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Left and communal problem: India (1925-47)

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Abstract

Communal disturbances broke out in Bengal over the question of victimization of some jute workers who had participated in a demonstration against the jute ordinance. Two workers had been killed and 40 injured in these disturbance. Subhas Chandra Bose had observed, "The strike breakers have fomented communal strife in order to put an end to the strike." In the annual session of Hindu Sabha at Nagpur, the leading communal ideologue V.D. Savaarakr pleaded in his address for a Hindu National Front' and appealed to communal minded person to boycott congress by stopping all kinds of monetary helps to it in running its affairs.

Keywords: Communal, victimization, demonstration, ordinance, appealed.

Introduction

As early as beginning of the 1920, M.N. Roy then a prominent leader of C.P.I., had drawn attention of the problems of communal riots and its adverse impact on class struggle. He suggested that the only remedy to communal divisions was class unity. This meant the bringing together of all working people belonging to diverse castes and communities in the struggle against imperialism. According to him, class unity through struggle against the oppressing classes was the only solution to the communal problem.

According to M.N. Roy, the upper classes of both the communities were trying to serve their own rights and privileges. Whereas the masses of both communities were exploited by the upper Muslim workers sweat in the same factory and peasants toil on the find the agents of the land but all of them are robbed by the landlords, the money lenders and agents of the imperialism.

Roy argued that setback suffered by the nationalist movement during post-Non-Cooperation Movement had given an impetus to the Communal conflict. Therefore, he advised re-organization of the nationalist movement with a programme of militant mass action. He suggested that the masses should be mobilized under the banner of nationalism on the basis of immediate economic demands. Agitation on economic lines, according to him would provide the safest on economic lines, according to him would provide the safest guarantee against communal tensions. One of the main planks in the nationalist platform, he further suggested, should be the protection for national and communal minorities.

The C.P.I. adopted several resolutions against communalism at its Kanpur Conference in 1925. It resolved that 'no one who is a member of any communal organization in India shall be admitted as members of the Communist party.' In the resolution on aims and objects it was mentioned clearly that the party shall consist of Communists who would pledge themselves to work for the part's objectives and that no one who was a member of a communal organization would be admitted as a member of this Party.

The Communists were trying to win over the Muslim masses through different programmes. Their aim was to influence and if possible to recruit class conscious and politically aware Muslims in their ranks. They published newspapers in different in order to reach different religious communities including Muslims. In Punjab, the Communists published Kirti in Gormukhi as well as in Urdu so as to be able to reach both Sikhs and Muslims.

When Communal riots broke out in Calcutta in 1926, the communists re-stated their non-sectarian position and explained the conflict as essentially a product of the class division within Indian society. A Manifesto drafted most probably by M.N. Roy and Evelyn Roy, was distributed in Calcutta. It argued that communal strife was privileged groups, of which the

office holding intelligentsia were the spokesmen and slum proletariat in the cities were the instruments. In countryside, too, communalism was seen as serving the vested enabled the British rulers to play on the mutual fears and suspicions of the two communities, and thus successfully pursue their policy of divide and rule. The solution to the problem, according to this manifesto, lay in class struggle. Within Indian society. A Manifesto drafted most probably by M.N. Roy and Evelyn Roy, was distributed in Calcutta. It argued that communal strife was privileged groups, of which the office holding intelligentsia were the spokesmen and slum proletariat in the cities were the instruments. In countryside, too, communalism was seen as serving the vested enabled the British rulers to play on the mutual fears and suspicions of the two communities, and thus successfully pursue their policy of divide and rule. The solution to the problem, according to this manifesto, lay in class struggle.

The Communists denounced communal antagonism in their periodicals *Langat* and *Ganavani*. As a result, their popularity suffered temporarily but they continued to make fervent pleas for social harmony between the two communities. So strong was their opposition to communal sentiments that the slightest concessions to communal feelings by a member of the party invited immediate expulsion.

In 1927, the Workers' and Peasants' Party (WPP) of Bombay issued a 'Mohurrum manifesto' appealing against a possible communal clash between Hindus and Muslims. It was declared that the party was duty bound to call up on Indian masses to maintain peaceful and fraternal relations among themselves during the forthcoming Mohurrum festival. The working masses of both the Hindu and Muslim Communities had nothing to gain by communal mobilization, which would only lead to the advantage of the exploiting masses. It was shameful and tragic that the Hindu and Muslim masses who were all exploited people would fight amongst themselves. It added that they must 'realize that the two communities together constitute a homogenous body and their suffering were common which resulted from serfdom and their social and political exploitation.

