THERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE

Emergence of a Fourth Space
Subhendu Dasgupta

The politics of West Bengal has acquired a new dimension due to the mass movements in Singur and Nandigram. The participants in these two movements have been villagers, peasants, and especially women. This was a new form of struggle in the contemporary politics of West Bengal.

The usual pattern of political movements in West Bengal is: a political party or a group of political parties design the content and the course of the movement at their central office located in Kolkata. They send instructions to the villagers to participate in the programmes in their respective venues, or in Kolkata. The villages and suburbs obey such instructions. This has been a continuing phenomenon for a considerable period.

This pattern was changed initially in Singur and then in Nandigram. The agenda and the course of the movements were decided by the villagers themselves with spontaneity. Decisions were taken without asking any established political party, without taking any permission from the administration, without submission of any application to the police authorities. Bringing in thus a fundamental change in the ongoing polity in the then West Bengal.

This change in polity has given birth to a new political space in West Bengal. Primarily in the city and partly in the suburbs. The members of this space are those who do not belong to any political party, do not want to be with a political party, are former members of political parties, those who write, sing, paint, participate in theatres, those who are associated with cinema, sports, those who are social activists, teachers, employees, those who are readers, viewers, listeners. They have been categorized as members of civil society. They have been referred to as 'Civil Society', 'Sushil Samaj'. This writer coined the term 'Third Space'.

THE THIRD SPACE OF POLITICS

The governmental administration is the 'First space'. The politics of administration is the politics of the First Space. Politics of Government . Politics of distribution of schemes to the citizens. Politics of denial of rights of the citizens. Politics of compensation. Politics of allowing the political parties to operate within a boundary. Politics of disallowing mass movements beyond the domain of the established political parties. Politics of governmentality. Politics of First Space.

And the established political parties are the 'Second Space'. Established, formal, recognized, institutionalized Political Parties. Central Committees, State Committees, District Committees. Going down vertically and rounding up as many people as possible. Keeping the agenda and programme of movements within a restricted boundary. Deciding the strategy and tactics of the movement with a single point goal of capturing governmental power in the state. And then to remain in power. Capturing of and remaining in power by securing votes in different layers of elections. The Parties do not organize political movement that may destabilize this pattern. They may destroy the political movements organized by others that may disturb the structure constructed by the Party. This is 'Second Space'. There is an interconnection between the administration of the First Space and the political party in governmental power that belongs to the Second Space.

The 'Third Space' has to be understood in this context. If any member of the Third Space becomes associated with the First Space or Second Space she or he will not be considered as a proper member of the Third Space. The Third Space should remain independent from both First and Second Space.

The Third space is a democratic space. The members of this space are not regulated by any institutional rules, are not directed by any institutional prescription. On the other hand the residents of this space are critics of the First Space and the Second Space. Critical of those in power.

The Third Space became conspicuously visible as supporters of mass movements in Singur and Nandigram. The Third Space participated in processions, assembled in meetings, acted in dramas, written poetry, composed songs, painted canvasses, published leaflets booklets journals, participated in debates on television channels.

The Third Space was created. The Third Space was abolished. Third Space stood by the mass movements. Third Space became dissolved when mass movements became diffused, when mass movements became complex. This is the character of the Third Space. It is subject based. It is time bound.

There is another form of demolition of the Third Space. If the agenda of mobilization of the Third Space gets equated with the agenda of a political party, the party concerned appropriates into its domain the both the issues as well as the members of the Third Space. The mechanism of appropriation. The frontal members of the Third Space are accommodated into the First and the Second Space. Transfer from one space to another. The purpose of the Third Space is thus defeated.

The dissolution of the Third Space and the emergence of a 'Fourth Space' are coincidental.

The members of the Fourth Space are the geographical, historical, social and cultural communities. They are less known or perhaps unknown. Tribals, forest dwellers, sea-fisherfolk are few examples. The First Space provides them compensations. The Second Space does not recognize them. The Third Space does not know them.

The religious communities like Muslims are better known. The First Space thinks about them. The Second Space includes them into their purview. The third Space constructs opinion about them.

The residents of the Fourth Space are more geographical, social and cultural than political. Thus they are rejected, disrespected by the First, Second and Third Space.

At present the members of the Fourth Space are preparing themselves to construct their own space for political reasons for the protection of their own identities. Their existence is dependent on nature, on natural resources. Forest, sea, coast, land, hill, water, cattle, crop diversity, traditional knowledge. On the basis of these assets their economies are framed, their society and culture are shaped. Their lives and livelihood are community based.

The fourth space now is under attack, is endangered. Attacked by governmental policies, laws, projects. Attack from capital. Its demand for investment, production and aspiration for profit. Attack in the form of disinterest shown by the political parties and civil society. The Fourth Space is under threat of acquisition. No one from outside is by their side, in their support.

Thus the Fourth Space is constructing its own position. Position of resistance. Non-violently, violently. The adivasis of Birbhum are in a struggle against the stone quarrying and stone crushing units. The initiative taken by the forest people of North Bengal for the implementation of the Forest Rights Act. The movement of the adivasis of Purulia, Bankura and Medinipore against the sponge iron industry. The mobilization of the sea fishing folk of Medinipore against the Coastal Regulation Act. These are examples of the politics of the Fourth Space.

The Fourth Space is bringing in such issues that are unknown to the First, Second and Third Spaces. Rights based on nature-community relationships, tradition, continuity through generations, natural assets, environment, rights of nature, ethics, eternal rights, etc. Such subjects, issues, idioms, questions are

unknown to the other three spaces. The content of geography, anthropology, sociology, history and philosophy are infiltrating into the dominating domain of economics and politics. The domination of economics and politics of the rulers is now being challenged by the subjects of the ruled.

The Fourth Space is now challenging the domination of those who are in power, power in all forms. Activists in the Third Space are waiting at the fence. For how long? There is no answer to the question. □