

Back to 'Basics'

People protest, somewhat spontaneously, but not against political parties, mainstream or otherwise, albeit parties, left and right alike, suffer from the crisis of confidence and the crisis of economic reality as well. Without the return of confidence their credibility will plunge further into dysfunction, endlessly producing perils and illusions for the people. As parliamentary election is a few months away, all are in search of issues that they could sell in a hopeless economic situation.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) despite its internal troubles could be a saviour for the registered secularists of India in the ensuing poll campaign. Having failed to project a comprehensive alternative the saffron brigade is now planning to revive the Ram Temple issue hoping that communal passion will save the day. If the BJP sticks to its Ayodhya gun, it will be easy for Congress and Left parties to bypass primary issues affecting the vast majority of people. Secularists have so far not succeeded in checking the rise of communal fascism in the Indian context because overtly secularists are not really secular. Rhetoric alone cannot create a secular atmosphere. What is wanted is better secularism, not less. After all communalism—or communal fascism as the left would like to dub it—does not grow in vacuum; it has an economic content.

No doubt fascism's symptoms are wafting in the air today, surprisingly masquerading as something else, threatening everything progressives stand for. Fascists everywhere constitute a mixed bag of national identities, cultures, religious bigotry and history. But they in general follow a model with mass appeal to obtain, expand and maintain power. Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, Franco's Spain, Salazar's Portugal, Papadopoulos's Greece, Pinochet's Chile, Suharto's Indonesia, Zia-ul Haq's Pakistan—all were fascist regimes with their own regional characteristics. And all are history now. But the rise of communal fascism in India has a different history in south Asian context. Communal divide in India is not a recent phenomenon. Nor can it be wiped out simply by producing dozens of secular election pamphlets on the eve of every election. Also, BJP is not the only communal party on Indian horizon. There is a little bit of communalism in each political party, no matter whether they profess secular rhetoric or communal bias. That religious fanaticism can be whipped up in a very short period itself illustrates among other things that communal passion is deep-rooted in society, it cannot be fought by only grilling the saffron establishment. Whether they like it or not, hindu-muslim divide is a permanent feature in Indian sub-continent. In the yester years the Congress Party utilised it to further its political interests. And now new players have emerged because of serious economic crisis the under-privileged face day in and day out. In truth many of the saffron flag bearers were once Congress followers. Communists have all along maintained double standard when it is the question of fighting communalism. In electoral politics—then election is the sole business they carry on—official communists do not hesitate to indulge in passive communalism if it suits their purpose.

Global recession has created a situation in which socialist ideals are getting currency once again. Even America's die-hard republicans say 'they are all socialists now'. Placards are back in East Europe, stating 'Down with Capitalism or Back to Communism', for the first time, since the collapse of communism 20 years ago. When the former Soviet Bloc vanished from the world map, they blamed it on socialism for the failure. As Chinese economy shows dangerous signs of bankruptcy they cannot identify socialism as the piece of villain because China is sinking due to failure of capitalism. But communists in India, being the ardent promoters of capitalist growth, rather multi-national sponsored growth strategy, are less enthusiastic these days to talk of socialist cause for the oppressed humanity. They are happy with their world of secularism, whatever it means in real life. They always review national and international scenarios against the backdrop of electoral gains or losses. And in electoral battle communalism—or for that matter secularism—will continue to play a crucial game for years to come. The reason is simple—foot-soldiers are easily available for stoking communal passion and violence.

Gone are the days of unregulated market. State intervention is now essential for survival of corporate giants. Even right-wingers are not averse to the idea of introduction of limited welfareism which they earlier opposed. Strangely, the leftists of India are yet to make a case out of welfareism in the changed global context. There are so many new areas to explore and yet the marxist left plays it safe by continually highlighting the danger of communalism without really attacking the economic roots that sustain communal politics.