

Rise of Hindu Fundamentalism in India

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Islamic fundamentalism has been a topic of discussion worldwide in the decade of 1990, in general, and after September 11, in particular. Hindu fundamentalism, however, has gone, meantime, almost unnoticed internationally. The recent Hindu-Muslim riots, last February, in the Indian town of Ahmadabad over the question of Babri Mosque, leaving over 800 dead, yet again mirrors the growth of Hindu fundamentalism in India.

Ahmadabad riots were second biggest Hindu-Muslim riots in ten years. The issue was the same. Building of a Hindu Temple in place of Babri Mosque in Ayodhya. In 1992, historic Babri Mosque was razed by the Hindu fundamentalists leading to worst ever Hindu-Muslim riots since the partition of India in 1947. Over 3000 were killed in 1992 riots.

Hindu-Muslim riots are just one aspect and expression of this phenomenon. Saffron politics, as Hindu fundamentalist politics is commonly refereed in India, has brought Indian working class to a dangerous end. Not only Muslims, who constitute 11 %, but Christians and Harijans (low caste Hindus) have been a permanent target of Saffron politics.

The nuclear blasts by Hindu fundamentalist government of BJP in 1998 has created a permanent threat to peace in the South Asian region as following these blasts, Pakistan went for nuclear blasts as well. Uneasy relations between these two neighboring countries have twice put these two countries in a war-like situation since these blasts.

Repression against Kashmiris, big attacks on civil liberties and working class are salient features of the present Hindu fundamentalist government led by BJP.

WHAT IS HINDU FUNDAMENTALISM AND ITS SOCIAL BASIS:

Hindu fundamentalism is also a non-scientific movement aimed at rolling back the wheel of history, defying all social and material factors.

It is a political phenomenon that stands for creating a pure Hindu state in India. It wants all the non-Hindus to embrace Hinduism. It practices organised violence. The family of Hindu fundamentalist groups and parties is known as Sangh Pariwar. Most important and biggest family member is RSS. BJP, currently heading the ruling coalition in India, is a political wing of RSS.

Hindu fundamentalism has features of fascism as well as Islamic fundamentalism.

Unlike Khomenis and Talibans, BJP government is not imposing dress code on women, sports and cultural activities. But like Muslim fundamentalists and fascists, it organises armed gangs, preaches chauvinism, it is reactionary and anti-minorities.

It's social base is the same as that of fascism and Islamic fundamentalism i-e petty bourgeoisie and those who have fallen from the ranks of petty bourgeoisie into the ranks of proletariat and semi-proletariat. Also, sections of the proletariat that are newly formed and yet not equipped with class consciousness .

This fact is reflected by the election results for BJP. For instance BJP has traditionally been strong in the most backward provinces of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh while it has never been able to sink mass basis in West Bengal where an elected communist party is in power for over two decades.

RISE OF HINDU FUNDAMENTALISM:

The Hindu fundamentalism registered a dramatic growth from 1984 onwards. BJP that could hardly win two parliamentary seats in 1984-general elections, was able to bag 88 seats in 1989. In 1996, BJP emerged as the biggest party but failed to muster support of the majority in the parliament. First BJP government was dissolved after 13 days. In 1998 and 1999, BJP again emerged as biggest party and is in government at the head of a 25-party coalition.

This phenomenal rise in less than 15 years owes to the bankruptcy of Indian capitalism as well as Indian left.

Religion and ignorance are concomitant. Ignorance is a product of poverty. Capitalism has offered nothing but poverty to Indian masses. Over 30 per cent Indians live below poverty line. Over 50 per cent are illiterate. These objective conditions were ripe indeed for the growth of religious fundamentalism.

Following national independence in 1947, India was ruled most of the time, until 1996, by Congress-party that led the independence movement against British imperialism. Congress is a traditional party of the Indian bourgeoisie but the fact that it led the independence movement gave it a great authority among Indian masses as well. The economic policies of Congress were aimed at promoting and safeguarding the Indian capitalism and bourgeoisie through its strong trade and tariff policies that closed Indian borders to multinationals until 1991 when Congress government led by Narsima Rao introduced the policies of trade liberalisation thus opening Indian market to multinationals. The reason was: during Cold-war period India aligned itself to USSR. The New World situation forced India to open borders for western capitalists. Also, industrially backward India was not able to compete in the world market, to develop and modernise its industry, it needed to open its borders to multinationals. Meantime, the inability of the Congress over period of four decades to solve the basic problems of Indian working class was making it unpopular among Indian masses.

