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Communalism, Religion & Marxism

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The December 6 destruction of the Babri Masjid and the subsequent developments constitute a qualitative change in contemporary Indian politics. These developments represent an assault on the very foundations of modern, secular and democratic India that was established following independence from the British rule.

Communalism, consequent conflicts and hostility have been part of the Indian social and political fabric for over a century. What are the reasons that promoted this constant source of tension in our society to assume such a qualitatively new offensive today?

To investigate this it is necessary to recapitulate, briefly, certain aspects of the experience of the class rule in independent India. The Indian bourgeoisie and its leadership, Indian monopoly capital, due to the compulsions of its narrow social base had to align with the landlord sections in order to maintain its class rule in independent India. This in itself set in motion new set of contradictions that continue to determine the content and direction of India's socio-political and economic development. Such an alliance meant the inability of the ruling classes, on the one hand, to break decisively from the economic stranglehold of imperialism and, on the other, eliminate the vestiges of feudalism and its grip over Indian people and its economy. This latter aspect found expression in the continued narrowness of the domestic market despite the recent burgeoning of the middle class. Historically, nowhere had capitalism developed, or could develop, without decisively eliminating feudal relations of production. Such a compromise with imperialism on the one hand, and landlordism on the other, in independent India could not lay the complete basis for the flourishing of the capitalist path of development as required by the Indian bourgeoisie. All efforts at super-imposing capitalism on feudal structures did not and could not yield the desired result of eliminating the vestiges of feudalism. The consequent narrowness of the domestic market, as reflected in the

low levels of purchasing power in the hands of crores of people, as a result of the inability of the ruling classes to effect a thorough going agrarian revolution through radical land reforms, forced the bourgeoisie to look for external markets in pursuit of its capitalist path of development. This in itself paved the way for greater dependence of Indian economy on imperialist capital and technology in order to enable the Indian capitalist class to compete in the external markets. The consequences of this has been the new economic policy with all its implications for the Indian people. (for details see Marxist Vol X, 1-2, Jan-June, 1992)

Thus, the compromise with landlordism in the sphere of economy had led to a situation where the Indian bourgeoisie is attempting to overcome the contradiction arising out of such a compromise by, on the one hand, perilously increasing the country's dependence on imperialism and, on the other, transferring the burdens of the resultant crisis on to the shoulders of the common people.

While this has been one manifestation of this contradiction, there was another, an equally important one. The inability to eliminate the vestiges of feudalism meant, at the level of the super-structure, the existence and perpetuation of the social consciousness associated with feudalism. The feelings of communalism and casteism continued to dominate the social order. The efforts at super-imposing capitalism only created a situation where the backwardness of consciousness associated with feudalism was combined with the degenerative competitive aspect of capitalist consciousness.

The process of class formation as a consequence of capitalist development was, thus, taking place within the parameters of the existing caste divided society. It was taking place not by overhauling the pre-capitalist social relations but in compromise with it. It is precisely this aspect that explains the complexity of issues that effect and dominate Indian society today. The advancing class struggle, has therefore, to encompass the already existing and surviving caste oppression. This lies precisely in the overlapping commonality between the exploited classes and oppressed castes in contemporary India.

Thus, at the level of the superstructure, feudal decadence was combined with capitalist degeneration to produce a situation where growing criminalisation of the society, coexists and grows in the

company of caste and communal feelings, which are exploited by the ruling classes for their political-electoral purposes.

This particular manifestation of the contradictions set in motion after independence, lays the objective basis on which the present concerted offensive by the communal forces has been mounted. The discontent amongst the Indian people, as a result of the crisis of the system, accumulated over the years, is growing. Discontent is affecting also the expanded and vocal middle class, drawn more from the former exploiting classes rather than from the upward mobility of the exploited classes. The domination of the consciousness of the exploiter classes combined with discontent provides fertile soil for the growth of communal ideology. Exploiting this discontent and on the basis of the perpetuation of backward consciousness, the communal forces are able today to divert this discontent into communal channels in pursuit of their political objective.

