

‘The Rain Before It Falls’

Communists in India, having fallen in love with the Congress strategy of inaction, have adopted it as a permanent way of political culture. Congress has long been trying every conceivable method of ending conflicts in troubled zones except the obvious one : ending the roots of conflict, ethnic or otherwise. As a result people witness more flash-points are emerging with every passing day. They are capable of, but not interested in, understanding the disturbing events that are unfolding around them in the wider world.

North-east is already a cauldron of ethnic violence. No doubt separate statehood demand in North Bengal has added a new dimension to the complicated north-eastern scenario. As for Delhi rulers state administration does not matter much as long as they get legitimate revenue and their unitary authority which is being show-cased as federal, gets less threatened. After all they have inherited the Mughal heritage of their chosen *subedars*. For them granting statehood (or creating more tiny states) has been a tactical manoeuvre for long to pacify middle class aspirants. The problem lies with the state-level lords (or subedars) who run their fiefdoms to further their vested interests only. They oppose any attempt to bifurcate a state apprehending loss of their authority. Quite expectably communists and their opponents in Bengal are united to oppose the demand of Gorkhaland which has been revived by a new outfit—Gorkha Gana Mukti Morcha—after a long time.

Not that sub-nationalism coupled with genuine ethnic question, dominates the agenda of statehood agitationists everywhere. Nepali-speaking people being a linguistic minority in Bengal have every reason to demand safeguards to protect their linguistic and cultural identity. But that is not the point at issue in the resurrected Gorkhaland agitation in Darjeeling. In effect they want a tiny state to manage a tiny exchequer, albeit a new state is being billed as a panacea for the unemployed locals. But recent experiences show that ethnic identity does hardly flourish within a definite geographical boundary to the satisfaction of all. Jharkhandis are Jharkhandis without economic might. So is the case with Chattisgarhis. Hills in all states are neglected and the people residing in hills can be mobilised on the single issue of deprivation. CPM that boasts of its organisational invincibility in almost all districts of Bengal, has failed to even make its recognisable presence felt in the hills of Darjeeling. In many ways Bengal’s Gorkha problem resembles Sri Lanka’s Tamil problem. And the original sinners are the British rulers. But those who have taken the mantle from the British have not basically changed the old course as also the colonial mindset while making some minor adjustments here and there. But cosmetics cannot buy peace for long because more and more people now realise how they are being marginalised without any future. But this marginalisation is universal, having a broader context—globalisation.

In truth India’s fractured communist movement ignored the sensitive issues of caste, religion and ethnicity in the past with the assumption that these feudal obscenities would wither away automatically because of higher development of productive forces. But that has not happened. Whenever there is an ethnic unrest

the powers that be try to pacify the aggrieved by way of pampering a section while doing everything possible to divide the movement from within. The ruling Marxists of Bengal are no exception.

As ethnicity does not exist in communist vocabulary, communist parties have no problems in a specific situation. Also, does not exist religious communalism in their core idea. And they have long been trying to combat majority communalism, somewhat vaguely, by wooing minority communal forces only to discover at their own peril in the end how both varieties of communalism got strengthened. Their passive approach to religion and religion-based communalism cannot deliver goods. And they have no option but to reap bitter harvest because of their exercise in escapism in respect of ethnicity.

Mass mobilisation against a common and bigger enemy in the yester years created an atmosphere in which backward and reactionary political tendencies didn't threaten social equilibrium the way they are doing now. Today's official marxists are neo-liberals—they agitate for investors, not for the victims of investment. They simply leave their self-congratulatory progressiveness quite loudly into History's unrushing tide. □□□