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Terminal Decline

The Left has been reduced to a shadow of its old self with no revival in sight

TOI Editorials



The collapse of the CPM vote base in Bengal, Tripura and Kerala has led to the inevitable question: is Left politics passe? In Bengal, the Left vote share declined from 29% in 2014 to just 7% this time. In Tripura, a Congress revival has pushed CPM to third place. In Kerala, LDF could win just one seat even as CPM and CPI piggybacking on a resurgent DMK won two seats apiece in Tamil Nadu. In better times, it was the biggest opposition party in the first Lok Sabha and enjoyed kingmaker status in Indian politics on two occasions – 1996 and 2004.

The Singur-Nandigram protests may have catalysed the Left collapse in rural Bengal but the rot had set in long before. Apart from common grievances like the encouragement of political violence and militant trade unionism, the Bengal Left was an abject failure even on Socialism 101 basics such as delivering a welfare state through schemes like universal literacy or PDS. However, LDF in Kerala escaped the ignominy of their Bengal and Tripura counterparts, ironically because the people did it a favour by kicking incumbent parties out of power every five years.

Recovery in Bengal and Tripura is unlikely because the Left's rhetoric on inequality has passed its sell by date while BJP rides on central clout exciting voters and disillusioned Left cadres with religious fervour and promises of development. The ascent of the Hindu Right in the socio-political sphere is also impacting another Left bastion: academia. Since Independence, Left fellow travellers have had an oversized presence in the life of the nation, arguably influencing even Congress's and BJP's many socialist policies. Perhaps the Left is a victim of its own success: its economic ideas appear to have been taken over by political parties across the board.

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड

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भूमि पट्टेदारी पर कानून बनने से काश्तकार को मिलेगी राहत

सुरिंदर सूद



जमीन को पट्टे पर देने को कानूनी रूप से वैध बनाना अब कृषि सुधार का महज संभावित लाभदायक पहलू ही नहीं रहा बल्कि एक आर्थिक अनिवार्यता बन चुका है। आजादी के बाद देश में भूमि स्वामित्व की सामंतवादी व्यवस्था ध्वस्त करने और जमीन का मालिकाना हक रखने वाले और नहीं रखने वालों के बीच असमानता कम करने के लिए कृषि सुधार किए गए थे।

लेकिन अब हमें इस बात की जरूरत है कि खेती-योग्य जमीन के स्वामित्व का दायरा बढ़ाया जाए ताकि कृषि कार्य आर्थिक रूप से व्यवहार्य बन सके। खेती नहीं करने वाले भूस्वामियों के बेकार पड़े खेतों का भी कृषि उत्पादन के लिए इस्तेमाल करने की जरूरत है।

उत्तराधिकार कानूनों के चलते भू-स्वामित्व में लगातार बंटवारा होते जाने से अधिकांश जोतों का आकार इतना छोटा हो चुका है कि कृषि पर आश्रित एक औसत परिवार की जरूरतें उससे पूरी नहीं हो सकती हैं। वर्ष 2010-11 की पिछली कृषि जनगणना ने दिखाया था कि करीब 85 फीसदी परिचालक भूमि स्वामित्व का आकार 2 हेक्टेयर से भी कम है और इसका औसत आकार तो महज 1.15 हेक्टेयर ही है। इससे भी बुरी बात यह है कि छोटे एवं सीमांत कृषि जोतों की संख्या सालाना 15 लाख से 20 लाख तक बढ़ रही है। अधिकांश मामलों में ये जोत भी अविभक्त नहीं हैं और दूर-दूर फैले छोटे आकार के खेतों में बंटे हुए हैं। इसका नतीजा यह हुआ है कि जमीन के इन छोटे टुकड़ों पर खेती करना आर्थिक रूप से और परिचालन के स्तर पर भी अव्यवहार्य हो चुका है। यह खेती की लाभप्रदता में कमी और कृषि क्षेत्र में चौतरफा व्याप्त आर्थिक तनाव के प्रमुख कारणों में से एक है।