The CPI(M), particularly since the end of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s, had constantly highlighted the growing crisis in the ruling bourgeois landlord class order. The CC meeting in May 1990 had noted : "The situation facing the country and the people is indeed very grave. The communal challenge, the separatist challenge, are combined by an intensification of the conflicts in many parts of the country. Even the exercise of the fundamental right of franchise is becoming increasingly more difficult.....the criminalisation of politics, the unbridled use of muscle power in running the daily administration, the degeneration of the law keeping forces...are manifestations of the deepening crisis of the bourgeois-landlord class rule."

Subsequently, the central committee and the 14th Congress of the Party had concluded that the bourgeois-landlord class rule had never before come under such a combined stress and strain. Both in its range and depth the crisis of the class rule had become very intense.

It is precisely the discontent amongst the people generated by this crisis that the communal forces seek to divert to achieve their political purpose. A conclusion of seminal importance that the 14th Congress arrived at was that the future of India is dependent upon whether the communal forces succeed in channelising this discontent for their purpose, or whether the Left forces are able to

channelise the discontent into the democratic mainstream leading to a change in the correlation of class forces favourable for People's Democracy. It is precisely this choice that defines the cross-roads at which our country stands today.

The communal forces have been able to mount such an offensive, in today's circumstances, precisely because they have been able to achieve a certain degree of success in diverting people's discontent, on the basis of an inflammatory propaganda and hate campaign, that went virtually uncontested (barring the left) for nearly a decade.

The CPI(M) and the Left forces, had all along warned Indian people and secular bourgeois opposition parties of this danger. Particularly since the middle of 1988, the CPI(M) had posed the struggle between two lines - one of all-in unity including the BJP against the Congress(I), as advanced by some bourgeois opposition parties, and, the other, of unity of left and secular forces opposed to both the BJP and the Congress(I) - for achieving the objective of defeating the Congress(I), then led by Rajiv Gandhi. It is today a matter of history that many bourgeois opposition parties did not heed such warnings by the CPI(M), only to realise, to their own detriment subsequently, its correctness. Notwithstanding this however, it must be realised that the secular opposition parties also represent the same bourgeois-landlord classes and hence vacillate on all such struggles against the manifestation of backward consciousness, precisely because of their own class nature. But, the crucial point is that while the BJP and its affiliates openly proclaim the communal banner for their political purpose, the others vacillate. This marks a crucial difference in today's context, as we shall see later.

The significance of the tactical line evolved by the Jalandhar Party Congress in 1978, and pursued by the CPI(M) since then in this context must be reiterated. The essential element of this tactical line is the following : on the one hand utilising the conflicts amongst the bourgeois-landlord parties to advance the people's interests towards a change in the correlation of class forces favourable for a Left and democratic alternative, (ever conscious and vigilant of the vacillations of the bourgeois opposition parties) and, on the other, to sharpen the class struggle. This, essentially, constitutes the basis for the current tactical line being pursued by the Party.

It is by diverting the discontent generated by the crisis of the

bourgeois-landlord class rule, that the communal forces are able to mount such an offensive today to make a bid to capture state power. In other words, the extreme right reactionary sections of the ruling classes today are making a bid for state power. They are doing this by utilising fascistic techniques and methods of propaganda. (For details P.D. January 17, 1993)

However, an important difference between the situation in Germany, on the eve of fascist ascendancy and the current situation in India must be noted. Dimitrov, in his address to the Communist International in 1935, had pointed out that the ruling class in Germany, the German monopoly capital, as a whole, moved away from the existing form of class rule- from bourgeois democracy to an open terroristic dictatorship. Secondly, the threat of the proletarian revolution was much stronger in Germany then and the fascist response of the German monopoly capital was to thwart this. In India today, the ruling classes as a whole have not yet come to the conclusion of abandoning the present form of parliamentary democracy, notwithstanding the severe stress and strain that it is under. On the other hand, the threat of the immediate seizure of power by the proletariat is not on the agenda today. Finally, this is also because the stage of the revolution in India is democratic, while in Germany it was Socialist.

