

'Das Kapital' now a rarity in Red West Bengal

Karl Marx's 'Das Kapital', which laid the ideological foundation for Communism, has ironically now become a rare book in communist-governed West Bengal.

The 19th century manuscript, in three volumes and written by Karl Marx, details at length how the growth of capitalism is directly related to the exploitation of labour.

Book owners here say there are few takers today for the three-volume 'Das Kapital', which at one time was considered a must read for those entering the world of Communism.

'It is now considered a rare book. Demand for this has gone down drastically. Sometimes IAS aspirants or students doing M. Phil come to buy it,' said Premanjan Pahari, owner of Ma Jagadhatri Bookstall in the College Street area.

College Street is considered the heart of Kolkata's book industry.

According to Pahari, the demand for 'Das Kapital' was at its peak during the Maoist movement that raged in [Kolkata](#) in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The book also did considerable business throughout the 1980s. But with the gradual emergence of globalisation over the past decades or so, demand has begun to diminish.

'Das Kapital is a serious historical document. It is the very epitome of communist thoughts and beliefs. But one cannot deny that its demand has shrunk considerably,' Tridip Chatterjee, general secretary of the Publishers and Booksellers Guild of Kolkata, told IANS.

'I doubt if a revised copy is available. The new generation is just not aware of it. They don't feel the necessity to read Das Kapital,' Chatterjee added.

Some leading wholesalers and bookstores do not sell the book anymore.

'What is Das Kapital? Can you spell the name of either the book or the author please,' was the response from Kolkata's chic Oxford Bookstore.

Similar was the response from Rupa and amp; Co.

'No, we don't keep Das Kapital. There's absolutely no demand for it,' said Raju Barman, a partner in the store.

The book can be made available by order. Booksellers charge anywhere between Rs.1,500 to Rs.4,500 depending on one's bargaining power but that could well be a second hand one.

Until the Soviet Union collapsed, 'Das Kapital' was available cheaply - thanks to state-run book firms in Moscow that were heavily subsidised by the government.

'Why should people buy Das Kapital, especially when the very theory and practice of Marxism is changing,' Chatterjee asked.

Added renowned Bengali author and poet Sunil Gangopadhyay: 'Demand for Das Kapital is no more, which is why you can find thousands and thousands of Harry Potters but not a copy of Das Kapital.'

A Left Front government headed by the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) has ruled West Bengal since June 1977, enviously winning election after election.

The CPI-M, its allies and their front organisations command millions of members. It looks like even many of them have stopped buying Das Kapital.

Nayanima Basu (© IANS / India eNews)