

The Iron Cage

Fascism was once described as ‘Capitalism with the gloves off’, implying that fascism was pure capitalism without democratic space. In truth fascism is not that simple—it is much more complex than that. Parliamentary democracy as practised by the traditional communist left in India and particularly in Bengal—the showpiece of Asian social democratic model—is indeed ‘capitalism with gloves off.’ Communist Party is not a household name in India but communists in Bengal are trying hard never to make one. There is much moaning in the media about the return of naxalism but the way the marxist elites of Bengal have managed to manipulate the media establishment in recent weeks to further their anti-people mission in Singur and elsewhere illustrates among other things that they can go to any length to silence the voice of dissent. How the news media serve elite interests and deliberately undermine the popular initiatives of ordinary people to actually rule their lives, apparently in a ‘democratic fashion’ reminds one of Noam Chomsky’s thought-provoking 1988 book *Manufacturing Consent*. What the apologists of Indian big business and multinational capital spreads around the country, all in the name of development strategy, is not democracy but fascistic tendency and political structures to strengthen that tendency. Neoliberalism is the defining political economic paradigm of their policy orientation—it refers to policies and processes whereby a handful of private interests are pampered.

With the police atrocities against the agitating Singur peasants who refused to abandon their tiny parcels of land in favour of the Tatas, bordering on medieval barbarism, the ruling marxists can boast of hypocrisy they preach day in and day out. The marxist rulers and the policies they enact from time to time represent the immediate interests of extremely wealthy investors and monopoly houses. What was initially associated with Reagan and Thatcher in defining the ‘laissez-faire’ market strategy, is now the official doctrine of the marxist left in India. The ultimate trump card for the defender of Tatas, however, is that there is no alternative. The right opposition to the ruling left does not stem from a progressive ideological perspective that challenges business and as a result people who are rallying behind them will be left in the middle to fend for themselves. If the political right on the Singur issue acts like there is no possibility of change for the better, the right in essence guarantees that there will be no change for the better.

It’s a mystery that the Tatas have suddenly acquired ‘darling status’ in the red bastion of ‘social democrats’. At no point of time did the Tatas really make any significant investment in this hapless state otherwise plagued by partition-related miseries. The Tatas were Bombay-based during the British era, albeit they had their flagship company Tisco in eastern India and today they are basically Mumbai-based. Even on the Singur issue, the right oppositionists that spearhead the anti-eviction agitation at the moment have failed to make it a point in their public address. For all practical purposes Jharkhand despite the overwhelming presence of Tatas in the steel city of Tatanagar, remains a raw material base, not an industrial hub with huge job potential.

Interestingly, a section of business community is opposed to the left's 'improper land acquisition policy'. For the land-loser, compensation is not solution. That farmers whose lands are being taken, should be made stakeholders, rather partners, is the dominant view among liberals and democrats. But the leftist, or for that matter right political parties are not listening.

Today the left front symbolises the ruthless landlordism of East India Company days. Strange it may seem, much of the traditional left is not in a position to think of modest welfare state. They demand a blind faith in their infallibility and in so doing they frequently resort to state terror. They are asking toilers to sacrifice for the people like the Tatas. Small and marginal farmers no longer matter in their scheme of things. Nor do they show any interest in vigorously pursuing labour rights, rather hard earned rights, lest investors get annoyed.

With mainstream political parties talking eloquently about the plight of landlosers and police repression, the Singur issue seems to have acquired a kind of national dimension, thanks to Medha Patekar. In many ways, the peasant question returns with the bloody Singur, with a difference, of course. Whether the far left can seize the opportunity in the changed context when political debate hovers around minor issues remains to be seen. ~~████████~~