These differences are crucial. What we are witnessing today is the attempt by the extreme right-wing sections of the ruling class to make a bid for state power by diverting popular discontent utilising fascistic methods and techniques.

In the pursuit of this objective, the communal forces have adopted a two pronged strategy. On the one hand, they seek to generate a sort of a monolithic unity amongst the vast diversity within the community of Indians embracing Hindu religion, and, on the other, they generate hate against an enemy outside of the Hindu faith, i.e. the Muslims. The entire propaganda mechanism and techniques unleashed by them is to achieve this dual strategy.

In fact, the ideological foundations for a Hindu Rashtra, were laid in the 20s by V.D. Savarkar. It was later adopted and an organisational structure provided for this by the RSS after its foundation in 1925 and particularly, in the period of the late thirties when the British inspired communal divide was exploited to the full. (For details see,

Sitaram Yechury, P.D. March, 14, 21 and 28, 1993).

ROLE OF IMPERIALISM

This offensive being mounted in India today, co-incides with the rise of religious fanaticism and neo-fascist forces all over the world. The dismantling of socialism in the USSR and Eastern Europe had led to a situation of very bloody civil war conditions raging in that part of the world. The gravest example being Yugoslavia. But, the common feature in all these countries, has been that the mass popular discontent is being diverted by these forces to achieve their political ends. In the absence of a working class movement, based on the revolutionary ideology of Marxism-Leninism, popular discontent is finding expression in right-wing neo-fascist forces in West European countries, especially Germany and France.

Imperialism, all along, had utilised such forces in its pursuit of dismantling socialism. Even in the former USSR, extreme ethnic chauvinistic and religious fundamentalist forces were directly aided and abetted by imperialism to achieve this purpose, especially in the Baltic and the Asian republics. Imperialism, true to its character, has had no compunctions in utilising such forces to achieve its political objectives. USA today, finds a strong and dependable ally in the theocratic Muslim fundamentalist state of Saudi Arabia. In its efforts to retain and strengthen its global hegemony, imperialism derives great mileage in destabilizing independent third world countries. By fostering such divisions, Imperialism, is able to gain the maximum advantage in the pursuit of its objective.

The recent developments in our country likewise also directly help imperialism in its objective of strengthening its stranglehold over Indian economy. The colossal loss, running into thousands of crores in the aftermath of the December 6 events will only help imperialism. Apart from this, it has now been documented, that all through the period of the cold war, when India pursued a policy of non-alignment, US imperialism had found as its ally the extreme right-wing sections of the ruling class, the then Jan Sangh, the predecessor of today's BJP. (see "Envoy to India" by Escot Reid, who was the Canadian Ambassador in the 50s.)

In many of the newly independent third world countries, following

the defeat of colonialism, the newly emerging ruling class under the leadership of the bourgeoisie were unable to complete the tasks of the democratic revolution. In many of these countries like in India, the emerging bourgeoisie had to compromise with the pre-capitalist elements to retain their class rule and leadership. The consequent crisis that this generated, and the resultant popular discontent, was likewise, utilised by reactionary forces aided by imperialism for its political advantage. Even in the case of Algeria, where through a popular democratic revolution the people had achieved tremendous gains, the fundamentalist forces were able to mount an offensive exploiting popular discontent to perilously threaten the gains of the democratic revolution itself.

Thus, we find that at the international level, the rise of neo-fascist and reactionary forces exploiting popular discontent to their advantage, in the absence of a revolutionary Left movement. In the third world countries, particularly, we find the growth of fundamentalist forces, - a result of diverting popular discontent consequent to the path of economic development pursued by ruling classes after independence. In both these cases, imperialism finds for its global hegemony, an ally in these forces and hence constantly aids and encourages them.

