

Addiction Politics

These days government is widely seen as the problem and rarely the solution, a sharp reversal of people's attitudes that prevailed even in the critical years of 1960s and 1970s. All parties project government as repository of popular hopes and ultimately no government, irrespective of its colour shows any sincerity to defend people's livelihoods. Electoral battle is increasingly becoming a dull affair because political parties try their best to avoid serious political and economic issues that affect the people most.

Recent electoral setback for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in a state or two does not mean the decline of Hindu right. Nor does it mean Islamic right will see a lesser evil in Congress. Whether one likes it or not, religious fundamentalism has still very strong appeal to broad masses because progressive forces, marxist or non-marxist alike, are not interested in fighting religious dogmatism. After all religion is no longer 'opium' to marxists, not to speak of non-marxist democrats and liberals. The way communists now-a-days pamper religious obscurantism, by encouraging their cadres and sympathisers to indulge in all kinds of religious rituals and festivals indicates among other things that their secular credentials make little sense in the practical field. For India's secularists secularism seems too vague to be defined. They never try to explain why communalism is on the rise despite their best efforts to propagate virtue of Indian secularism day in and day out. Also, their secular discourse ends in voicing empty rhetoric against the saffron club, as if there was no communalism before the emergence of BJP. In the Indian context no political party is free from communal virus, not excluding the communist parties. Earlier communists used to locate communalism in Congress though they were no less communal than the Gandhians in fielding candidates in election. In other words they too do not expect electoral success purely on the strength of their flag and ideological identity. And yet they think they could fight communalism by dishing out pious words. Not that Congress-ruled states are less vulnerable to communal culture. In India religious divide that continually generates communal animosity is not a recent phenomenon. Nor can it be wiped out simply by pretending that it all starts with the rise of BJP. It has been there for long. BJP works as a catalyst but while anti-BJP forces in most cases play with the gallery to establish their secular credibility to gain minority vote.

Come election season, 'secularists' under different political signboards compete with each other to express their chorus about the rising communal danger and dole out all kinds of promises to the minority communities. Sometimes the tricks sell, sometimes they do not. But ordinary people, irrespective of their religious belief and caste loyalty, are now more concerned about recession, not secularism. Despite what they call global meltdown, the government of India is all set to open insurance and banking sector to foreign companies threatening whatever remains of job potential in the core sector. All of them tread lightly in fighting the recession, with all its attendant dangers and misery. Recessions and 'reforms' create widespread human suffering. Ironically, minimising the suffering is not the top priority on any party's agenda. Their political pendulum swings between secularism and communalism.

All established political parties, regional or mainstream, have virtually deserted the poor and downtrodden. With international economic downturn showing no sign of improving, notwithstanding 4 trillion dollar bailout by America political crisis is sharpening everywhere with every passing day. Secularism, communalism, regionalism—nothing is working. As a result violence is becoming the only option for the marginalised. But most violent outbursts are spontaneous and they fizzle out even before gaining momentum for a wider perspective. In truth the authorities and major political parties seem to have developed a conviction that they could allow and tolerate violence, terroristic or otherwise, upto a certain point for their own survival. Barring the maosits (naxalites) no militant group has a long-term goal with a programme of revolutionary social change, to reach. This is one reason, maoist violence, not religious or ethnicity-based violence, is posing a serious threat to the establishment, notwithstanding their limitations and flaws. But maoist movement too has reached a plateau, with no hope for a major breakthrough in the immediate future. Meanwhile, where exactly established political parties stand on humanitarian grounds and economic justice remains something of a mystery. □□□