

Calcutta Notebook

MSPVT

It's unconvincing to conclude that the people of Nandigram have nothing to worry about just because there is a regime change in Bengal. True, they seem to be heaving a sigh of relief but so long as corporate agenda remains unchanged the 'ghost' that created a living hell for the poor and marginalised of Nandigram may return under a different cloak. After all the notorious Salim Group is lying low for the time being but they are not totally out of the scene and the new rulers are not truly against their local agents. Nandigram otherwise an obscure village in east Medinipur became a focus of international attention for quite some time as it thwarted the neo-liberal march of the 'marxists' by paying the price in blood while inspiring dozens of on-going people's struggles across the country. Democrats and liberals of all shades exhibited a unique solidarity in those tumultuous days by supporting the cause in their own limited way to tell the world that 'iron heels' are not the last words. Here is a book titled 'Ode to Nandigram' that may provide food for thought to the people who think the status quo can be broken.

"Ode to Nandigram" is a collection of poems, paintings and reflections on what happened in Nandigram in east Medinipur district of West Bengal leading up to the cold blooded massacre on 14 March, 2007 of unarmed protesters against forcible acquisition of land for setting up a chemical hub and a SEZ (Special Economic Zone), ousting the villagers from their age-old habitation and avocation, and throwing them into an uncertain, unknown wilderness. A 6-page history sheet captioned 'Timeline Nandigram' based on the chronology of events from 10 June, 2006 guiding the reader up to the fateful 14 March, 2007 when the massacre of protesting men, women and children conjointly by policemen and armed cadres of the ruling CPM party wearing police uniform took place, and beyond up to 29 November, 2007 when the former US Attorney-general visited the spot where the massacre occurred lamenting the moving spectacle of the plight of people facing the brutality of their own government—all these add wealth of information to this presentation. More wealth has been carved out of the paintings and sketches, 23 in all, depicting the pains, sorrows and inarticulate moans of the artists integrating themselves virtually with the actual sufferers, exuding pathos in the mind of the viewer.

And the acme of this work of art is reached in some beautiful poems, written in Bengali, transliterated in English alongside, transporting, as it were, the reader's mind to the eerie, gloomy, dreary Slough of Despond. There are 27 poems, of which only one is long and two are just above couplets. The poets and artists vented their ire against State terrorism by means of the pens, pencils and brushes at their disposal. The leaders of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) at that time discounted the ongoing protests as those by outsiders on one hand and warned all those who protested of making hell of their lives on the other. Poet Sankha Ghosh captured the people's anger at these outrageous nuisance in his poems, "Outsider" and "Yours truly". The tyrant in these two poems cries, "Won't you listen to what I say? You are an outsider..." and "I have kept my vow...I have made life hell for those who dared".

This book is worth preserving. A portion of the returns of this book is earmarked for rehabilitation of people displaced by the erosion of the river, "Ganga" in the district of Murshidabad, West Bengal. The book is published by 'Shreya Publications', 2B/2, Picnic Garden Third Lane, Kolkata-700039. The price of the book is Rs 200.00 only. □□□