But to conclude that communalism and its fundamentalist ideology is the creation of Imperialism alone would be erroneous. It is an ideology of revivalism of internal reactionary forces appealing to backward consciousness amongst the people utilising the existing social contradictions. Imperialism utilises it in order to establish its world wide hegemony to destabilise and thus weaken all forces that oppose it. Imperialism used it to its advantage in the former socialist countries by aiding and abetting such forces of internal reaction. While fundamentalist ideology is a reactionary ideology, an ideology of revivalism, it is utilised by the exploiting classes in different times and different countries for advancing its political interests.

Thus, both the Hindu communalist offensive and the Muslim fundamentalist response today constitute a frontal assault on the very independence and sovereignty based on a secular democratic polity that defines modern India. Both these forces, in fact, feed each other. Their similarity in attacking the modern concepts of secularism, democracy and nationalism are indeed glaring. While castigating these concepts as alien to their respective religious cultures they however, have no compunction in borrowing the

modern 20th century concept of fascism. (For details of similarity see P.D. Jan 31, 1993). Both base themselves on a distorted definition of nationality, central to which is religion. Rejecting the historical experience till date of how religion has never been and can never be a cementing factor for any national formation, they openly advocate the predominance of religion, both in politics as well as in the ordering of the society. Thus, they reject, both the historical experience of the nation states and negate the scientific basis of nationality.

Communalism and its fundamentalist ideology is not the championing, far less the protection of religiosity. It is the utilisation of the religious divide between the people consciously engineered and perpetuated for a political purpose. It is an ideology based on a religious conflict for a specific political purpose. The British had used this for perpetuating their colonial rule and in the process elevated it to such an extent that they could succeed in partitioning our country and leave behind a scourge that continues to claim countless lives. Communalism hence, is far removed from religion. It generates and perpetuates hatred amongst religious communities as the basis for its existence and growth.

MARXISM AND RELIGION

In such a context, a great deal of controversy has always existed regarding the Marxist understanding of religion. The popular perception is the normally out of context quotation that "religion is the opium of the people". In fact, deliberately, the passage in which this statement finds place is never quoted in the full. Marx had stated : "Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, just as it is the spirit of the spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people." (Introduction to the critique of Hegel's philosophy of Right, 1844).

Religion, is the opium in the sense that it is as potent as opium is in creating an illusory world. For a human being who is oppressed, religion provides the escape for relief, it provides a "heart in a heartless world, a spirit in a spiritless situation." For this precise reason, it is the opium that the people require, to lull themselves into submission so long as they continue to remain in conditions which

appear outside of both their comprehension and control.

In fact Engels says that all religion "is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those forces that control their daily life"(Anti Duhring).

The Marxist understanding of religion is essentially integrated with its entire philosophic foundations. In pursuit of the simple question of what constitutes the real freedom of a human being and his consequent liberation, Marx proceeded to reject the Hegelian idea of the revolution of the mind as represented by Feuerbach, during his time, to come to a conclusion of seminal importance. That was: consciousness of a human being is determined by the social conditions and not vice a versa. "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary their social being that determines their consciousness"(Introduction to the critique of Political economy).

It is on the basis of such a fundamentally important conclusion that Marx says : "the basis of irreligious criticism is : Man makes religion, religion does not make man". In other words, like every other manifestation of human consciousness in terms of thinking and the consequent intellectual practice, religion also is the product of human social existence and not the reason or the cause for the same.

