

The World After Singur

They may go down in history as 'Nano' communists. Communism is increasingly becoming an area of academic curiosity, thanks to globalisation. If voters continue to make the official communists be what they are not and never will be, they are likely to end up being more like what the official communists actually are. They are the fanatic defenders of corporate interests even at the expense of their time-tested constituency. The monopoly houses of India have never seen such a golden opportunity ever since the British left the sub-continent in 1947, to increase their assets in leaps and bounds destroying in the main Indian agriculture. Their crash industrialisation of the 'Great Leap Forward' variety, *a la* China, has caused an almost hallucinatory madness to grab poor farmers' land which in turn is the source of agony of impoverished millions and starvation deaths as well.

Once upon a time the British destroyed Indian agriculture and handicrafts to save England's manufacturing. And now Indian corporate houses in league with their foreign collaborators are repeating the same history with a vengeance by vandalising rural India, all in the name of 'development' and progress. The East India Company is back with an Indian flag.

The governments and monopoly houses are hell bent to change the traditional agricultural practice creating an uncertain future for millions. The country lurches back and forth between perennial social turmoil and semblance of normalcy at the gunpoint. The days of indigo cultivation are back. This time it is cash crop for bio-fuel at the cost of food security. Artisans from rural India are vanishing very fast. They have lost their old skill without gaining anything new to sustain themselves in the changed economic scenario.

Meanwhile, the Singur controversy has acquired a national dimension because of Tata's desire to shift his dream car plant to some safe haven not plagued by anti-land grab agitation. Not that the Tatas had red carpet reception in Kalinganagar of neighbouring Orissa state where tribals died in police firing to pave the way for Tata Steel's smooth sailing. The Singur crisis illustrates among other things that there is a contradiction in the business community in respect of land acquisition. Even a day before Tata's announcement to say 'goodbye' to his marxist friends of Bengal, an ex-Assocham chief indirectly blamed it on the Tatas for not coming forward to settle the land dispute directly with the unwilling peasants. The peasants of Singur have been paying a heavy price for the marxist government's shameless appeasement to Tata and they are now being asked to accept the *fait accompli*. Many political individuals from the erstwhile naxalite camp, have taken up the briefs for the marxist government by resorting to baseless scapegoating. Their allegation that the Opposition did not do much when land was actually acquired borders on hypocrisy. The government promulgated Sec 144 to finish Tata's boundary wall before time, depriving the agitationists of their right to protest peacefully. On an earlier occasion the Tatas withdrew from Haldia Petrochemicals without being confronted by the land-losers.

Forcible acquisition of land is threatening food security in almost all states. Also, abnormal rise in food prices cannot be attributed solely to price hike in oil. The gradual shrinkage of arable land because of massive transfer of this limited natural resource to non-agricultural sectors is bound to create a permanent famine like situation and social violence as well.

The marxists are clever enough to describe the prevailing scenario as historical necessity. But what they do not tell the people is that it is also historical necessity to reverse this jobless industrialisation drive at any cost. Destabilisation of rural economy is so complete that Indian society can hardly avoid civil war in the coming years.

They can manage social inequity and mass impoverishment upto a certain point through repression. But they are unlikely to succeed after the critical stage which has already arrived. Any further impoverishment of rural population will not produce a happier future for the haves. There is no gesture at economic inequality from the powers that be. It is a horrifying world of unthinkable inequity. Those who are shedding tears for the Tatas never think of uprooted millions who are mere numbers now.

Meanwhile surge in the transnational integration of food production and transport has sped the destruction of whatever remains of traditional agricultural system. In the emerging event of chaos middle class buyers who look too jubilant to see 'Nanos' rolling out from Singur plant as quickly as possible may have to bite the dust not in the distant future. At the time of writing the Singur agitation was withdrawn at the intervention of the Governor of West Bengal but Tatas refused to budge an inch from their original plan. [9.9.2008] □□□