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In Tamil Nadu, DMK's 'sons of soil' land party in trouble

WRITTEN BY

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Dravidian parties are deemed to be the sons of the soil in Tamil Nadu unlike the Congress or the BJP or even the Left parties who have the control buttons in 'Aryan' Delhi. DMK leaders from top to bottom took this in the literal sense and thought that since they belong to the soil, the soil belongs only to them!

With the Jayalalithaa government opening Pandora's Box by setting up a special police cell in every district of the state to look into land-grab complaints, several DMK leaders are either already in jail or rushing to courts for anticipatory bails. From every district, hundreds of complaints are pouring in and the state total has crossed 3,000 already.

Most victims are old people, widows and families with no political support of any sort. The modus operandi of the DMK's land sharks have been several but simple and similar. Once the land shark marks a property for grab, he gets false documents prepared to show that the landowner had already sold the property to someone. From this 'someone' the land-grabber 'legally' buys the property and goes to the police for protection from the real owner. The police, under the direct administration of the then chief minister Karunanidhi, was a docile and silent collaborator.

In a state where cinematic illusion and political reality morph into one another, land-

grab incidents look like they are straight out of Tamil and Telugu potboilers. Former DMK minister NKKP Raja comes first in the intimidation stakes: He was charged with using bulldozers to destroy a plantain garden and farmhouse in rage since the owner, Sivabalan, refused to sell them to the minister. The minister tied Sivabalan and his family to a post and thrashed them. Sivabalan went to the courts for justice. But since DMK was in power, the minister was soon out on bail and continued to occupy powerful positions in the party. Now with the change of guard he is behind the bars.

Madurai, Salem and Trichy, where three of Karunanidhi's powerful satraps ruled, top the list in the number of land grab cases. In Madurai, where Karunanidhi's son and in-house beté noire Alagiri terrorised the region with his musclemen, skeletons are tumbling out now, with each of the musclemen (also party officebearers) now under arrest. A supporter of the Marxist party was attacked and murdered allegedly by Alagiri's men. They are then said to have thrown the dead body on a highway, and to have ran their vehicles over it several times to make it look like a hit-and-run road accident. The police obligingly closed it as accident case. Now that case is reopened.

In Salem, ex-minister Veerapandi Arumugam (now under arrest) competed with Alagiri in terror and intimidation. His nephew Parapatty Sivakumar allegedly murdered seven family members of a retired policeman in a land-related issue. Arumugam's clout among the police and bureaucracy was evident even after his arrest recently. The police team meant to interrogate him, welcomed him with a salute, gave him a seat and stood in respect asking formal questions. Following media outcry the entire police team has now been transferred.

The Trichy incident really reads like a Hollywood flick of action and revenge bloodless. A businessman from Namakkal known for buying sinking businesses and turning them around to resell them at a profit took charge of a hotel in mortgage. He turned it around only to get the shock of his life. The local DMK satrap (and former minister) KN Nehru's men occupied the hotel and took it over. The victim-businessman ran from pillar to post only to be slapped with a case against him. He went to the court and reached out to the media. Local Tamil magazines and dailies would prepare the news report, make the page and the story would mysteriously disappear just before going to print. That was the kind of clout DMK chieftains enjoyed. The exasperated businessman even met with a

mysterious road accident. He finally decided to acquire some media power himself and launched some magazines on the eve of elections and succeeded. (I now write a column answering readers' questions for one of them.)

It is obvious that the same government machinery that is now geared to dig up all dirt was conniving with the previous rulers to create the dirt. A scion of DMK's first family purchased over 100 acres of land on the eve of the last elections and the entire government registration department was at his beck and call to complete the deal. The registration officials worked from a marriage hall to suit the convenience of the political buyer.

And pliant officials were amply rewarded by the DMK regime. Karunanidhi distributed prime urban housing plots from the chief minister's discretionary quota to officials and their family members for a pittance. The biggest catch, Jaffer Sait, the intelligence chief during Karunanidhi's regime, is now under suspension on allegations of getting government land by breaking rules and selling it to builders for huge profits. Karunanidhi's erstwhile secretary's son is also booked for similar violation.

And how is Karunanidhi reacting to scores and scores of his party men and loyal officials getting exposed as land sharks? On action being taken against the top police official Sait, Karunanidhi said he was harassed because he is a Muslim! Do you get a sense of déjà vu? Yes.

Karunanidhi said A Raja of the 2G spectrum scandal was marked because he is a Dalit! Interestingly, most of Karunanidhi and his family's auditors and lawyers are neither Dalits nor Muslims! They are all 'evil Aryan' Brahmins!

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• TAGS: Congress, Tamil Nadu, AIADMK, Delhi, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), Madurai, Karunanidhi, Salem, Alagiri, BJP, bharatiya janata party, Jaffer Sait, Raja, Pandora Box, Trichy, Sankaran, Veerapandi Arumugam, Sivabalan, KN Nehru, Parapatty Sivakumar
