

Calcutta Notebook

Shoummo

APRIL IS THE CRUELLEST month in this city and so is October, the usual month of festivities, when all guards are dropped, people let their hair down and at times raucousness gets the better of reasoned disposition. The festival season in the city and the state induces its denizens into a state of slumber to an extent that even skeletons stop popping out of CPI(M)'s cupboards. The one source of solace for some is the festival numbers published by the numerous little magazines which usually live up to the demanding standards set by their readers. This weekly's *Autumn Number* was no exception to this exceptional rule.

Ramachandra Guha, a fellow traveller of this weekly in the past, wrote an article 'After the Fall' in the June 2011 issue of *The Caravan*. This article has been well received here. It has since been translated into Bangla and also discussed in the *Autumn Number* of this weekly. The general secretary of the CPI(M) reacted to Guha's article in the November 2011 issue of *The Caravan* but with the troubled state of affairs in the party's backyard, Karat's repartee was not even a mild karate chop. CPI(M)'s general secretary claimed to have seen through Guha's game of resuscitating Santiago Carrillo, former general secretary of Communist Party of Spain (during 1960-82) and one of the initiators of Euro-communism. Carrillo declared in 1991 that 'The Communist movement as such has completed its historical cycle and it makes no sense trying to prolong it'. Karat suspects that this is Guha's chosen script for the CPI(M)'s exit from the Indian political scene. The general secretary failed to grasp that it is the state of disarray of his party that has encouraged Guha to chart this ignominious path for his party. In West Bengal, Karat's is a party that is not sure of putting up candidates in all the seats in panchayat elections of 2013 and this must be a cause of serious introspection. Of course the upper caste party bureaucrat was at his severest on Guha while castigating him for getting BTR's caste all wrong.

Ramachandra Guha sermonises from the pulpit and seldom reasons his deductions. For example, Ramchandra Guha believes that Jyoti Basu and Buddhadeb Bhattacharya are 'men of culture'. Guha does not substantiate but if Bratya Basu's blockbuster play 'Ruddha Sangeet' is to be taken at face value then Jyoti Basu is reported to have famously commented that '*ami abar o shob culture-fulture bujhi na*'. A verbatim translation is that 'I do not understand culture'. However, Budhadeb Bhattacharya has worked hard to hop on and ride the culture bandwagon. A volume of Mayakovsky's poetry translated into Bangla, a play 'Dusshamoy' about which the noted critic Dharani Ghosh wrote that it does not fall below the level of the ordinary and plenty of pretensions stood the man in good stead until he bared his fangs in Singur and Nandigram. To be fair, Guha goes on to add that 'The police came under the control of the party cadres, helping them fix local elections and capture the panchayats' but he refuses to accuse these culture vultures of being guilty of twiddling their thumbs while the mayhem was on.

Ramachandra Guha, by stating that 'most major leaders of the CPI(M) are gentlemen', resuscitates an old debate that had long been conclusively settled by a former finance minister of this state who had also nurtured this column during its formative years. This former minister is reported to have said things to the contrary during his tenure in the Left Front cabinet. It must be a respite for Guha that he does not keep track of the local vernacular media. Or, else he could have had a flavour of the gutter speech of these 'gentlemen' in the run-up to the May 2011 elections and even thereafter. Another 'gentleman', former CPI(M) Chief Minister of Kerala is reported to have commented 'If it had not been for Sandeep's house, not even a dog would have glanced that way'. He said this when Major Sandeep Unni-krishnan's father asked Achutanandan to leave the martyr's family alone during their hour of grief. Sandeep Unnikrishnan had earlier, in November 2008, gone down fighting the terrorists in Mumbai.

Guha succumbs to the lure of categories such as 'less greedy' and 'less corrupt' and strongly puts forth these as reasons for the Left Front being in power in the states of Kerala, West Bengal and Tripura for extended periods. Pray, may I ask, as to why must practitioners of left politics be such lesser charlatans and not squeaky clean? He goes on to add that 'Decades of patient and often selfless work with subaltern groups has resulted in success at the ballot box' and yet he does not stop to mull that Bengali migrants in Tripura have reduced the indigenous population to a political minority and *bhadraloks*, Dasharath Deb being the only exception, have appropriated the office of the chief minister for themselves. Or, why *bhadraloks* continue to be majority in the West Bengal CPI(M) state committee when minorities, Other Backward Communities, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes together are a majority of the state's population.