The 'Mohurrum Manifesto' declared "the WPP, the political vanguard of all exploited, considers its duty to advise the Indian masses not to participate in religious struggle and communal movement which the religious minded ambitious bourgeois politicians of Indian dream of and aspire to kindle on a countrywide scale. The communal movement will only create a disastrous division in the ranks of masses. The WPP firmly demanded the abolition of communalism.

The contents of a Central Committee meeting of C.P.I. held in 1927 are equally revealing. It carry following items having a bearing on their policy with regard to communalism: (i) Position of members of a Communist-Party who were members of a communal organization of were carrying on communal work to be considered; and (ii) statement on Hasrat Mohani's claim as being a Communist and communal leader at the same time.

S.A. Dange presided over the meeting on 29th and 30th 1927. The Central Committee took firm action against members who were associated with any communal organization. This problem of 'simultaneity' and dual membership was characterized a 'splintered consciousness.' Since Hasrat Mohani was asked to quit the Muslim League. But he preferred to resign from the Communist Party. Similarly, S.D. Hassan who was working for a communal paper in

Punjab was "dropped" from the party. K.N. Joglekar who was a member of the Brahmin Sabha was asked to resign from that position for the same reason. This was infact, the first occasion when a political party adopted such a resolute stand against communalism.

Subsequently, on 29 January 1928, the Workers' and Peasants' Party of Bombay, then a platform of communists, passed a resolution calling upon the whole nation not to be misled by motivated communal propaganda, and to realize that the interest of all the oppressed and exploited people did not clash. They appealed to people to sink, minor differences in the great task of obtaining freedom for all. Again around the same time (middle of January 1928), the Bombay Presidency Youth Conference, which had invited a sizeable numbers of important communist or radical leaders in its meeting, passed a resolution on Hindu-Muslim unity and the abolition of communal electorates.

Being fed up with the congress reformist politics and getting sick of growing communal strife in the post-non-cooperation phase during the twenties the revolutionary group, Punjab Naujawan Sabha, was formed by the workers of Amritsar in which all the different communities represented. Their primary objective was to shift the attention from 'communal programme' to economic issues concerning general masses. Their perception was that "communal programme" was the root cause of all communal clashes. Therefore, it should be shunned from public sphere.

The criticism of Nehru Committee report on the principles of the Swaraj Constitution by the WPP Bengal and AITUC Sub-Committees had an identical approach on the communal problem Both the documents (of WPP and AITUC) dealt in detail with the communal question and observed that a solution was possible through a joint struggle of the communal question and observed that a solution was possible against imperialism, feudalism or an other forms of exploitation. All Parties Conference was held in Delhi on 12 February 1928 in which major participants were AITUC, WPP and CPI (Bombay) who represented the working class. A sub-committee was formed to delve into the problem of communal question and the creation of provinces based on linguistic boundaries. Its report was to serve as basis of the provisional draft from a left perspective of the principles of Swaraj Constitution.

The WPP of Bengal criticized Nehru report for giving excessive attention to the communal question. Their perception was that masses had no communal feelings and that such an unwanted discussion would only lead to creating communal consciousness among them. The All India Workers' and Peasants' Party adopted a provision in its constitution in 1928 making it, made it mandatory for "candidate" as well as full-fledged members to avoid joining any communal organization as well as not to participating in any communal campaign.

However, with the rise of an active left leaning youth cadre inside the congress, a large number of persons with a working class background were drawn into the movement. The communal tensions among workers were partly, a result of the recruitment pattern in the mills where the employer and the government had a tendency to play one section of the workers against another on narrow communal grounds. This became explicitly clear during the 1929 communal riot of Bombay. But the Communist trade union leaders are known to have participated actively in pacifying that riot. In

the same context Gandhiji (July 1931) had suggested that the communal problem may be solved only by substituting it by a feeling for the nation in which the role of minorities is recognized. This the advocacy for solution of the communal problem, however, suffered were convicted in the Meerut Conspiracy Case (1929-33) to long terms of imprisonment. The Progressive Writers Association (PWA) then having a considerable influence among Urdu speaking groups came out in late thirties opposition against Muslim league. They asserted that the League was not a broad-based political organization but represented rural aristocrats and urban nawabs. The league according to them was formed for safeguarding the narrow economic interest of these exploiting classes by fomenting communal prejudices. In this way, the revolutionary zeal of the masses was being deliberately diverted into inter-communal strife. The imperial policies of 'divide and rule' were served very effectively by communal strife. According to PWA, the task of the Muslim Left wing intellectuals among Muslims was to oppose the League. They were of the opinion that freedom could only be won on the basis of inter communal harmony. The PWA also tried to resolve the longstanding Hindi-Urdu language controversy, which had acquired communal overtones. The difference in script was artificial and the direct result of the 'divide and rule' policy of the colonial rulers. To resolve this problem they suggested that Roman script should replace both the scripts.

