

Ideas Are Timid

Memory is short or maybe not. Are people better off than they were five years ago? This is, for better or worse, the fundamental question of Indian politics today. With election season getting hotter everybody is talking about change. These volatile times have put the onus on poor voters to focus on complex national and international systems more than ever. But they simply do not know where tomorrow will take them. The unprecedented financial crisis of 2007-08 which is described in various ways by political leaders and managers of businesses everywhere, and with more certainly in store for 2009 and beyond, is one of the great calamities of modern neo-liberal capitalism. And yet this point is being ignored by all, left and right alike. They seek the mandate for change without addressing the problem. The marxist left, CPM to be precise, mocks at itself by hawking, just on the eve of the poll, its alternative policy framework to be incorporated in their common minimum programme if their idea of third front government gets materialised.

Whether their four-point formulation will work in the post-poll bargaining scenario is a different matter but they look too optimistic to have their way without realising the fact that for them the world is not really getting 'smaller' and 'flatter'.

There is nothing new in the so-called alternative policy framework. No doubt secularism tops the agenda. In their secular world economic content doesn't matter as if everything is happening in vacuum. The message is simple : grill the saffron establishment and cultivate sympathy from the minority community. The bad news is, on a business as usual turf, the problem of communalism is not solvable. The virus of communalism is less effective in areas of mass uprising. Then the marxists have virtually abandoned the path of mass agitation because their pro-people approach, if there is any, does not go beyond relief. As for social justice whatever it means, it is not really directed at a particular system that breeds injustice and inequity in the first place. They always talk about it in abstract and that makes little sense to the deprived and marginalised. The fourth pillar of their alternative policy orientation is independent foreign policy—an area in which they never showed independence, even of their kind.

During the hey days of Soviet era the sole purpose of their 'independent foreign policy' was how to defend Soviet foreign policy measures even by describing Russian aggressive act as socialistic. They never criticised China's sham internationalism while failing to take a concrete and clear stand on India-China stand off in respect of border war of 1962 and Tibet. Independent foreign policy that the marxist left talks about every now and then is not really independent. Their independent India doesn't represent Indian interests as it is owned by outside interests. Anti-American stance which is being equated with anti-imperialism is just skin deep and for all practical purposes it in no way affects the American imperial design in the sub-continent. Even the concept of non-aligned movement that was once billed as the middle path, supposed to be equidistant from the two rival super powers doesn't figure in their discourse any more.

After Nandigram and Singur whether their pro-people gossip in the form of alternative policy framework can win the support of the vast majority of the poor is anybody's guess. Then manifestos are produced for the purpose of electoral battle and after election they lose their relevance and significance. With friends like Chandrababu Naidu, Jayalalitha and Deve Gowda, they cannot really offer an alternative economic model of development without which whatever remains of their pro-people image is likely to suffer further.

The so-called marxist dream—third front government—is one way to tell the Congress that they are too eager to join any Congress-led coalition after the poll though they missed the unique chance in the late '90s when the late V P Singh initiated the move to install a non-Congress non-BJP government at the centre. May-be, it is too late to dream of another historic chance at a time when they have no idea about what is going to happen. □□□