Such an understanding at once places religion, not as a thing in itself, not as something that exists by itself independent of the driving force of society in history. In fact, precisely for this reason, Marxism does not lay blame e.g. the persecution of Copernicus or that of Ekalavya on religion itself. It regards all these things as the natural manifestation of social forces and movements expressing themselves in religious terms because religion has been the dominant form of ideology throughout all recorded history. Progressive and reactionary ideas, the vested interests of the ruling class or the demands of an exploited class equally present themselves in the form of religion in men's mind so long as religion is a dominant form of ideology. Hence Marxism is able to take cognisance of the positive and progressive content of religious reform movements e.g Sufi, Bhakti movements but at the same time point out their limitations that they would not be able to effect the desired change in society by remaining only within the limits of the religious fold. Unless they are able to change the social conditions

that find expression for domination in a specific religious form, that particular form and associated oppression cannot be removed. Thus, while recognising the positive content as well as the limitations of religious reform movements, Marxism is able to place the history of religion also within the realm of the evolution of human civilisation and the corresponding human consciousness.

As Engels says, religion is a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces. In the beginning of history, it was the forces of nature which were so reflected. (In the Indian political context, this can be seen in the primitive forms of worship to the images of Surya, Vayu, Agni, Naga etc. The vedic rituals are essentially based on Yagna which is an invocation to Agni. But "side by side with the forces of nature, social forces begin to be active; forces which present themselves to man as equally extraneous and at first equally inexplicable, dominating them with the same apparent necessity, as the forces of nature themselves. The personifications, which at first only reflected the mysterious forces of nature, at this point acquire social attributes, become representatives of the forces of history. At a still further stage of evolution, all the natural and social attributes of the innumerable gods are transferred to one almighty God, who himself once more is only the reflex of the abstract man. Such was the origin of monotheism, which was historically the last product of the vulgarized philosophy of the later Greeks and found in the incarnation in the exclusively national god of the Jews, Jehovah. In this convenient, handy and readily adaptable form, religion can continue to exist as the immediate, that is, the sentimental form of men's relation to the extraneous natural and social forces which dominate them, so long as men remain under the control of these forces. We have already seen, more than once, that in existing bourgeois society men are dominated by the economic conditions created by themselves, by the means of production which they themselves have produced, as if by an extraneous force. The actual basis of religious reflex action therefore continues to exist, and with it the religious reflex itself"(Anti Duhring).

Hence, Marxism, when it imparts a scientific treatment to history is able to see the complex role religion played in great social struggles. The origins of Christianity can be seen in the role of mass revolts that marked the decay of the Roman empire. In the rise of Islam, Marx and Engels both drew attention to the internal struggles between the Bedouins and the towns people, the awakening of Arabian national consciousness for the liberation of the Arabian peninsula from the Abyssinians and to recapture the long dormant

trade routes. Similarly, the Protestant reformation was seen as a reflection of the complex class struggle taking place between the decaying feudal order and that of the rising bourgeoisie. "The ineradicability of the Protestant heresy corresponds to the invincibility of the rising bourgeoisie"(Engels, Feuerbach)

Religion, therefore, for Marx and Marxists is a product of the social conditions in which man existed and continues to exist. The history of religion, in one sense, is also a reflection of the history of human evolution. Hence, religion, like any other form of consciousness is not a thing in itself but a reflection of the real world. In so far as human beings are unable to comprehend the forces of nature or of society that appear to determine their day to day existence and guide their destinies, the need for creating an extraterrestrial supernatural force remains. Religion therefore, provides for the human being a sense of comfort, beauty and solace that he cannot find in the real life. At the same time, the class struggle that is taking place in society at any point of time can also find expression in religious terms, as long as religion remains the dominant form of ideology.

In so far as it finds an ideological expression of the concrete class struggle taking place at a point of time like all other ruling class ideology, it becomes an instrument and justification for the exploiting class. As Lenin had said : "Religion is one of the forms of spiritual oppression that everywhere weighs on the masses of the people, who are crushed by the perpetual toil for the benefit of others, and by want and isolation. The impotence of the exploited classes in the struggle against the exploiters engenders faith in a better life beyond the grave just as inevitably as the impotence of the savage in his struggle against nature engenders faith in gods, devils, miracles and so forth. To him who toils and suffers all his life religion teaches humility and patience on earth, consoling him with the hope of reward in heaven. And to those who live on the labour of others religion teaches charity on earth, offering them a very cheap justification for their whole existence as exploiters and selling them at a suitable price tickets for admission to heavenly bliss"(Lenin, Socialism and Religion, 1905).

