

FOR THE PEOPLE

What the political right did in Kalinga Nagar in Orissa a year ago, is being repeated by the Marxist left in Bengal today. The Orissa police of BJD-BJP combine killed 12 tribals who were protesting against forcible acquisition of land for a Tata enterprise. Peasants do not matter but Tatas do because this is the era of neo-liberalism. Also this is the era of repolarisation for political power equation. With its unprovoked aggression against small and marginal peasants, the CPM-led left front faces a contradiction which it is powerless to resolve amicably in favour of its traditional constituency. If it abandons its aggressive land acquisition policy, it will send a wrong signal to investors. If on the other hand, the ruling marxists stick to their guns, they will doubtless be sucked into an unmanageable parliamentary crisis, not in the distant future. They could afford a little bit of mass anger that has currently gripped some areas in south Bengal because the assembly poll is far away.

But the 3-tier panchayet polls are just one and a half years away. With anti-land acquisition movement gaining momentum, the parliamentary left finds it increasingly difficult to market its leftism.

Public opinion is against the CPM-led left regime's land-grabbing policy. Civil Society groups are against it. Grassroots struggles and radical intelligentsia are against it. Yet the marxist party in power looks too arrogant to abandon its anti-peasant measures.

Many progressives who expected too much from the Indian brand of social democracy as symbolised by the official communist outfits like the CPM, are now talking in terms of an impending 'civil war'. True, a civil war is looming but in all probability it may be turned into a communal riot if the left front government succeeds in manipulating its divide and rule policy.

As the land issue is getting complicated with every passing day the left's minority vote bank seems to be shrinking drastically.

So they had to play the communal card in reverse order and dismiss the allegations that land belonging to Muslims only were being targeted for acquisition as baseless. Left parties which today enjoy their highest-ever representation in parliament and which run three state governments, command a level of credibility and influence far in excess of their mass following. And this scenario is going to be altered, possibly after the next general election, if anti-left swing in minority vote is not arrested on time. They are better placed than ever before to develop an alternative model of development and industrialisation without squeezing the peasantry. But they are doing just the opposite. Like their rightist counterparts they are in no mood to swim against neo-liberal tide. Instead they have created Singur model and by persisting with the Singur model, the marxist left stands to lose the gains it achieved by way of implementing, though half-heartedly, 'operation barga'. Forced into desperation, they are now talking of distributing some vested lands to oustees owning allegiance to the ruling parties, of course.

To blame it on Jamat-i-Ulema Hind for creating communal passions cannot hide the emerging reality. They are wooing the Tatas, somewhat shamelessly by continually imposing Section 144 in Singur area. And yet they are too eloquent to describe it as a democracy which it is not. They are so unpopular today that they cannot exercise 'democratic rule', even of their partisan kind, without the aid of Section 144. The left is adopting the Singur model or neo-liberal model, despite their lip service to social welfarism, in which the corporate tycoons, not the toilers, call the shots and, the market rules making all democratic institutions redundant. ✍✍