

BJP: A Reactionary Response

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Any discussion on the Bharatiya Janata Party must begin with the question: how is the BJP to be characterised? From 1986 what stands out about this party is its strident advocacy of Hindu majoritarian communalism. But in Marxist terms, while it is necessary to underline its communal features, that alone is not sufficient to define the Party's character. It would not be correct to see the BJP, as many analysts do, as a nationalist party which is right of centre.

The BJP is definitely a right-wing party, but it is distinguished by its reactionary communal platform. In that sense, it is different from ordinary conservative parties of the right. Classically, such parties of the right-wing are characterised by the open advocacy of the interests of the ruling classes and are defenders of the status quo. This stance differentiates them from other ruling class parties who disguise their class interests when putting out their party programmes and strive in varying degrees to build a coalition of support based on welfare state or social democratic prescriptions.

In contrast to the conservative right-wing parties, there is very often the phenomenon of the neo-right parties which are marked by radicalism i.e. they take to mass politics and launch mass movements with a critique of extant society which break the boundaries of the traditional right. The mass politics generated by such parties is primarily motivated by a reactionary-sectarian platform which targets an "enemy" - the other ethnic\religious community which is held responsible for all the problems of society. Le Pen's National Front in France registered growth mainly through its virulent campaigns against immigrants and projecting a French ultra-nationalism tinged with racism; the new parties in Germany are also making a dent in the Christian Democratic base with their chauvinist anti-foreigner appeal; in the middle-east, the parties of Islamic fundamentalism have their mass radical character whether it be the Khomeinism of Iran or the Islamic party in Algeria. Most of these parties flourish when societies are in acute crisis and the traditional ruling class prescriptions to run society have reached a dead-end.

The BJP has to be placed at this end of the spectrum in the Indian context.

THE ENEMY IDENTIFIED

In the political terrain of India, a conservative party of the right has no immediate foreseeable future. Given the mass poverty, the sharp economic and social inequalities and the compulsions of electoral politics, all bourgeois-landlord parties have to pay obeisance to the slogans of social equality and removal of economic disparities.

The BJP in its quest to function as a viable party of the right in the Indian political milieu has finally arrived at what it considers to be the key to success. Hindu nationalism articulated with an internal enemy - the Muslim minority - gives the BJP its communal character. Alongside this cutting edge to its platform, is the right-wing character of its economic policy - support to the liberalisation and privatisation drive. It is the combination of these two features which makes the BJP a unique political force at the national level - a right-wing communal party which represents the reactionary sections of the big bourgeoisie and landlords.

In arriving at this point in the evolution of the BJP, the party has been influenced and facilitated by external factors and also its own internal compulsions. The external ones can be defined as : the new stage reached in the crisis of the bourgeois-landlord system in the eighties which necessitated the turn away from the Nehruvian path by substantial sections of the ruling classes; the changes internationally, exemplified by the worldwide right-wing offensive and its ascendancy as seen in the Reagen era in the USA and the Thatcherite and Kohl regimes in Europe; the dramatic shift in the international correlation of forces with the events in Eastern Europe and the dismantling of the Soviet Union and the rise of religious fundamentalism in the third world as a whole in the eighties.

Internally, the BJP found itself at a dead-end with the 1984 general elections when it got just two seats in the Lok Sabha. Its very identity and existence seem threatened. The BJP had to reassess its basic programmatic and ideological outlook to chalk out a new strategy.

SEARCH FOR A POTENT PLATFORM

The BJP came into being in 1980 after the collapse of the Janata experiment. The resurrection of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in the form of the BJP seemed to be a qualitative transformation wherein the party seemed to mark a break from the old Jana Sangh-RSS ideology. This brief interregnum when the party adopted the plank of Gandhian socialism sat ill upon the RSS dominated cadres of the party. The Presidentship of A.B. Vajpayee (1980-86) saw the underplaying of the Hindu communal rhetoric and the attempt to broadbase the Party's platform by taking up the issues affecting the tribals, scheduled castes, the rural and urban poor. The trauma of the experience within the Janata Party and the controversy regarding dual membership (with the RSS) which ended the marriage resulted in the lingering effort to imitate the centrist bourgeois parties. The 1984 debacle put paid to these efforts. The phase of Indira Gandhi's appeal to Hindu votes and the strong reaction to her assassination, were seen by the BJP as the success of the Congress(I) in stealing its original platform and prospering from it. It must be recalled that the RSS worked to ensure the success of the Congress(I) in many areas in the 1980 elections.

METAMORPHOSIS IN HINDUTVA

The journey from a amorphous right of Centre bourgeois platform to the platform of Hindutva was systematically accomplished in the three year period 1986 to 1989. The Presidency of L.K. Advani coincided with this period. The transition was effected on the direction of the RSS with Advani as pilot. It was under Advani's stewardship that the links with the RSS declared. Hindutva defended and finally the Ram temple adopted as the Party's main plank.

What were the ingredients of the Hindu communal platform? Some of the issues were no doubt rooted in the traditional stance of the Jana Sangh and the RSS. The effort to project the party as the only nationalist force; the typical petty bourgeois ploy of advocating a third path which is neither capitalism or communist - part of Deendayal Upadhyay's "integral humanism"; the alacrity in picking up any issue which showed potential for rousing anti-Muslim feelings. All this was part of the ideological-political baggage bequeathed by the RSS and Jana Sangh to the BJP.