Hence, religion according to Marxism is both a necessary creation of the social conditions, at a point of time, and an expression of class exploitation at another, and an integral part of the ruling class ideology.

For this precise reason, Marx and Marxism alone, having understood the genesis, origin and the continued domination of religion on the human mind in a scientific manner, states with authority that the role of religion is contained and determined by the states of social organisation. And, for that precise reason, Marxism does not attack religion per se. Its attack is on the conditions that give rise to religion and the conditions that perpetuate the hold of religion on the people. Since religion is not a thing in itself, Marxism seeks to radically alter the conditions that provide the basis and perpetuate religion as an instrument of class oppression. Engels, in his famous argument with Duhring who had stated that socialitarian system has to abolish all the essential elements of religion, stated : "Herr Duhring however cannot wait until religion dies its natural death....He incites his gendarme of the future to attack religion and thereby helps it to martyrdom and a prolonged lease of life"(Engels, Anti Duhring).

Marxists are materialists. And as materialists they understand and comprehend the complex role that religion plays in a class divided society. And also how religion as a form of the superstructure continues and will continue to exist for a long period even after the establishment of a classless society. Its attack is not on religion per se but on the social conditions that give rise to religion and hence this determines its direction of activity. As Marx said "The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions. The criticism of religion, is therefore, in embryo the criticism of the vale of woe, the halo of which is religion"(Introduction to the critique of Hegel's philosophy of right).

This then is the Marxist materialist understanding and appreciation of religion. Its humanist content and at the same time its utilisation as a instrument of class rule have to be understood in its totality. A communist works to change the conditions that continues to give rise to the hold of religion and not attack religion per se because it is not and can never be a thing in itself independent of the social organisation of human civilisation. Lenin had asked the following question : "Why does religion retain its hold over the backward sections of the urban proletariat, over the broad sections of the semi-proletariat, and over the peasant mass? Because of the ignorance of the people, replies the bourgeois progressivist, the radical, and the

bourgeois materialist. And so, down with religion and long live atheism! - the dissemination of atheist views is our chief task. The Marxist says that this is not true, that it is a superficial view and narrow, bourgeois culturism. This view does not profoundly enough explain the roots of religion; it explains them not materialistically but idealistically. In modern capitalist countries these roots are mainly social. The deepest root of religion today is the social oppression of the working masses and their apparently complete helplessness in the face of blind forces of capitalism, which every day and every hour inflicts upon ordinary working people the most horrible suffering and the most savage torment, a thousand times more severe than those inflicted by extraordinary events, such as wars, earthquakes, etc. "Fear the gods". Fear of the blind force of capital - blind because it cannot be foreseen by the masses of the people - a force which at every step in life threatens to inflict, and does inflict, on the proletarian and small owner "sudden", "unexpected", "accidental" destruction, ruin, pauperism, prostitution, and death from starvation - such is the root of modern religion which the materialist must bear in mind first and foremost if he does not want to remain an infant-school materialist. No educational book can eradicate religion from the minds of the masses, who are crushed by the grinding toil of capitalism and who are at the mercy of the blind destructive forces of capitalism, until these masses themselves learn to fight this root of religion, the rule of capital in all its forms, in a united, organised, planned and conscious way"(The attitude of the Workers' Party towards Religion).