खेतों के बंटवारे की प्रक्रिया तब तक जारी रहने की संभावना है जब तक कि उत्तराधिकार कानूनों को संशोधित कर उत्तराधिकारियों के बीच संपत्ति विभाजन को नियंत्रित न किया जाए। लेकिन ऐसा होने की संभावना नहीं है लिहाजा इसके बुरे प्रभावों को दूर करने के लिए एक पारदर्शी एवं कानूनी रूप से वैध भूमि पट्टा बाजार का विकास सबसे व्यावहारिक तरीका लगता है। भूमि पट्टेदारी को वैध दर्जा देने से किसानों के बीच कृषि कार्यों के लिए जमीन का विनिमय संभव हो सकेगा और उनके मालिकाना हक पर भी कोई असर नहीं पड़ेगा। भले ही छोटे एवं बिना जुताई वाले खेतों के मालिक अपने खेत अपने पड़ोसियों या अन्य छोटे किसानों को पट्टे पर देने के लिए प्रोत्साहित होंगे वहीं छोटे एवं सीमांत किसान पट्टे पर खेत लेकर अपनी आय बढ़ा सकेंगे।

गांवों में नहीं रहने वाले अधिकतर भूस्वामी पट्टेदारी को कानूनी मान्यता नहीं होने से अपना कब्जा खो देने के डर से अपने खेतों को पट्टे पर देने में संकोच करते हैं। यह कुछ राज्यों में लागू पुराने काश्तकारी कानूनों का परिणाम है जिनमें बंटाई या पट्टे पर खेती कर रहे काश्तकारों को जमीन का स्थायी अधिकार दे दिया गया था। इस वजह से करीब 2.5 करोड़ हेक्टेयर जुताई योग्य जमीन बंजर पड़ी हुई है। इसके अलावा अब काश्तकारी सौदे जुबानी या गुप्त होने लगे जिसमें किसी भी पक्ष को सुरक्षा नहीं होती है।

इसके अलावा बंटाईदारों समेत सभी अनौपचारिक पट्टाधारकों को दूसरी तरह की समस्याओं का भी सामना करना पड़ता है। सस्ती दरों पर संस्थागत कर्ज न ले पाना, फसल बीमा, आपदा राहत और सरकार की तरफ से भूस्वामियों को दी जाने वाली तमाम अन्य सुविधाएं एवं सब्सिडी नहीं मिल पाना सबसे अहम हैं। पट्टे पर खेती करने वाले किसान कृषि ऋण माफी और कृषक आय समर्थन जैसी सरकारी योजनाओं के भी पात्र नहीं हो पाते हैं। इस तरह जमीन की उपज

बढ़ाने और खेती की सक्षमता बढ़ाने के उपायों में निवेश के लिए उन्हें प्रोत्साहन देने वाला कोई कारक भी नहीं रह जाता है।

इन अधिकांश अड़चनों को जमीन पट्टेदारी को कानूनी रूप से वैध बनाकर दूर किया जा सकता है। नेशनल इंस्टीट्यूशन फॉर ट्रांसफॉर्मिंग इंडिया (नीति) आयोग पहले ही आदर्श भूमि पट्टेदारी अधिनियम का प्रारूप बना चुका है जो राज्यों के लिए अपने अलग भूमि पट्टेदारी कानून बनाने की राह दिखा सके। इस मसौदा कानून को वर्ष 2016 में ही राज्यों के बीच वितरित कर दिया गया था लेकिन गिने-चुने राज्यों ने ही इसके अनुरूप अपने कानूनों में बदलाव करने की रुचि दिखाई है। प्रस्तावित कानून कृषि-भूमि के मालिक और काशतकार किसान दोनों के ही वैध हितों को सुरक्षित करने की बात करता है। पट्टेदारी के सौदों को आपसी सहमति से अंतिम रूप देने की अनुमति देने से यह कानून पट्टे की अवधि खत्म होने पर भूमि का स्वामित्व उसके असली मालिक के पास लौट आएगा।

