partition, West Bengal was ahead of other States in production and processing of jute, tea, cotton textiles, silk fabrics, weaving and spinning industries. Capitalist exploitation in these industries was easily seen, although the middle-class thrived on them. Siddhartha Shankar Ray's regime (1972-77) saw a ruthless police action against Naxalites and Marxist cadres in urban areas, who went underground, or fled out of the State. This, alongwith first large-scale rigging of the Assembly poll in 1972 bred a strong disaffection with the Congress regime. The way two United Front governments were dismissed by the Centre in 1969 and 1970 was perceived as undemocratic and unconstitutional by many educated Bengalees. All these led to the gradual swelling of the ranks of Marxist supporters and sympathisers, which was also vindicated by the successes of the first two Left Front governments, led by Jyoti Basu, in land reforms and other pro-poor programmes.

What amazes is that this disenchantment was almost an overnight growth; it simmered throughout the regime because of cadres' torture in the countryside, but the embers were fanned into flame from 2007 by the ruthless police and cadres' pogroms in Singur and Nandigram. Up to June 2006, when the Front returned to power with over two-thirds majority, there was not an iota of this disaffection in a little over half of the electorate that always stood by it, through thick and thin, if a future chronicler of this sudden fall has to identify the U-turn point, it will be the excesses in Nandigram Block-1 on 14th March and in some villages of Block-II from 6th to 11th November, both in 2007, which are now globally known. The sun did not rise in Nandigram, as Front Chairman, Biman Bose claimed, when the runaway families, supporting the CPI(M) returned home from Khejuri in mid-November; it is rising now, as power is slipping from the party because of its sins of omission and commission on a rebellious people who set up British India's first free government in August 1942. Arrogance, *hubris* and Stalinist

ruthlessness in the Chief Minister have contributed to his downfall; even partner parties in the Left Front do not spare him from blame and criticism of his moves for what has come to pass.

This disenchantment is also in sharp contrast with the luxuriant growth of the Communist Party of India since it was launched by an emigre Bengali revolutionary, Manabendra Nath Roy in Tashkent (then in the Soviet Union) on 17th October 1920 along with his second (American) wife, Evelina Trent and five other emigre Indians. Born as Narendra Nath Bhattacharya in Cbangripota village near Kolkata on 6th February 1886, his name of disguise was given by Prof. Dhanagopal Mukberjee of Stanford University in its campus for hoodwinking the US intelligence. The first significant break of the CPI came, when 18 accused communists in the trial of Meerut conspiracy case, from 1929 to 1933, narrated to the judge the torture, brutality and mass imprisonment by the Raj police which had also previously filed two other conspiracy cases against early CPI members in Peshawar and Kanpur courts to stem the tide of communism in India. The nascent party was neither with the Congress nor with the underground terrorists in the 90-year struggle for freedom, when it came on 15th August 1947 which the CPI called 'sham'. Among other national icons that it debunked, alienating patriotic Bengalees were India's fugitive national hero, Subhas Chandra Bose ('the running dog of Japanese Emperor Tojo'), Rabindranath Tagore (a 'bourgeoise poet') and Mother Teresa (a 'CIA agent').

The party made its mark and thrived in Bengal's political landscape through two events—the Tebhaga movement from 1946 to 1947 and taking up the cause of rehabilitation of streams of some 31.21 lakh Hindu refugees from East Bengal and East Pakistan before and after 1947, up to 1960. No wonder, when the Left Front seized power in 1977, Bangladeshis perceived it as 'their government in Kolkata', because many of the two communist parties' rank and file were born and brought up in East Bengal. They first tasted power in the two United Front governments that they formed with Bangla Congress briefly, with Ajay Mukberjee of the breakaway Congress faction as Chief Minister of both. He was also disillusioned by his coalition partners, particularly the CPI(M) and in a bizarre move, exposed its vileness and violence in a series of public addresses in 1969 and went on a 72-hour fast against his own government. The burst of enthusiasm and support of refugees, marginal and landless farm labour and a section of the urban educated, despite a plethora of misdeeds across three decades, weakened from 2008, as the 'god' they adored began to show its feet of clay from 2007. Like the six apostates in 'The god that failed', a host of leftist leaders, writers and artistes were expelled from, or gave up their allegiance to, either communist party, conspicuously the CPI's founder, M N Roy, expelled in 1929 for proposing de-colonisation ('imperialism need not be resisted, because it will collapse on its own'), film-maker Ritwik Ghatak in 1954 for proposing an alternative 'cultural line' and much later, poet Shankha Ghosh, utterly shocked by Nandigram pogrom in 2007. If they gave out the inside stories that saw them out of the party, they will be as revealing as those of the six Western writers.

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*[To be concluded]*