

State Terror

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West Bengal set a dangerous example in unleashing of state terrorism and violating human rights in the 1970s. The Congress regime under Siddhartha Sankar Ray took inhuman as well as repressive measures for subduing the voice of dissent. The Congress Party made disastrous results in the Lok Sabha elections held in March 1977 and in the Assembly polls of the state in July 1977. The question of civil liberties and human rights were inextricably linked with the elections of 1977. This was particularly true to West Bengal,

As the issues of civil rights and state terrorism remained very important in West Bengal, the Left Front in its election manifesto put proper emphasis on such issues in 1977. It was assured by the Left Front that after coming to power it would not take any step that would violate the democratic rights of the people. It was also stated that there would be virtually no use of police force for suppressing people's movements. In each and every election campaign since 1977 the Left Front leaders used to remind the voters of West Bengal of state terrorism and consequent horror of the 1970s.

But during last 30 years the Left Front Government under CPM leadership has taken steps in flagrant violation of principles of rights and liberties of the people. Refugees in Marichjhanpi, farmers of Shantipur, workers of Naihati, Youth Congress members in front of Writers' Buildings, agitating 'mob' in Baguiati, aggrieved passengers for irregular plying of trains in Sealdah station, students of Falakata and Jadavpur University have been victims of police atrocities and firing during the Left Front rule. But no punitive measures against the erring policemen were taken. The leaders and the ministers rather tried to shield them. Jyoti Basu, during his Chief Ministership, stated on several occasions that custodial deaths should not take place in a civilized country. But during his regime innumerable deaths in police custody did take place.

But there is little doubt that the 'more developed' (*unnatatarā*) Left Front under Buddhadeb Bhattacharya has taken 'more developed' measures for violating civil liberties and democratic rights. He has combined culture with repression in an extraordinary skill. The Amnesty International, a human rights organization of global repute, had conducted a large scale enquiry on human rights situation in West Bengal in 1999. At that time Buddhadeb Bhattacharya was the Minister in charge of police. The draft report, made on the basis of this enquiry, was sent to the West Bengal Government for its opinion. The government did not give any reply to the Amnesty International. It rather questioned the authority and jurisdiction of the Amnesty International in a letter sent to the central government. But the state government did not make any attempt to refute the allegations of human rights violation with facts. In 2001 the Amnesty International published the report entitled, *Time To Act To Stop Torture And Impunity In West Bengal*. In time of publishing the report, the Amnesty International communicated through a press release that in context of increasing police brutality, the West Bengal Government had failed in its responsibility to put an end to such happenings.

The police atrocities in Singur and Nandigram have thoroughly exposed the brutal face of the West Bengal Government. Media have played their role in showing what really happened in Nandigram on 14 March. The police aided by armed CPM cadres launched inhuman attack upon unarmed rural poor. Even there are allegations of rape. More things may come to light when CBI enquiry report submitted recently to the Hon'ble High Court becomes public.

The West Bengal Government, along with its Chief Minister, cannot shake off responsibility for this brutal massacre. Nandigram will be remembered for eternity in the annals of genocides in India. The reaction of the events in Nandigram was quick and sharp. Scholars, writers and historians renounced their honour and awards offered by the West Bengal Government. Some

playwrights had severed their connections with the state government. The Governor, with all his constitutional limitations, rightly expressed his anguish over the incident. The Calcutta High Court called the police action in Nandigram 'unconstitutional' and ordered for a CBI enquiry. Even other Left Front partners raised their voice of protest, though in a limited scale. But the leaders of the major ruling party did not hesitate to defend the police brutality. Many even went to the extent of saying that police was attacked by bombs and bullets. But there was no evidence that police received any injury. The attitude of the rulers goes against the norms and principles of a civil society. Even after eight days of the massacre, not a single leader of the ruling party felt it necessary to visit Nandigram. There is little doubt that after March 14, 2007 Buddhadeb Bhattacharya has lost moral authority and right to rule in West Bengal.

The experiences of Singur and Nandigram have manifested that the Left Front government in West Bengal depends heavily on armed might for protecting its authority and for containing social discontent. It attributes little importance to the point of winning popular consent. The rulers deliberately ignore socio-economic factors responsible for protest movements, and try to project them as mere manifestations of law and order problems. But the rulers have forgotten that a popular consent forms the basis of a free republic, in real sense of the term, and people's right to protest against injustice, oppression, exploitation and eviction is very much enshrined within the democratic principle of popular consent. □