

THE GOD THAT IS FAILING-II

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The reasons of the God's failure are not far to seek; they are still green in proverbially short public memory. The main was the sudden U-turn by the Chief Minister, soon after his re-election in 2006, from the road to Marxism to that of capitalism for fast industrialisation of the State. He began hobnobbing with the Tatas for letting it set up a small car unit on nearly 1000 acres of fertile, multi-crop land of Singur in Hooghly district and with other Indian and foreign (notably the Salim Group of Jakarta) entrepreneurs for setting up a chemical hub and SEZ in Nandigram as well as various other industries on similarly fertile arable land in other districts. It signalled to poor people that the CPI(M) was no longer with them and did not want their well-being.

This nascent disaffection deepened with every passing day thereafter, as the party's State and Politburo leaders indulged in plain lies and Goebbelisian propaganda. Just 10 days before the pogrom in Nandigram on 14th March 2007, the Chief Minister told a foreign TV crew that no police action was contemplated in Nandigram; after it, he even denied having approved police firing from the Writers' Building on the day, until the then Home Secretary, P R Roy contradicted him in the media. Other leaders were no lesser merchants of untruth, bluff and propaganda—Biman Bose, Shyamal Chakrabarti, Benoy Konar revelled in blunt Mamata-bashing in filthy tongue. Tirelessly, even now, they accuse her of colluding with Maoists, but do not give a shred of proof, their calumny of her and the TMC is like the proverbial pot calling the kettle black. They accuse the TMC of indulging in terrorism too, while in public perception, no other party outdoes their party in it. The CM calls it a 'violent, uncouth party' with no policy, or programme, whose members sit at the feet of one leader. This alienated the general electorate who had once been bemused by the mask of the CPI (M) and got trickle benefits from its pro-poor moves.

From the very outset of the United and Left Front regimes, the two communist parties have been synonyms for torture and oppression to non-communist people in the countryside. These went to extremes in the Sundarbans island of Marichjhampi in 1978 and in remote villages of Keshpur, Garbeta, Bhaja Chauli in West and East Midnapur, in Nannur, Mangalkote, Arambag, Shasan and recently in Bagha Jatin, where the parties' political objectives were achieved by cadres, comrades and hired goons or harmads, as the media term them. It is unbelievable that a ruling party that swears by democracy hires and maintains goons to further its political agenda. Impartial functioning of the police, the intelligence and the bureaucracy which, by and large, marked the Congress and British regimes, became a myth. The police shy away, if left cadres are involved in crimes and need to be nabbed and take orders from local comrades. The pendulum of bureaucracy stopped, as a retired senior IAS officer, Ms Kalyani Chaudhuri disclosed recently in a book. Jyoti Basu is said to have asked an IAS officer, appointed a District Magistrate, if he would be working for them, i.e., the CPI(M).

The god's eclipse has been hastened by the Front government's financial muddle too. To wean away the electorate from the Congress from 1977 and from the TMC since 1987, Jyoti Basu pursued the politics of 'getting quick benefits' for them through giving away the State largesse, like granting government employees various rights, even right to call and join strikes which eventually ruined work culture, allowances for the unemployed, aged, widows, scholarships and freeships for Muslim students in schools and madrasahs, abolishing school fees up to the 12th class, enhancing pay and pension of government employees by about 20 times in three decades by implementing three State Pay Commission reports, giving inheritable and inevitable *barga* rights to sharecroppers, gift of vested arable land (some 10.58 lakh acres up to September 2001) and homestead plots to marginal and landless farmers. Sops, subsidies and unproductive, even infructuous, expenditures abounded from Day One. The ongoing and over year-long, joint operations against Maoists in *Jangal Mahal* from 18th June 2009 are costing the exchequer a staggering 44 lakh rupees, per day. Central loans and overdrafts from the RBI and reckless borrowing from other financial institutions and the market totalled nearly 1.925 lakh crore (1925 billion) rupees on 31st March, this year, to make up yawning revenue deficits, whose annual interest burden exceeds 14,000 crore rupees.