A section of the bourgeoisie was hit by the so-called economic reforms. This section turned to the BJP. Because, BJP was not merely anti-Muslim. It was also anti-Christian and anti-West as Christian missionaries come from West.

Once India turned to West for economic rescue; it had to implement the IMF-World Bank policies. The IMF-World bank dictated policies brought more poverty and misery to Indian masses. Disenchantment grew among the masses. The inability of the Indian left to offer itself as an alternative to Congress let BJP cash the situation. The BJP grew by leaps and bounds.

INDIAN LEFT AND BJP:

Following demolition of Babri Mosque, Communist party of India organised a peace and reconciliation march. It was a 300000-strong march. A big success. The next election in this troubled town was won by the CPI. That shows the potential of the left as an alternative to both Congress and BJP.

But invalidated by its Stalinist two-step theory and parliamentary politics, Indian left has never been able to exploit its potential.

The mainstream Indian left is represented by Communist party of India (CPI) and Communist Party Of India Marxist (CPI-M). CPIM is a split from CPI in 1960s and today is the biggest communist party in India. Together, these two parties are today the third biggest party in the parliament. CPIM in the Indian state of West Bengal has the honour of being world's longest-serving elected communist party. These communist parties has been in power in the states of Kerala, Karnatak and Tripura. A big section of the working class is organised in the trade union wings of these two parties.

This strong base is held by these two parties since 1970s. But it never materialised into a mass base across India thus giving way to BJP.

In 1970s and 1980s, sticking by their Stalinist ideology, both CPI and CPIM were supporting Congress and Janata Dal (another bourgeois party) respectively. CPI and CPIM were expecting bourgeois democratic revolutions from these two parties. So blind and shameless was there support to Congress and Janata Dal that even bourgeois press would make fun of them by calling them as Communist party of Indra (CPI) and Communist party of Morar Ji (CPIM). Indra Gandhi and Morar Ji were leaders of Congress and Janata Dal.

The collapse of Soviet Union led these parties to further bankruptcy. He leadership became more and more right wing. Today these parties can be compared with so-called present social democratic parties of Europe.

At a time when BJP and Sangh Pariwar members were turning to anti-west demagogy, the communist government of West Bengal was trying to turn West Bengal into a safe heaven for multinationals.

It seems Indian bourgeoisie is not as scared of the growth of communist parties as these communist parties are themselves.

Time and again the mainstream Indian left has failed to fulfil its tasks with regard to building a mass party that may offer a radical working class alternative thus checking the growth of fundamentalism, an alternative to overthrow capitalism and feudalism.

RISE OF ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM:

Interestingly, the rise of Hindu fundamentalism was corresponded by the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan and vice versa. Both the phenomena have reciprocated and complimented each other. Anti-India demagogy by Pakistani Islamic fundamentalists, particularly their involvement, provides a fertile ground for the Hindu fundamentalists to propagate their anti-Muslim ideas.

An interesting fact is that the Islamic fundamentalists groups operating worldwide have not drawn in their ranks Muslims from India. Similarly, Indian Muslims have never been involved in Kashmir militancy. But they become a victim of both Muslim and Hindu fundamentalists.

WHAT NEXT :

Once in power, BJP became an obedient servant of the world imperialism. India, on the other hand also became an important investment centre for world capitalism following collapse of Asian Tigers, offering cheap and trained labour. A big investment, particularly, in computer industry has been a salient feature of Indian economy in recent period. The imperialist strategy is to create a middle class in India that could be capable of buying their goods. BJP has helped persuading this policy. A new middle class is also emerging following some development owing to foreign investment.

But in general BJP has been proved unable to solve the pressing economic problems facing working masses. This inability leads to its unpopularity. First BJP government became fast unpopular just in a period of one-year despite its nuclear blasts. But then Pakistan army through a war adventure in Kashmir provided BJP with an opportunity to win another election.

The second and current government is again in trouble. BJP's defeat in Uttar Pradesh state elections, a bastion of BJP power, just before Ahmadabad episode mirrors the growth enchantment against BJP. But Ahmadabad incident again divided a big section of the working class along religious lines.

The experience shows that unless an alternative is built and offered, BJP and its Saffron politics can not be defeated. The left possesses the potential to build this alternative. Besides CPI and CPIM, a number of other small left parties exercise influence in different pockets of Indian working class. Of late, CPI (Marxist Leninist Liberation), with a more radical stand than CPI and CPIM, has registered big growth in certain areas. It shows the gap on the left. Marxists in India have the duty to build left unity and then translate this unity into a radical mass alternative.

P.S.

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