A self proclaimed 'student of Marxism by habit', Ramachandra Guha concedes that 'India remains a deeply inegalitarian country' and is appalled that 'One man in Mumbai can build himself a house 27 storeys high and 400,000 square feet in extent, while 60 percent of that city's population live in slums'. However, he does not wonder that many like that 'one man' and the '60 percent' share the same work place and yet, 64 years since 1947, the spoils for their day's labour are so disparate. Rather, Guha wishes a political spectrum where the Congress is not beholden to the remnants of Nehru's progeny masquerading as Gandhis, the BJP is free of the RSS' knickers strings and a parliamentary Left is structured according to the aspirations of the middle class and so on. Further, Guha pulls up the parliamentary Left for repeatedly keeping away from coalition governments at the centre. A casual student of Marxism might think aloud about the location of the common meeting ground where the left can frolic in the sun with Congress and Janata Dal. If Guha's displeasure with the condition of 60% of Mumbai residents sheltered in festering slums is genuine then it is also certain that he is aware that their class interest is nothing but antagonistic to the class interest of the denizens of 27 storey 400,000 square feet spaces. When a key denizen of 27 @ 400,000 says '.... Congress apni dukan hai' or '....Congress is our shop' (see Radia tapes at <http://www.openthemagazinexom/article/nation/aapka-toh-sab-kaam-ho-gava>) it becomes clear that the Congress is in no position to bite the hand that feeds. The aforesaid

statement was made to the foster son-in-law of a senile BJP honcho, once described as BJP's *mukhauta* or mask. The Congress and the BJP are fed by the same hands and that they eat from the same plate is clear to most other than those like Ramachandra Guha who draw an imaginary schism between the two *mukhautas* of the establishment and then take sides.

'A romantic may pin his hopes on the naxalites' says Ramachandra Guha. If that be the case, then vast swathes of forest land and their inhabitants, the object of plunder by his bourgeois friends, have come under the sway of these romantics. He calls these 'romantics' the 'descendants of naxalites' and as a proof their foreign lineage Guha says that they call themselves the Communist Party of India (Maoist). However, author fails to add that at *Janatana Sarkar* gatherings not only photographs of Mao and Karl Marx but also that of Charu Mazumdar are displayed on the podium (see *Walking with the Comrades* by Arundhati Roy, *Outlook*, 29 March 2010). This is a deliberate omission because Guha is not willing to see the possibilities beyond the present brand of parliamentary politics, with his wish list of a sanitized Congress/ BJP and a parliamentary left alive to the aspirations of a chirpy middle class. He also intends to limit the discussions about the Left to meander between the course charted by P C Joshi and B T Ranadive.

A self-confessed 'Anthropologist among the Marxists' Ramachandra Guha tries his hand at 'Counterfactual History' by speculating that 'Had the party had the wisdom and the courage to support PC Joshi after Independence, instead of taking the adventurist line advocated by BT Ranadive' then they would have 'a visible and largely beneficial presence in India as a whole'. There can be two counter arguments to this speculation. Firstly, Guha's model prescription of a left aligned to the aspirations of the middle class and in alliance with a government at the centre has been pursued in principle (though there was no participation in government) by the CPI since the late 60s, through the emergency in 1975, till the Bhatinda conference in 1978. That those were the years when the CPI dissipated or melted into air can hardly be denied. Secondly, the Joshi and Ranadive strands have merged into same stream and it is the CPI(M) and not the CPI that is more enthusiastic about claiming Joshi's legacy. On the occasion of P C Joshi's birth centenary, Prakash Karat wrote an article filled with admiration, in the *People's Democracy* of 15 April 2007. Further, an exhibition titled 'Legacy and Relevance of the Progressive Cultural Movement in India' showcasing rare photographs of P C Joshi and his contribution to the nurturing and efflorescence of organizations like Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) has been very recently accommodated at A K Gopalan Bhavan, New Delhi. To put it bluntly, Joshi or no Joshi, the CPI(M) would still have unleashed its murderous hordes in Marichjhanpi, Bijan Setu, Bantala, Nandigram, Netai.....

Reading 'After the Fall' some may stand back and say like Antony (Julius Caesar , Act III, Scene 2) 'O, what a fall was there, my countrymen!' but those hopeful will not carry on to say that 'Then I, and you, and all of us fell down, Whilst bloody treason flourished over us.'. □□□