

Voices of Conscience

The whole country is watching—the opposition opera. Indian parliamentarians are the strange offspring of east and west cultures, quite often not so remarkable, but always possessing a unique wisdom of escapism. Even Ms Mayawati is now talking about price rise, with a rider, of course. As millions of her very own constituency are outraged, she has asked her MPs in both houses of parliament to attack the government on the ‘spiralling prices’ without showing any inclination to cross the line. In other words she is not in favour of toppling the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government. Not very long ago she bailed out the Gandhi-Singh dispensation on the same issue during the cut motion in budget session. Opposition parties including left parties look too eager to project themselves as ‘voices of conscience’ as they demand a debate on the thorny issue while the Yadav caste-lords of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh who unconditionally support the government without enjoying the privilege of ministerial berth in the second UPA administration, are just echoing Mayawati’s strategy—rather a strategy of inaction.

Prices of essential commodities and food items have been rising for the last few years in arithmetic progression. And all political parties have virtually accepted this phenomenon as one more natural calamity which cannot be tamed without the magical wand of God. But omnipotent market god is not obliging them. While wheat rots in the open costing the exchequer millions of rupees in wastage, whatever remains of public distribution system is on the brink. What they call food inflation seems to have reached a critical point and yet there is no food riot. What one can think of is more starvation. Almost a famine like situation in some tribal belts. There is a possibility of food movement because the lives of the marginalised are being shattered, millions are suddenly finding their confidence in the government really shaken. The spectacular rise of communist left in Bengal had its seeds in the food movement of the early sixties. And yet they are not reacting the way they should. Not even the far left.

Right to food is equated with right to life. And it’s a universally accepted right. All their noises about price rise finally boil down to the demand of more grants from the centre for development in ‘backward’ regions. But the term backward is a misnomer. Then there lies a ‘popular’ criteria to describe any area as backward if there is any symptom of naxalism. So Mayawati’s party—Bahujan Samaj Party—would demand inclusion of Mirzapur and Chanduli districts in Uttar Pradesh under the special list for the development of naxal-hit areas. Grant is a good area of loot and non-accountability. It is not going to address the problem of price rise. On the contrary it may blunt the edge of mass anger that may erupt

anywhere anytime under any pretext because of suffocating atmosphere `people are being forced to live in.

After secular hoax the worst thing that has happened to the margina-lised of this hapless country is the emergence of so many regional satraps under the banner of the oppressed. In reality they run their fiefdoms as princely states of old British days. They have narrow political vision with obnoxious world outlook and after sometime they get easily coopted into what is called mainstream.

Unless they change the course of economic management, the possibility of which seems remote, it is next to impossible to control price rise. After all de-control is the buzzword, not control. Less government is what they want, not government intervention.

Petroleum minister Murli Deora while defending the hike in petrol and diesel prices which is mainly responsible for cost-push effect, said the impact of increase on the economy was so minimal that opposition parties had no case to agitate. Finally they agreed to pass a resolution on the issue in both houses of parliament just expressing concern at the initiative of the Union Finance Minister.

They need 'growth rate' to sustain and 'growth' needs price-rise. What matters in their calculation is Indian corporate power that looks global at the moment. As per the latest estimate of global accounting firm PriceWaterhouse Coopers 2220 Indian companies are likely to go global in the next 15 years. Also, 'Indian MNCs' will outnumber those from China.

Today millions are in a completely hopeless situation. And most of them feel powerless and don't know what to do. Many thousands desperately want to take to streets but have been discouraged and reduced to passive onlookers by the so-called people's representatives.

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