

IT'S DOOM THAT COUNTS

## 'THEIR VIOLENCE, OUR SPONTANEITY'

**Subhendu Dasgupta**

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2007, the Government of the State of West Bengal committed a mass murder in Nandigram. The Government became violent. The CPM-led Left Front Government in West Bengal became violent. This violence occurs, is made to occur, regularly in our everyday life. We have been unaware, tried to ignore, occasionally conscious of, or merely accept this pervasive violence. This is how it has gone on: the violence of the state power, violence of the party in power. We have protested, we have remained silent. However, the scale, nature and depth of the violence on 14 March reached such proportions that it could not remain unnoticed.

We, the people of West Bengal are stunned and disturbed, angry and worried as we stare down the aftermath of this massive act of violence. Our apparently tranquil, secure, silent, generally apolitical existence faces questions. We question it ourselves. Why? Why did it happen? We question our own contribution, our participation. We question where we stand. What should we do? What can we do? Can't we do anything? Our knowledge, experience, conscience search the answers. How can we remain silent like this? How can we ignore this? If we can then what does it make us - the questions strike at the heart of our very existence. We search, all of us. And we find the answers in our own individual ways.

The massacre at Nandigram has brought people from different walks of life together. On the day that followed, people walked, sat in demonstrations on the streets of Kolkata. Scientists of the Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics came out of their laboratories to walk in protest. Teachers and staff of City College in South Kolkata also came out in a big group. Elderly residents of Golf Green Urban Complex came out of their flats, while others joined them gradually in this walk through their neighbourhood. So did doctors and nurses from the Medical College. No one was aware of who was organizing, or whether this was organized at all in the true sense of the term, yet the following day, news spread that people were gathering at College Square as well as in front of the Metro Cinema at Esplanade. The gathering at both places was overwhelming. Such spontaneous moves have spread not only to different corners of West Bengal, but far beyond, to other states, to cities abroad.

Such was the spontaneous large-scale people's initiative. In the last 30 years the people of West Bengal have been targets of spurts of violence, though on much smaller scales. Violence that emanated from the government, from the party in power. The so far silent, common people of West Bengal in the face of violence of a much bigger order now prepares to change themselves. This has reflected in a spontaneous mass movement. This has brought in a political change that is deep inside. A political mass movement that is banner-less.

One could possibly draw parallels with the food movement, movements opposing the Emergency, movement for the release of political prisoners. These were not directed by any party in power, or parties in opposition, and trying to come to power. Men and women, realizing that their very human existence was at stake, took it upon themselves to join those mass movements. They came out in the open through protests, to prove, over and over again, that they wanted to live in the proper sense of the term, and what the government and the party in power were doing was wrong and inhuman. People openly voiced their opinion that the government had instigated violence, had become violent.

14th March 2007 once again brought the people of West Bengal in the path of history. The government, the parties in power in the government had always created their categories of 'us' and 'they' in their own terms. The 'us' of the government, and the parties that formed the government constituted the bureaucracy, the party organization, the party cadres, the owners of capital. The 'they', on the other hand, constituted the farmers, organizations involved in protecting the farmers' land, groups opposing the official 'development', sections opposing the

government or the party in power- and thus anti-state, anti-development and thus the targets of official violence.

So long it was the government that created the two categories. Now we should be creating our own 'us' and 'they'. To us 'development' should be considered in the real sense of the term: development for the masses, for agriculture, farmers, food security; for employment intensive industries, small and rural industries, consumer industries catering to the general masses, workers; for opening of closed industries through workers' cooperatives; for environment, water; for rural health; for services for the masses; for rights, dignity and humanity.

On the other hand, 'they' in our schema constitutes, the government, the bureaucracy, the police forces, the parties in power with their henchmen, the big capitalists, promoters, large industries, modern technology, displacement of workers, large housing complexes replacing closed industries, real estates coming up on filled-up water-bodies, Special Economic Zones, nuclear power plants, contractual workforce, workers deprived of their basic minimum wages, inoperative rural health centers, shopping malls, expensive hospitals, fly-overs, eviction, large retail traders displacing small shop owners, knowledge cities, exclusive educational institutions, an economy catering to the upper classes, violent development, development through violence.

It is time we go on broadening the domain of 'us'. The more we do this 'they' would gradually lose ground, lose strength and support, lose rationality and have no option than to take recourse to violence. They will have only their own cadres, bureaucrats and the police forces. More and more Nandigrams would be created.

We would no longer be unprepared. We will be prepared. We would no longer be taken by surprise. We would be part of a mass movement. This mass movement would not be of the kind designed by political parties craving for power. This would be a spontaneous movement of the common masses.

As part of this spontaneous movement, new forms of protest would emerge. For a day we would do without cooking in our homes, we will go without food. For a day we will put off all the lights in our homes at a particular time. For a day we will sing all night, put up plays, read poetry. Each day we will bring out leaflets on different issues and distribute these to every home. We will sit in front of different government institutions, but in silence. We will return all awards of the government. We will relinquish all positions endowed to us by the government. We would refrain from participating in any governmental function and entering any government auditorium. We will not organize any function in these auditoriums. And the like.

Similar things are happening at present. Power-official, political, administrative, has the capacity to get the know of, and thus to break organized political movements. Yet it cannot comprehend the spontaneous unorganized movements that emanate from within the masses. This unnerves them. The more they get unnerved, the more they get violent. Through such continuous violence they would gradually fall apart. □□□