

40 Years Later

As in so many things, traditional left opinion lives in a bubble, believing that mere ranting about the Centre's neoliberal policies while implementing those same policies in states where the leftists are in power, will carry the day. It does no longer seem so. Today the left-ruled state of West Bengal is in reality two sharply polarised states, but not so much divided between left and right as between the privileged and the deprived. Marxists are no longer the party concerned with reducing social and class inequalities.

The scale of peasant violence that has engulfed some parts of East Midnapur is no less grave than what people witnessed in the wake of Naxalbari uprising in 1967 when the initial issue was distribution of vested land. The home ministry was under the CPM in the United Front Government and this time too it is under the CPM. A police officer Sonam Wangdi was killed in North Bengal only to be followed by massive state repression fuelling ideological polarisation in the CPM. 40 years later a police officer was again killed in what they call mob violence without much ideological impact because political forces behind the so-called 'mob frenzy' in which the sub-inspector Sadhucharan Chatterjee was lynched are themselves handicapped by their own limitations of not going too far threatening the status quo. In 1967 there was a vertical split in CPM to give rise to a new orientation in ideological struggle against revisionism and parliamentarism. And the Chinese support to the 1967 peasant upheaval hastened the process of formation of ML movement. As the marxist-leninists are themselves divided into several groups and sub-groups today, they failed to reopen the ideological debate that has been in limbo for quite some time.

It is the question of forcible acquisition of land by the state, not the landlord as it was in the case of Naxalbari uprising. And only in Nandigram there was a kind of vertical split, somewhat spontaneously forcing all opposition parties—left, right and ultra left—to speak in unison. There was not much ideological thrust behind the split. Faced with the possibility of a much bigger backlash the ruling marxists finally decided to go slow to enforce their sell-out while offering some sop in the form of distributing pattas to the landless, in partisan way of course. But a civil war like situation persists because armed squads with the tacit approval of persons in authority continue to terrorise the poor who refuse to subscribe to the CPM-line of acquiring land for industrialists. It is irony of history that the marxists may team up with the saffronites to teach the peasants belonging to the minority community, a lesson or two.

The alienation of parliamentary left from broad masses has just started and it will aggravate if they pursue the policy of coercion. All political parties are trying to cash in on the anti-left mood of masses without really creating a political space for further polarisation. But a realignment in panchayet structure in the next poll does not mean much to the landlosers. Unless they revive the old slogan of 'land to the tiller', it is next to impossible to unite the poor and marginal peasants

under a single umbrella. As the CPM-led left front is not in a position to agitate over 'land to the tiller' issue, there lies a possibility of non-traditional left to emerge from isolated and yet potential peasant struggles.

Meanwhile, some left front partners, particularly Forward Bloc and RSP, are opposing the controversial West Bengal Land Reforms Amendment Bill 2006 for the sake of opposition. No doubt the bill is aimed at wooing promoters and land-hungry industrialists but their opposition after a few rounds of parleys at the front meeting vanishes in the thin air. The far left is yet to reflect on the raging controversy. In other words all of them are reacting to spontaneity which cannot sustain a movement for long in the face of concerted attacks by the administration and ruling party goons. If mass anger is to usher in the accountability that has been sorely lacking in the official left establishment for 30 years, the agitationists must rise to the occasion throwing an all encompassing route to democratic revival. Whether or not protesters can passively allow official left-wingers at this juncture to build a mighty fortress for the advocates of free-market excess is the moot question. ~~~~~~~~~