Nevertheless, poverty is deepening and starvation deaths stalk remote tribal regions in West Midnapur, Bankura, Purulia and Birbhum. The R N Sachhar Committee highlighted the pathetic state of the Muslim families in the left regime, which swung their votes in favour of the TMC in polls from 2008. As Youth Congress chief Rahul Gandhi alleged on 6th September in a rally in Kolkata, Central funds for development and pro-poor programmes were swindled by, or siphoned to, the party. Cadres and comrades extort crores of rupees as ransom from industrial units, new appointees, private transport operators etc. While other people keep mum in fear, normally docile tribals of West Midnapur rose in revolt, when the police swooped upon tribal villages, in a rabid manhunt for the culprits of mine blast on the Chief Minister's convoy on 3rd November 2008 near Midnapur town, abused women by reckless molestation, caning and firing, leading to the ongoing revolt and anti-Maoist operations in Lalgarh region with relatively poor success. Everyday, the media report scams of various kinds- of potato purchase for subsidised sale, of ration dealers, property and real estate agents, enjoying State patronage and protection and other forms of illegal gratifications.

Mockery is made of communism by giving ample licences for vending foreign and country liquor, even in remote villages, spoiling poor farm labourers and idle youngsters. While the British Raj promoted sports in villages to keep youngsters away from extremist politics in the 1940s, a communist government promotes alcoholism. The State's borders with Bangladesh, being porous, thousands of Muslims and non-Muslims cross over to the State, particularly into south 24-Parganas, Malda, south and north Dinajpur and Jalpaiguri districts, leading to population increase of 17.8% during 1991-2001; the ongoing census will certainly give a higher-percentage. The left parties encourage the influx and even enlist them as voters to swell their vote-bank, ignoring the fact that they are a pressure on civic amenities. Political meanness and myopia taint many of their moves. Although they claim that the UPA's flagship pro-poor programme, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) was in response to their demand, its implementation in West Bengal has been the tardiest among States. Few districts fulfil the target of 100 days' work in a year for all job-card holders who are also paid less than the fixed minimum wages. The Finance Minister alleges tardy and insufficient flow of funds for the programme, which the Union MOS for Rural Development, Sisir Adhikari refutes. In 33 years, whenever any development work has

been funded by the Centre, the Front government went slow about it, or not at all, probably fearing it will swell the Congress vote-bank. This could be the reason of unutilised Central funds.

"Will the two communist parties ever return to power in West Bengal, if the Front loses in next year's State polls"? is now a much-debated question. Their supporters say, even if the TMC comes to power by itself, or jointly with the INC it will not be able to stay long in the government, if aspirations of people, now bent on voting for a change in the Writers' Buildings are not fulfilled, they will bring the leftists back. The staggering public debt will break the back of the rightist government, paving the way for the Front's return. This is a remote possibility, because as long as Ms Banerjee leads the TMC, her dynamism will not let the party dry up, or exit from power ingloriously. Her extra-ordinary efficiency in running the Railways will not diminish while running the State, howsoever the leftists try to smudge it by untruth and propaganda. As long as Sonia Gandhi remains the Congress President, she will back her whom she had repeatedly named as the next Chief Minister of West Bengal. Nehru family detest communism; Indira Gandhi as Congress President, got Kerala's and free India's first leftist government, led by EMS Namboodiripad, dismissed and President's rule imposed on 31st July, 1959.

Have 33 years of successive left rule improved the Bengali society and the daily lives of people? The so-called 'Midnight's children', now in their sixties, grew up in a different social and cultural milieu until 1977. Poverty, of course, was deeper then, but there was no political strife of the kind, seen every- where now. Institutions were not corrupted as now by ruling party's interference; justice and merit were not denied in public appointments. Communist and other leftist parties were active then too and were vocal against many Congress moves, but inter-party contacts and relations did not sour as now. Truly, in previous 25 years of Congress rule (interrupted by four brief President's and two United Front rules, totalling five years), the condition of marginal landless farmers and share-croppers did not ameliorate as much as in the left regime, but what little took place owing to land reforms petered out under pressure of family needs and circumstances. They certainly got slice of a free cake from the State, but it was small, because it had to be given to too many. The distribution of vested land was thus a distribution of poverty. Front governments distributed 10.58 lakh acres, while some 11.08 lakh acres of others' land were cultivated by registered share-croppers.

