

An Exercise In Escapism

No matter what they call themselves—socialists, secularists, communists, leftists—rarely have they appeared so irrelevant in Indian politics. For the communists of India communism is a dead issue. They are back to square one, trying to redefine their Darwinian evolution, particularly after the demise of Soviet Russia. They do not disown capitalist Russia. Nor do they recognise it as their saviour. The muscovites of yester years have all become fanatic worshippers of American capital. They change with the winds of change for sheer survival. Their programmatic goal of achieving socialism through parliamentary (or extra-parliamentary) means is not even a distant reality. Maybe they know their political bankruptcy better than anybody else. So they have completely stopped talking about socialism and communism. But a lack of new ideas is haunting their politics of status quo-ism as well. The overuse of secular card sometimes becomes counter-productive as it is happening now. Despite their best efforts to sell communalism as the principal danger voters see their refusal to stick to old welfare ideologies as a betrayal of left's traditional socialist ideals. In a way the left finds it much more difficult than the right to cope with emerging economic realities. Their idea of secularism is so stale and naive that they cannot motivate people even when communal flare ups engulf society. Nor could they even engage the opposition. Their style of combating majoritarian communalism in effect strengthens minority communal passion which is no less dangerous. True, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its frontal outfits have a plan to polarise people on communal lines but the challenge offered by the so-called secular brigade is too superficial to reverse the up-swing of the right-wing march.

Quite expectedly the anti-christian violence in Orissa and Karnataka dominated the all important meet of National Integration Council held last month in New Delhi. But the 146-member council comprising union ministers, chief ministers, representatives of political parties and distinguished persons, has all along been a weak apology to check disintegration which is the main trend, not integration. They discussed a lot of things under the sun only to see no light at the end of the tunnel. While most secularists demanded banning of saffron establishments, particularly Bajrang Dal and Viswa Hindu Parishad, knowing full well Congress-led united progressive alliance government won't do that, legal luminaries, however opined against such banning as it won't solve the basic problem.

It makes sense to become philosophical at such meets. And prime minister Manmohan Singh had a nice occasion to become philosophical by identifying communal violence as an assault on India's composite culture. But what they call composite culture also stands in the way of proper integration for which they assembled in the first place under the NIC umbrella. So long as religious identities define cultural outlook composite culture being a heterogeneous amalgam of different social tendencies won't serve the purpose of integration. Sweet words cannot change the ground reality.

Minority community people do not believe in secular nonsense dished out by the leftists from time to time. They have been condemning communalism for

many years without really doing anything concrete to develop an all encompassing secular culture. In the absence of broad-based social movements seeking social and economic justice secular culture will remain a good area of academic interest to intellectuals for years to come.

As for anti-christian communal violence, it is a recent phenomenon. Hindu-Christian divide unlike hindu-muslim divide at no point of time posed any serious threat to peace and communal harmony. Having failed to marginalise the muslims the Sangh Parivar is now targeting the weakest link in India's social and economic chain. They are tribals—the original inhabitants of this land. Incidentally a large number of them are christians because of vigorous social welfare work done by missionaries. Weak they are no doubt. But they are not really isolated. Even Vatican will react after each bout of anti-christian violence in India. Strangely enough, secularists are somewhat reluctant to make the problem of anti-christian violence a national issue. Maybe, christian minority factor does not affect their vote market the way it does in case of muslim minority.

But the BJP is unlikely to gain much in terms of polarisation through this anti-christian rioting. Nor could anti-BJP forces stand to win minority confidence elsewhere because of their passive response to anti-christian violence. As they cannot aggressively pursue their re-conversion strategy among muslims, it is easier to target tribal and dalit christians. It is their long-term agenda, vote or no vote.

What is being overlooked in this secular-non-secular discourse is a massive onslaught of state and multi-national capital in Orissa's tribal belt. They are acquiring tribal land at the gunpoint for industrial houses, domestic and foreign. And Orissa remains a favourite destination for all. In a situation of communally charged atmosphere land acquisition becomes easier. After all secularists are concerned about communal question, not forcible acquisition of tribal land. The NIC meet was so casual that they didn't even agree on the term 'terrorism', apprehending the possibility of hurting minority sentiments. So they settled on 'extremism', hopefully to scuttle BJP's demand for more harsh measures to tackle 'terror'. □□□