Thus, exposing the self-bestowed monopoly of upholding religion by the communal and fundamentalist forces is also an integral part of the struggle against existing social conditions whose transformation is what Marxists and the CPI(M) seek in India. Communalism in pre-independence India was generated and utilised by the British as a constant instrument of state power in their notorious divide and rule policy for maintaining the colonial order. It is in fact following the 1857 first war of independence when the Hindu-Muslim unity was demonstrated at its highest form that the British consciously engineered a policy of communal politics. The consequent separation of electorates on the basis of Hindu-Muslim divide, the partition of Bengal and the patronage given to the Muslim League etc. were part of the political agenda for continuing the colonial rule.

In post-independent India, the crisis of the bourgeois-landlord class rule that we discussed above leading to growing popular discontent was also sought to be overcome by the ruling classes by utilising the

deep communal divide. Instead of consciously working for the eradication of the communal poison, that continued to be perpetuated following partition, the communal divide was often utilised through vacillation and compromise for narrow political benefits. True to the character of the very class that they represent, the bourgeois-landlord parties have not consistently upheld the principle of secularism as the separation of religion from politics. In periods of acute crisis, which in the recent period can be seen from the mid 80s with the Rajiv Gandhi's new economic policy orientation, was also accompanied by compromising attitude towards both Hindu communalism and Muslim fundamentalism. The opening of the locks on the Babri Masjid/Ramjanmabhoomi site and the Muslim Women's Act reversing the Shah Bano case judgement in 1986 were crass examples of how compromise with communalism were affected for the ruling party's electoral aims.

However, such compromising positions and the open assault on modern India through the eradication of both secularism and democracy on the basis of a avowedly blatant communal platform, need to be differentiated. The latter's bid to capture state power represents, as we have seen, a qualitatively new stage in the assault on the very foundations of the existing polity.

The ruling class, however, also realises that to keep India, with its enormous size and diversity, united, such a communal agenda would not serve the purpose. The geographical unity of India needs to be maintained for the ruling classes in order to consolidate and strengthen its class rule. A communal divide like what the BJP is mounting today, also justifies the ideological foundations of separatist movements like Khalisthan etc. This can only act contrary to the interests of the leadership of the Indian ruling classes in their effort to maintain the geographical unity of the country. People's disunity can be encouraged to the extent that it does not cross the limit of posing a threat to the geographical unity. Such a disunity may well be useful in the short term for the ruling classes to divert their attention away from the real problems and thus mount the struggle for a class alternative.

Thus, we find representatives of the big business like Tatas coming out openly against such communal violence. But, at the same time, the ruling classes exercise their class rule through agents, which are political parties. When an avowedly communal party makes a concerted bid for state power sections of the bourgeoisie themselves

will vacillate and some will extend support to it. This is the precise situation in which the country finds itself today.

The spread of communal poison and the sharp polarisation taking place, creates the dangers, not only for the dismemberment of the country and lays foundations for a virtual civil war conditions, but also consciously and effectively disrupts the unity of the very toiling sections on whose unity rests the advance towards people's democracy. The rise of communalism, today, therefore, represents simultaneously the weakening of the unity of the basic classes on whose strength the struggle against the present class rule can be mounted. The struggle against the communal forces today is, at the same time, the struggle for maintaining the unity of these classes and to that extent, is an integral aspect of the class struggle.

It is under these circumstances, the CPI(M)'s tactical line is one of unity of Indian patriots in defence of a secular democratic polity on the one hand, and strengthening the struggle against class policies of the ruling class, which continue to impose further burdens on the people, on the other. It is this simultaneous conduct of this struggle - broad based unity in defence of the existing Indian Constitution and the strengthening of the class struggle on basic economic issues that can save India from the assault of fundamentalist theocracy.

India has to be saved in order to change it for the better. The CPI(M) Programme, adopted in 1964, had stated in unambiguous terms that the task of completing the unfinished democratic revolution rests on the shoulders of the working class led People's Democratic Front. The assault by the communal forces today, is to reverse whatever little that has been achieved through political independence in 1947 and since. The task of the communists is to preserve whatever has been achieved in order to advance for the future.