इसके अलावा यह मसौदा कानून पट्टाधारकों को दूसरे किसानों को मिलने वाले सभी लाभ पाने का हकदार बनाने के लिए भूस्वामियों के बराबर दर्जा देता है। गौर करने लायक एक और खासियत यह है कि जमीन की उत्पादकता बढ़ाने में निवेश करने वाले काशतकारों को पट्टे की मियाद खत्म होने पर उनके निवेश का अनुप्रयुक्त मूल्य वापस मिल जाएगा। इस प्रावधान से पट्टे वाली भूमि के समतलीकरण, मृदा स्वास्थ्य उन्नतीकरण और सिंचाई सुविधाओं के विस्तार जैसे कार्यों में निवेश को बढ़ावा मिलेगा। इस तरह नीति आयोग के आदर्श कानून की तर्ज पर अपने यहां भूमि पट्टेदारी कानून लाने में राज्यों की हिचकिचाहट कृषि समुदाय के हितों का ध्यान नहीं रख रही है।



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Left Adrift

The communists once wielded influence out of proportion with their numbers. Now, they are in retreat on both fronts

Editorial

The communist parties have plumbed the nadir in the general elections, with just five seats in the Lok Sabha — four in Tamil Nadu, one in Kerala and absolutely none in West Bengal and Tripura, their former strongholds in the east. Apart from the numbers, the influence that they had wielded in national affairs and policymaking has also dwindled to nothing. Once upon a time, they could claim to provide the moral armature of Manmohan Singh's government, highlighting welfare and deploying the work of academics loyal to the cause for leverage in steering policy. That was before they let their anti-Americanism get the better of their political sense and withdrew support to the government over the Indo-US nuclear deal, a decision they were unable to explain to the electorate. That misadventure alone would have sapped the energy of the cadre in less committed parties, but it was not the first. In 1996, to the dismay of the troops, the Politburo had prevented Jyoti Basu from becoming prime minister of the United Front government.

And in 2008, Somnath Chatterjee was expelled by the CPM for being more loyal to Parliament than to his party.

Ever since, the left has been almost shouldered off the electoral field and had retreated to the groves of academe. It ventured out of that safe haven this year to do combat in Begusarai, and lost one of the most closely watched contests. This would only embolden the BJP to proceed with its declared project to clear universities of left influence. Of course, success in this initiative would also deprive it of a pet peeve, that it had been excluded from academia and the writing of history by left-wing intellectuals. But that would be a small price to pay, now that it has demonstrated its electoral prowess beyond doubt.

The left movement has lost relevance because it is overtaken and outclassed. Its politics is based on the notion of class, whose contours have changed over time. Historically, it was also hamstrung by its decision to interpret caste through the lens of class. It doesn't really matter any more, because Hindu pride may have, in many ways, trumped caste, too, in this election. The eclipse of the left may be a historical necessity, but which party is capable of filling the moral vacuum it will leave behind – its commitment to welfare, and to the centrality of the poorest? That question lingers on.

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Keep the faith

Minorities must repose trust in Constitution, majority must recognise them as equal stakeholders

Tahir Mahmood , [The writer is former chairperson of National Minorities Commission.]

“Please pray to God for India, that is Bharat” a Sikh friend — a former judge — messaged me at dawn on May 23, the day of election results. “No use, God superannuated long ago and relieved himself of the job of listening to the prayers of the faithful”, I instantly replied. I sent both his text and my response to a Muslim friend, a former state dignitary, who wrote back: “The Creator has other worlds to look after, why waste efforts on a wayward creation.” To my query “which other worlds, the heaven and hell where he is taking care of the houries for the believers and readying fire and filth for others”, he kept mum.

