

The Edifice is Crumbling

It is no fun being a democrat in this biggest showbiz of democracy. The essence of what exists in India is not representative democracy but party dictatorship and political institutions to enforce that dictatorship. What they mean by 'free and fair elections' is that things must not be dominated by just one party, but at least two parties or two alliances of motley groupings must be given space to compete. If monopoly of political power for a party or a group of parties, big and small, becomes too longish the crisis reaches the boiling point and regime change is all that voters can think of though the ultimate result is not one which will lead to real freedom for the people. But it may create some breathing space for the people, at least for the time being, as it is the case in the suffocating atmosphere of Bengal and Kerala.

Reflecting the volatile nature of Congress politics and the perennial influence of dynastic factor, the Congress party does hardly need any national agenda to fight polls. And in the ensuing assembly polls in the crucial states of Bengal, Kerala, Tamilnadu, Pondicherry and Assam, they look more like regional outfits as they are not in a position to contest elections on their own, barring Assam, of course. In truth the Congress party is not taking these assembly elections seriously as they are not going to be ejected from the centre even if they get further marginalised after polls in these states. Yet the April-May assembly poll attracts excessive media attention because the era of CPM-led Left dominance in the states of Bengal and Kerala may come to an abrupt end as indications are that disgruntled voters in Bengal and Kerala are likely to express their fury in the ballot at the way the official communists or social fascists as many would like to call them, have run the discredited governments for so long by systematically plunging the people into misery and fear-psychosis *a la* internal emergency of Indira Gandhi period while allowing the political right to become a safety valve for money bags at this critical juncture.

In Kerala the musical chair is being alternately held by the left and the right. Finally what matters to political stakeholders, irrespective of their colour and professed faith, is Bengal where the people may coldly vote to liquidate the red party that has virtually sent the state into liquidation.

The cost-benefit scenario of CPM-led left rule in Bengal cannot be assessed simply by citing innumerable instances of human rights violations, police atrocities, corruption, favouritism, suppression of cultural freedom and all that. The way they have depoliticised the people while being apparently respectful to the logic of democratic governance, so long as it converges with their strategy to protect vested interests and is oblivious to the will of the people whenever its expression is seen as posing a threat to their hegemony, is unprecedented. If Mubaraks are regarded as well-paid autocrats vested with virtual ownership rights in relation to the indigenous wealth of their country on an international scale, Indian communist satraps despite their limited manoeuvrability serve the same purpose as they always remain receptive to their big bosses, both domestic and foreign. In a sense they represent the toxic residue of colonialism. People in this part of the globe get scared with the word communism because of systematic criminalisation of politics by the CPM.

Right now political prisoners numbering about 2000 are languishing in different West Bengal jails which are at worst overcrowded living hells reminding one of the horror of hellholes during the apartheid regime of South Africa. Maoist label, false or real, is enough to put anybody behind bars though even a member of a banned organisation cannot be incarcerated unless the person commits any crime or violence as per the latest Supreme Court verdict. Then the Supreme Court ruling is not for the CPM because they are the only

supreme judge to judge themselves. About 800 custodial deaths occurred during the left-front rule of 34 years in Bengal and between 1980 and 2010 nearly 450 prisoners died in jails. Clamping Sec 144 to disallow any mass protest has been a hallmark of left rule for all these years. The exact figure in relation to murder of political opponents is not available but it may run into several thousands. Since the last Lok Sabha poll in 2009 more than 300 opposition political activists are said to have been killed by the party in power. Then they have their own roster of martyrs to justify killings. Congress during their heydays stopped progressive plays with the help of hoodlums. The CPM-led left did the same thing by forcibly stopping drama shows that were critical of their misrule and barbarity. How they have destroyed educational infrastructure from primary level to higher education making the state glaringly deficient in many parameters and deliberately crippled public health delivery system beyond recognition, defies description.

There won't be many sympathisers to join the funeral procession of the communist left. But they are unlikely to get rid of marxist myopia that so often accompanies the decline of so many communist parties. □□□