Left propaganda has blurred the fact that the Congress regime which legislated the Estate Acquisition Act in 1955, distributed some 6.26 lakh acres of vested land to landless and marginal farmers up to 1977. Agrarian reforms in the Left regime applied to only 15% of the total arable land under principal crops which in 2007 was a little over 13.81 lakh acres. On 28th June 2006, the government decided to distribute some 90,000 acres of *khas* (State) land among five lakh marginal and landless farmers, but how much of it was actually distributed is not known. Soon after the debacle in 30th May civic election, the government offered to make free gift of up to five cottahs (nearly 3500 sq. ft.) of farm and homestead land, buying it at up to 25% above the market price to landless families, but response hitherto has been negligible. Maximum damage has been done to the State's industries which in the Congress regime kept it ahead of other States. Because of militant labour unrest, stoked by the CPI (M)'s trade union wing, CITU, at least 66 thousand units, both in the public and private sectors, closed or went sick in a decade (1978-1988). Many entrepreneurs relocated their factories, or withdrew capital. *Gherao* of managers and owners of jute mills and tea gardens, demanding higher wages, or bonus, led to massive lockouts, closures, strikes and demonstrations,

entailing a huge loss of mandays. Re-elected in 2006, the Chief Minister, Buddhadev Bhattacharya wanted to reverse the damage to dire consequences in Singur and Nandigram, which made him give up his grandiose plans of industrialisation in 2008.

While most other States who in 1977 were behind West Bengal went ahead of it in development, the State bogged down in internecine political strifes and rivalry. Gory clashes with, and gruesome killings of, opponents abounded, some of which have been narrated by journalist Udayan Nambodri in his 'Bengal's Night Without End' up to 2006, when it was published; more occurred in four years thereafter. Casualties were high in the CPI(M), TMC and INC, which made them accuse one another. While schools, colleges and universities of dubious standards proliferated, too many experiments with institutional education lowered its quality. Abolition of English teaching in primary classes in 1980 deprived a whole generation of boys and girls of their legitimate scopes of higher education and employment. Government health care through primary and rural hospitals is in a shambles, as doctors refuse to serve in remote villages, or run private practice. This gave rise to mushroom growth of private nursing homes and hospitals, where the poor cannot afford treatment. Farm yield rose high in the 1980s because of high-yielding seeds, chemical fertiliser, pesticides and successive good monsoons; agrarian reforms by the Front governments contributed very little, although they were otherwise truly a feather in their cap. It is a pity that this success could not be maintained and repeated in other fields.

Yet there is need for India's two communist parties to re-invent themselves and influence, if not dislodge, rightist governments. The age-old disparity between India's rich and the poor has widened under the UPA-II government. The Saxena Committee has revised upward the Planning Commission's estimate of BPL people to above 50% of the population; in West Bengal, the number would be higher. Hunger and starvation deaths stalk the tribal poor. Marxists could have repaired these faultlines; they did not. A CPI(M) MP objected to recent hefty rise in pay, perks and allowances of Parliamentarians, but when other MPs demanded it inside the Houses, left MPs kept quiet. Chief Executive Officers of big companies draw monthly salary up to and above a crore of rupees; some private bank CEOs are paid above two crore. How many Maharajas of undivided Bengal collected as much revenue from intermediaries? Pay and allowances of Central and State employees have risen steeply, by over 20 times, in four decades, but have the wages of farm and factory workers risen as much? Housemaids, for instance, earn 300-400 rupees a month, putting in 3-4 hours of labour, everyday. There is a global concern about the Central and State governments' secret MOUs with corporate houses for letting them exploit mines, metals and minerals beneath forests and wastelands, displacing Adivasis, which Maoists are reportedly opposing. Why don't the Marxists protest against such exploitation? For them, there is still so much to do a more equitable distribution of land in States where their presence is negligible. They raised minimum wages of workers in the organised sector, but did little to hike them in the unorganised sector. Instead, they eyed big industrialists, because money makes the mare go.

