

THE MAMATA PHENOMENON

THE SPECTRE OF CHANGE

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A spectre is haunting West Bengal –the spectre of change. This ghostly shadow has become a nightmare for the ruling party, the CPI(M). The people here have grown fatigued with the partyocracy and status-quoism. An anti-incumbency factor has at long last attacked the Left front. People have become tired–tired, tired and tired–of hearing for the last thirty odd years the same old chants of oppressive regime of Congress, white terror, Naxalite attacks and success of the Operation Barga. Which is why neither the fables of Trinamul's entente with the Maoists nor Mamata's so-called incompetence in running the railways and failure to stop accidents have made a dent in the people's psyche. A character in a Tagore novel said 'nothing can be more desecrated and irreligious than monotonous idolatry'. In such a state man prefers custard apple to mango.

Custard apple in lieu of Mango! Trinamul's anarchy to replace the progressive and flourishing Left Front? It is being said that if the LF government is out of power, everything will fall apart. Throughout India only two and a half states are ruled by the Left. Have all those states gone astray? This state will run the same way as all other states. Rather a change will benefit the CPI(M) too - the flab will go, opportunists and sycophants will desert the moment the Party is out of power. Trinamul, given a chance, has to behave and will have to act responsibly. Otherwise another wind of counter-change will lurk on the threshold. Another complaint against the Trinamul Congress is that it has neither ideals nor ideology. But what about the Communist parties? No Communist party can now claim to have any ideology, let alone the CPI(M). Just a year after the Left Front came to power in West Bengal, Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowsky in his magnum opus came to conclude, analyzing the main currents of Marxism, that the theories of the Communist parties were no more than "repertoire of slogans". Moreover, as the end of History has been prognosticated, it seems that the era of ideologies too is over. The new generation does not give a fig for ideology; what most people want is good governance.

The greatest contribution of the Communist parties is that they gave to the poor the courage to speak up and stand straight to protest and fight against oppression. Trained in the hands of old Communists, the poor have now got united and thronged in thousands in the villages, panchayats, town settlements and even in the state capital in an organized way to protest against the ruling front. The thousands that gather at the meetings at the call of Mamata Banerjee are low-income, poor people. The image of the CPI(M) now is that of the well-dressed and well-fed Bhadrak and the party has alienated itself from the vast majority of the people. The rise of the Trinamul is, in reality, the rise of the poor and lower middle class people.

Eminent sociologist Andre Beteille's characterization of Mamata's rise as a "phenomenon" is one hundred percent correct. Though nominally an upper-caste Hindu, she does not come of any upper-class family, does not possess any pedigree or degrees

from Oxbridge or Harvard, not even a minor degree from the Presidency College. She did not have any godfather. Neither is she daughter nor widow of any celebrated leader. Rather looked down upon as one of the 'women of domestic-help class', she has single-handedly shaken head-to-foot the patriarchal, ideology-fostered Left Front, led by the CPI(M). This is really a phenomenon. And the one who has consolidated the rise of the subalterns and antipathy of the people against the CPI(M) into a solid mass, deserves a serious attention.

It is not that this type of populism does not contain hidden seeds of fascism. But during the last three decades the CPI(M) blocked all the roads from the clubs, city and town blocks, villages and hamlets, panchayats, from office corridors to the colleges and universities and declared that 'I am the monarch of all I survey, I am the top of the minar, I am the nation and I am the society'. People felt that they were interned and suffocated. Left with no inner space, they were afraid to express themselves. Vaclav Havel, the noted dramatist and dissident leader, who raised his voice against the Communist system in Czechoslovakia and later rose to become the President of the Republic, showed that in his country too, men were entwined in the hateful cobweb of greed and fear, and thereby a process of "total unity of total pretense" had been constructed. In his essay "The Power of the Powerless" Havel showed that in such a condition people resort to sabotage and assert like "bacteriological weapon", acting almost like fifth columnists. When people try to come out of the interment, the whole house of cards tends to crumble. To prevent that disaster, Soviet tanks entered Czechoslovakia. Alas, such a measure cannot be repeated here. Now to overcome the state of disaster, the CPI(M) leadership in West Bengal think that the palliative is greater mass contact. No point in getting glued together with the people. The people like to enjoy their own space; they dislike being supervised in all aspects of their lives.

Educated Indians read either the Mahabharata or its stories. The Left Front is in power for the last 33 years. After the great war of Kurukshetra Yudhishtir, after ruling the Bharat for as long as 36 years, started seeing bad omens. He saw cows giving birth to asses, mules to elephant-babies, bitches delivering cats. Thus the Jadu clan became prone to many vices and showed signs of infighting. Kritavarma produced a list to show how the Pandavas, during the just war of Kurukshetra killed the Kaurava generals through unjust means. As if Kritavarma was submitting a list of shocking things perpetrated by the CPI(M) like the great Sainbari carnage, abominable acts in Marich-jhanpi, burning of Anandamargis on the Bijon Setu, the so-called sunrise at Nandigram, the gory tale of Tapasi Malik of Singur. Krishna was killed by the arrow of Jara, a hunter representing old age, and here the leader dies of old age decrepitude. On the other hand, Arjun, though managed to hold the Gandiva up from the quiver, forgot all about the divine weapons. Most of the females of the Brishni-clan went away with Gopa marauders at their free will. The voters queued-up in long lines but silently crossed over to the other side by stamping on the Trinamul symbol. What is this? Is this end of an era or 'hunter and hunted changing places'?—only the future can tell.