

Disarming Images

There is nothing more unrealistic than the idea of having something radically different that would come anywhere near being in the interests of the vast majority of people under new dispensations in Kerala and Bengal. But there needs to be air for people to breathe, room for them to disagree and tolerance for them to come to truths that ground reality reveals in its normal way. As for recently-held assembly elections in Tamil Nadu and Poducherry nobody bothers about the outcome. It's Dravidian regionalism. And Congress has somehow managed to project its national image by winning polls in Assam. In Kerala musical chair that revolves around CPM-led LDF and Congress-led UDF suggests among other things that parliamentary democracy has come of age in this part of the globe. The periodic entry and exit of CPM and Congress in the state legislature is almost axiomatic and nobody knows when this binary arrangement of power-sharing would be broken. For one thing there would be no CPM as the Keralites know it today without power. But it is Bengal that always signifies something extreme in politics—no matter whether it is parliamentary politics or extra-parliamentary politics. After 34 years in power the CPM-led left in Bengal is in such a pathetic situation that there are few people to join their funeral procession. CPM stands for horrendous death, destruction, mutilation and suffering, their humiliating defeat in election reflects a rejection of CPM-form of representation and appreciation of change. What was decisive in Bengal polls was not ideology, not promise to keep old promises, but masses in motion fighting for free expression and an atmosphere free of terror and fear.

They have not yet started their post-mortem. But it is unlikely for them to admit mistakes. After all they have developed a habit of justifying barbarian methods to get things done in favour of money bags. Land is the issue and land will remain the issue for years to come despite the change of guard in Bengal. If the anti-left Opposition, mainly the Trinamul Congress (TMC) is in power today it is because of limited support they extended to peasants' struggle against forcible land acquisition in Singur and Nandigram. If the peasants, rather small and marginal peasants, do not survive, Bengal won't survive.

CPM is basically a middleclass party with its huge cadre-base drawn from lower-middle class background and lumpens. Their Nazi-type regimentation created a situation where democracy sounds a funny word. And most of their leaders are middle class *bhadraloks* with all their caste prejudices and high ambition to maintain their elite status, notwithstanding what they breach day in and day out. Their double standard limits no bound and they call it marxism. Having perfected the art of parliamentary game well over the years they have systematically transformed this party into a party of the rich, albeit professed goal remains the same—something called people's democracy. These days these people are Neotias, Ambanis, Tatas and their likes, not the nameless and faceless of Nandigram, Singur and Netai.

In the yester years they fought for share-croppers and marginalised peasants and created mass base to reap electoral harvest in due season. These days they are fighting for land sharks while systematically losing the mass base only to witness one electoral misfortune after another.

Not that voters are fools and they can be fooled all the time. Just on the eve of election, some old timers, rather part-timers, who are known as intellectuals on the CPM-brand left, were pressed into service to influence non-committed and non-partisan democrats but the gambit didn't click as the so-called intellectuals failed to impress even the die-hard left as

they would like to grill the bureaucracy, not the party or the party-policy as such for mass alienation. Surprisingly they didn't even utter a word or two about horror unleashed by the party cadres to get their agenda of horrifying industrialisation done. Ministers and shadow ministers were always there to boost up morale of party hooligans who were on the rampage in every area of protest and agitation for justice and sheer survival. They will go down in history as social-fascists who once ruled this part of the country by making the word 'communist' a symbol of terror and brutality.

If they had been so long in power in Bengal it was because they succeeded initially to convince minority community voters that they might have to face recurring communal riots without left-rule. They inflated the saffron danger to such an extent that even in areas of traditional communal harmony and peace they spread panic and pampered reverse communalism to keep minority voters under their sway. But as land-losers under neo-liberal onslaught marginal and small peasants belonging to the minority community suffered most and they began to distance themselves from the official left much before the Mamata phenomenon became a force to reckon with.

In today's Bengal, only the most ignorant or willfully blind would argue that CPM has any respect for the lives and democratic rights of ordinary people. In short, for the CPM-led left, right and wrong are defined by interests—vested interests. Their sad decline reflects the devastating effects of neo-liberal policies, involving a drastic reduction of living standards, a dramatic upsurge in lumpen culture, unprecedented levels of unemployment, social degradation and destitution—all things the freedom-loving intellectuals on the official left are totally silent about. □ 16-05-2011