The comments I made reflected my alienation from religion as a whole owing to the inhumanities and communal polarisation it has bred in recent times. The remarks of the other two echoed simmering discontent among the minorities of the country, including their elites, with the recent political landscape. I hate sermonising but I have reproduced these dialogues as a prelude to offering some suggestions, unsolicited of course, to both the rulers and the ruled.

For the minorities, I am reproducing some verses of an eminent Urdu poet, Jagannath Azad: Bharat ke Musalman kyon hai tu pareshan/ Bharat ka tu farzand hai begana nahin hai/ Ye desh tera ghar hai tu iss ghar ka makin hai/ Meri hi tarah hai ye gulistaan tera bhi/ Iss khak ka har zarra-e-taban hai tera bhi/ Ham sab ki tamannaon ko phalna bhi yahin hai/ Har manzil-e-mushkil se guzarna bhi yahin hai/ Jeena bhi yahin hai hamen marna bhi yahin hai.

(Muslims of India, why are you so upset, you are the children of India not aliens, it's your home, you are its co-owners, like mine this garden is yours too, every shining particle of this land is yours too. All of us have to realise our aspirations here, brave all kinds of difficult times here, live and die just here).

Every word of this poetic gem composed by the great non-Muslim poet after the country's unfortunate division, when the Muslims refusing to migrate to the other side of the artificially created borders were facing difficult times, is extremely relevant for the community at this political juncture. They have to accept the ground reality, reconcile with the situation and cooperate with the rulers of the day. There is no wisdom in committing the proverbial blunder of "darya mein reh ke magarmachh se bair" (making an enemy of a crocodile, while living in the water).

The rulers of the day, basking in the glory of an unprecedented electoral victory, and their ardent admirers, must also realise that the 250 million-strong minorities of India are equal citizens of the country. They are as patriotic as the one billion-strong majority. A fairly large number of citizens from the minority communities have already voted for the ruling dispensation. Winning over the rest of the community too — not by undue appeasement but by implementing on the ground their human and constitutional rights — will make the regime a force to reckon with. But to achieve this, it is necessary to shun the political culture of hate speeches which, though strictly prohibited by law, are a favourite pastime for politicians of all hues.

The proper course of action that needs to be pursued by the jubilant majority, and the disgruntled minorities, is to shun morbid religiosity and accept the apex court's injunction that genuine religious beliefs have to be distinguished from superstitions (Durgah Committee, Ajmer v Syed Hussain Ali, SC, 1961). The truth and equality of all religions alike must be accepted and religious sentiments of all must be respected. But that should happen within the parameters set by the Constitution which clarifies that professing, practising and propagating religion is assured but subject to morality, health and public order, and that religious freedom shall be no hindrance for introducing necessary "social welfare and reform" (Article 25).

All citizens, whichever religion they may be following, must also fulfill their fundamental duties under the Constitution "to cherish and follow the noble ideals which inspired our national struggle for freedom; promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture; and develop scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform" (Article 51A).

After the bitter and vicious electioneering, what columnist V Mitchell of The New York Times observed in a 2014 article is worth pondering over by all Indians — the majority and the minorities, the rulers and the ruled alike: "It is truly the greatest show on earth, an ode to a diverse and democratic ethos where 700 million of humanity vote providing their small part in directing their ancient civilisation into the future. Its challenges are immense, more so than anywhere else. It is even more astounding that the most diverse nation on earth with all religions and cultures is not only surviving but thriving. The nation where Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism were born, which is the second largest Muslim nation on earth, where Christianity has existed for 2000 years, where Zoroastrians have thrived since being thrown out of their homeland; where three Muslim Presidents have been elected, where a President was also a woman, succeeding a Muslim President who was a rocket scientist and a revered hero of the nation. Where all this is happening is India and it is an inspiration to the entire world."

This perception of an independent foreign journalist about our great nation, which has to be maintained at any cost, must infuse patriotic pride in the hearts of — to use the opening words of our Constitution — “We the people of India”, as a whole. It must remind us of its diktat that all of us must “abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions” — Article 51A (a).