Jawaharlal Nehru had visualized the danger of communalism and its fascist implications for Indian society and future polity. He therefore initiated a programme of Muslim Mass Contact to prevent the gullible from falling into the trap of Communal ideology. K.M. Ashraf, a Communist was entrusted by the AICC to direct the Congress's Muslim Mass Contact Campaign to 'wean away Muslims from the fold of Muslim League'. Nehru in his election speech at Ambala on 16 January 1937 lambasted those who talked in terms of Hindu rights and Muslim Interests as "Job hunters who were guided by self-interest. Jawaharlal Nehru said, "We talk of approaching the Muslim masses. That is no new programme for us although the stress may be new. It must be remembered that the Congress has always had large numbers of Muslims in its fold and the most eminent (National) leaders of ours have been and are Muslims.

The programme of the Muslim mass Contact threatened the communal lobby amongst Muslims. Nehru could feel the left ward swing of the masses, which resulted on the one hand in thousands of Muslims joining Congress and on the other hand forced the League to adopt a radical anti-imperialist programme. This had created a under communal influence into active political struggle by organizing the joint struggles for the immediate demands of the Hindu and Muslim masses. They were of the view that 'Communal Unity' at the base would provide much broader base to work upon. The conference of the Congress Socialist party held at Lahore in April 1938 identified the Communal disturbances as the handiwork of reactionaries and deliberated upon preventing such occurrences in future by upholding the religious, linguistic and cultural rights of the minorities in accordance with the promises made in the Congress manifesto prior the elections. The Congress wanted identification of political and economic interests of all the different communities social base. It suggested the creation of a Volunteer Corps for the maintenance of communal

peace. It was hoped that there would be a mass movement involving all communities in the nation's anti-imperialist struggle.

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In 1937, a General jute Workers Strike was called by trade unions. Soon the strike spread to Barrakpore and Hoogly areas. The leadership of the Communists in this strike was firmly established. They organized meetings with workers everywhere. However Suhrawardy, The labour minister in Fazl-ul-Haq's government tried to exclude the labor organizations from mill areas by the use of section 144 of the Criminal Penal Code. This was sought to be Justified by arguing that Muslim workers were not happy with the Hindu leadership which naturally, whipped up communal feelings leading to attempts at organizing the workers on communal lines. In the Meghna North Mill, Muslim workers were attacked by the Hindu workers of the nearby Anglo-Indian Middle Mill.

On 16 November 1938, a clash broke out between Hindus and Muslims as Ramzan coincided with Durga Puja in September-October. The Anand Bazar Patrika blamed a few persons belonging to the local Communist organization for the communal trouble at Titograd. Reference was made to the formation by the "Red" group of Hindu Sangha. Throughout October, Nani Gopal Mukherji, a local CPI leader, convened meetings of the Titagarh branch of the Bengla Chatkal Majdur union (BCMU) in conjunction with the Hindu Sangha. Mukherji's involvement with the Hindu communalists did not have the sanction of the official Communist leadership. The CPI leaders were unhappy over his divisive tactics. The BLP-CPI leaders were of the opinion that a general strike would help remove the communal differences by focusing attention on economic issues.

In June 1939, again the communal riots occurred in the industrial city of Sholapur. It was believed by the Communists to be result of divisive policies and activities of Arya Samajists. They reported to have used very offensive slogans like 'Hindustan Hindooka, Nahin Kisi ke bap ka.' It goes to the credit Girmi Kamgar union led by communists that by swift and decisive intervention it saved the city from a riot on that occasion.

A.K. Gosh writing in National Front in January 1939 suggested a definite line of action for combating communalism; "that Congress must accept the reasonable demands of Muslims, special effort must be made to win over Muslims, Congress must purge its Hindu outlook and prohibit the semi-religious ceremonies at Congress functions. Bande Mataram must be given up and should not be used in Congress meetings. The insistence on the Vidyamandir Scheme almost created a crisis in Central Province. It is necessary to discard all doubts of Muslims. Nothing could be done which shows that congress wants to impose Hindu culture on them. Use of religious

terminologies be given up. Thus, the ideological struggle between mainstream Congress party and the Communists on the one the Muslim mass Contact movement of the Congress did contribute to creating an awareness among the political class the urgency of focusing on real issues rather than narrow parochial concerns.

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