Leftist governments in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura have not really treaded the path, outlined by Karl Marx; most Marxist leaders know little of classical communism. Charu Mazumdar, the Naxalite leader, gave to the court names of 10 factions of the CPI (Marxist-Leninist); to these have been added CPI (Maoist) and its factions. Their members, called Naxalites and Maoists, condemn the CPI and the CPI (M) for diluting the goal of armed Revolution, preached by Mao Zedong. Ancient, medieval and Muslim India did not dally with communism; like democracy, it came from abroad. Hinduism

does not recognise equality of people; the four-fold caste system, created by Lord Krishna, as he told Arjuna in the Bhagavadgita, makes it impossible. To most Indians, communism is a foreign ideology, unlikely to be the people's favourite for long, or ever adopted in federal governance. Democracy derived from Plato's Greece and spread to the West. In ancient India too, *Gana* and *Sangha* republics existed alongside monarchies; Panini, Buddhist and Greek chroniclers mentioned at least 25 of them, notably Videha and Vrijjian. The British introduced parliamentary democracy in India and Indian Constitution derived a lot from the Government of India Act, 1935. Political ideologies based on class or race animus, like Fascism, Nazism and Communism, are alien to India's tradition and culture and can never succeed. Dreams of Marxist and Maoist Revolutions have done, and are doing, great harm to the Indian psyche and society.

As Marxism recedes from West Bengal and its votaries' hold on power goes loose, people develop misgivings about the TMC which alone, or with the INC, is likely to wrest it from the Left Front. They feel, heavy debt and interest burden will leave little for the next government to spend on building the badly needed various infrastructures. Ms Banerjee has matured politically, shedding much of her aggressive, demagogic style, but people fear, if she takes whimsical decisions like resigning from the NDA cabinet as Railway Minister in 2005, the leftists will return. To apprise people of the damage, done by the Left Front in 34 years, she, or whosoever leads the next rightist government, has to institute a broad-spectrum enquiry and publish a White Paper. The first task before it will be restoration of democracy, justice and rule of law and replace political appointees in key institutions. She respects, and wants to restore, Bengal's hoary traditions and culture and jettison Marxist baggages. Even if removed from power, left parties are unlikely to be totally uprooted, howsoever Sonia and Rahul Gandhi may try, but their eventual return to power, by hook or crook, has to be made impossible, because West Bengal cannot afford to lag any further behind other States. Mamata Banerjee has potential to lead the State to the true goals of democracy, envisaged by Rabindra Nath Tagore in his well-known poem, "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high".

Like the six apostates, many other great men found communism a faulty ideology. Nearly none of Marx's predictions about the spread of communism came true. He once said, "All I know is that I am not a Marxist". He had little respect for his disciples in general; he used to say, a theory disintegrates, when disciples try to 'explain away' problems in it and use 'cunning argument' to support it. Though overwhelmed by Bolshevik government's experiments in education and agriculture during a two-week tour to Moscow in September, 1930, Rabindranath predicted its eventual fall in 50 years, because such a 'moulded and regimented society' cannot last long. Bertrand Russel's essay on why he was not a Communist is well-known. Mahatma Gandhi feared a totalitarian society and government. "I look upon increase of power of the State with the greatest fear, because...it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality which lies at the root of all progress.... Bolshevism is the necessary result of modern materialistic civilisation. Its insensate worship of matter has given rise to a school which has been brought up to look upon materialistic advancement as the goal of life and which has lost touch with the final things in life". In an article in New York 'Monthly Review' in 1934 when East Germany was under Marxist rule, he wrote, socialism cannot be called a science, as Karl Marx claims. "The crisis of our time", he said, "concerns the relationship of the individual to society"; his dependence on it was 'a threat to his natural rights or even to his economic existence'. To him, the real source of evil was the

economic anarchy of capitalist society and 'crippling of individual'. "The only way to eliminate these grave evils was establishment of a socialist economy, accompanied by an educational system which would be oriented toward social goals". A planned economy, he said, was 'not yet socialism', because "it can completely enslave the individual".

Mankind always yearns for love, even in political systems and ideologies and beneath surface strifes and wars, love binds it. Daily lives illustrate this; great mystics of the East and West have testified to it, memorably, poet Dante Alighieri (c 1265-1321) who, at the end of his visionary journey through the Inferno, the Purgatorio and the Paradiso in The *Divine Comedy* (c 1309-20), 'fixed his gaze on the eternal light' in the Paradise and, as he wrote, and
"....In its depths, I saw ingathered,
Bound by love in one volume,
The scattered leaves of the universe.'
[concluded]