

LETTERS

ALIRAJPUR AGITATION

The Madhya Pradesh Government and the district administration of Alirajpur watched mutely as the displaced adivasis of the Sardar Sarovar and Jobat Dam Projects went another step ahead in their *Zameen Haq Satyagraha* and actually cultivated the government land at Jobat with their own bullocks, which they have occupied. The oustees began cultivation of the land under the Jobat Agricultural and Seed Production Farm and started the first task of sowing the maize crop.

The cultivation began in the traditional adivasi style, with the elderly members of the community and long-time strugglers, Bava Mahariya of village Jalsindhi and Mangliya Daya of village Bhadal worshipping the 'deve daani', Mother Nature and Mother Earth. The oustees are determined and state that they will continue with the Satya-graha until they actually receive their share of cultivable, irrigable and suitable land from the Narmada Valley Development Authority. The nature-loving women and men have also resolved to nourish the maize crop throughout the coming season and reap the harvest as their rightful share.

Although the farm authorities have complained to the local police against the oustees for 'illegally encroaching' on the government land, no 'action' has come forth thus far. Evidently, the authorities cannot easily brush aside the fact that the oustees are actually asserting their long-standing legal rights within a democratic framework. Further the authorities are also aware that as per the High Court's Orders, the State had to 'compensate' the oustees for violation of their fundamental rights, when they had lathi-charged them way back in 2007.

It is notable that there are hundreds of adivasi families affected by both the projects in Alirajpur district and Badwani district (SSP), but none of them have been rehabilitated till date with cultivable and irrigable land as per legal and judicial stipulations. After 15 years of dialogue with and agitation before the state and central authorities and utter non-compliance with binding Tribunal Award and Judgements of the Supreme Court, the SSP oustees have resorted to this satyagraha, as a last resort. The oustees have also given a call and challenge to the Chief Minister of the State, Mr Shivraj Singh Chauhan to immediately intervene and prove his commitment to the adivasis, who he claims are his 'brethren'. All the project-affected families realize that the act of cultivation on the government land is only the beginning of another long-drawn struggle with the State, which has deprived them of their basic constitutional and human rights for more than a decade and a half. They, however, continue to battle peacefully with the same grit and hope.

Jamnibai Kamla Yadav, Nahadriya Tersing,
Madhya Pradesh

'BETRAYAL OF THE PEOPLE'

True to his anticipation, Sumanta Banerjee's article, 'Transgression masquerading as Transformation' (December 18-24) has raised certain questions. At the outset, he alleges 'betrayal of the people' (obviously of West Bengal)—a political cliché—by the CPI (M), CPI (ML), civil society groups and intellectuals. 'Betrayal' means 'breach of faith'; did people repose faith in any, or all, of these three groups? In 2006 Assembly poll, Left Front candidates polled only about 1% more than opposition and independent contestants; a miniscule might have voted for CPI (ML) candidates. Do people have really faith in civil society groups and intellectuals? Where is 'betrayal' then? Mr Banerjee then accuses these three categories of making U-turn in their pre-poll stances and using another cliché, of 'stinking hypocrisy and opportunism'. So-called interlocutors were not appointed by Mamata Banerjee; they volunteered to broker talks between her and the Maoists in response to her general appeal. Did she at all 'permit' (or direct) the joint forces to kill Kishenji? Mahasweta Devi's impromptu charge of 'fascism' against Ms Banerjee and recanting it, the next day, was indeed a somersault, but the rally in Kolkata by a section of the State Congress against the TMC's violence and not repeating it after rebuke by the High Command can by no means be called a 'turn around'.

Ms Banerjee came to power through a massive majority in the 2011 poll at the crest of a rave popularity, securing the mandate of about 35 million of the 50 million voters. So many people cannot go wrong in their political choices! In highbrow cynicism, he alleges 'lack of intelligence' in 'Bengali human rights activists, actors, artists, Maoists and Congress leaders' He denounces euphoria adulation of Ms Banerjee, but can such a massive mandate for her be called 'euphoria', which means 'an often groundless or excessive feeling of well-being and happiness'? Was there no ground in so many people's massive rejection of the Left Front? However, Mr Banerjee's charge of 'political degeneration' against the Maoists should stick, but their refusal of holding talks with the government cannot be strictly called a volte face, because they had never agreed to it. The article is thus replete with inaccuracies and misinterpretation of facts, which should be 'sacred' to scribes, because comments are not!

Bulbul Roy, Kolkata