But the post-1986 phase showed a more aggressive approach to the old issues with the addition of new ones to the repertoire. The Meenakshipuram conversions saw the BJP lining up with the RSS and the VHP to raise the bogey of Islamic subversion of the Hindu samaj from within. The groundswell of support built up by the VHP on the Ram temple at Ayodhya was ultimately cashed in by the BJP after a three year period when in 1989 at its Palampur national executive session, it formally adopted the temple demand; the resurgence of separatist terrorism in Kashmir saw the vocal reiteration of the demand to scrap Article 370 from the Constitution; the infiltration of Muslim migrants from Bangladesh became the basis for whipping up anti-Muslim feelings while Hindu migrants are welcomed back. The Minorities Commission was condemned as appeasement of minorities.

All the above issues are woven around the central theme of targeting the Muslim minority as the enemy. The BJP thesis is put out as follows :

The BJP is against pseudo-secularism which it says amounts to "minorityism". Pseudo-secularism is the practice by all parties which denies the essentially Hindu character of the country and therefore pampers the minorities and appeases minority communalism for garnering votes. Genuine secularism requires recognition that Hinduism is the cultural essence of Indian society and its binding force. Advani set out this thesis in his first Presidential address to the National Council session in May 1986 : "Unfortunately, for many politicians and political parties, secularism has become only a euphemism for appeasement of minority sections which tend to vote en bloc". In the next Presidential address he called for rejection of pseudo-secularism and declared : "Truth is that for many politicians and intellectuals, secularism is only a euphemism to cloak their allergy to Hinduism."

The two pet terms pseudo-secularism and minorityism were utilised as part of the offensive against secularism and to cover up the BJP's advocacy of Hindutva and majority communalism. By the BJP's specious reasoning, only acceptance of Hindutva could make one a genuine secularist - what it calls positive secularism. Any defence of legitimate minority rights becomes minorityism. As for manifestations of minority communalism - they become useful grounds for championing majority communalism.

The success the BJP attained in putting out these distorted concepts has surprised many people. Why were these old slogans in a new garb so receptively responded to ? What gave these slogans its resonance among wide sections of the people?

In answering these questions, we must go back to the conjuncture of events which catapulted the communal agenda on the mainstream political agenda.

BOURGEOIS-LANDLORD CRISIS - A RESPONSE

The turning away of the ruling classes from the path of development framed in the days of Nehru elicited different responses from the political forces representing these classes. In the case of the Congress(I) - the Rajiv Gandhi regime symbolised the new outlook and values that were sought to be embraced. Liberalisation and market values were glorified. This phase of liberalisation floundered by 1988-89 with the economy in a deep state of financial crisis. Politically the retrenchment of the Nehruvian model led to increasing compromises on secularism and with the divisive forces who severely threatened national unity.

Faced with this systemic crisis, emerged the alternative put out by the BJP which advocated Hindutva as the basis for protecting national unity and to counter divisiveness; for abandoning the Nehruvian framework and advocating liberalisation - Indian style which is supposed to lead to building of a strong capitalist India under aegis of Hindu majoritarian interests.

It is a matter of conjecture how much of the bankruptcy and venality of the Rajiv regime helped the BJP gather significant support from the sections of the middle classes and the rural elites. But the quick disillusionment with the Congress of the Rajiv era sparked off the process of the BJP's resurgence. At first it was masked by the V.P. Singh/Janata Dal phenomenon which appeared to provide the secular bourgeois alternative, but the clear ideological alternative of the BJP thrived by initially utilising the broad anti-Congressism in alliance with the National Front and the Janata Dal.

At the outward level, the Bofors scandal brought out the venality of the new dispensation while the Shah Bano case served to expose the worst aspect of appeasement of minority communalism. The BJP cultivated the image of a clean variant of the Congress(I) within the system. Its claim of putting the "nation first" was supposed to be the guarantee against corruption and degeneration. As for the Congress(I)'s opportunist bouts of surrender to communalism, it went hammer and tongs at the unprincipled compromise with Muslim fundamentalism on the Shah Bano case but welcomed the Rajiv concession to Hindu communalism of opening the lock at the disputed site at Ayodhya.

For a substantial section of the middle classes, the spurring of the Rajiv dream was adequate to turn them to the BJP's false rhetoric, now that the Nehruvian framework no longer provided them a stable perspective. The promise of quick benefits through liberalisation were belied. The vicious attacks on national unity and the Hindu minority in Punjab and Kashmir reinforced the BJP propaganda that the minorities are being pampered. The frustration on the economic front after the arousal of glittering hopes coupled with the onslaught on national unity provide fertile soil for the BJP's distorted appeal on nationalism and secularism.

Whatever defence of secular values which were in place for this vocal strata, got breached dangerously with the Mandal Commission implementation ushered in by the V.P. Singh Government in August 1990. In the perception of this predominantly upper-caste educated sections, the Janata Dal regime represented a direct threat to their main avenue of advancement - education and jobs. This drove them to the anti-democratic position of denying the protection to be accorded to historically and socially oppressed sections. The anti-reservation movement provided the thrust for the BJP to win over large sections to its shrill temple campaign through Advani's rath yatra.

The year 1990 marked the culmination of the maturing of the Hindutva platform with its attendant response from significant sections of the middle classes and elite sections. The procession of retired and serving bureaucrats, military officers and intellectuals to the BJP underlined this shift.

BIG BOURGEOIS REACTION

Sections of the big bourgeoisie who were dismayed by the inept government of the National Front as seen from its class point, were prone to pro-BJP sentiments. The anti- Mandal feelings influenced these sections also. In fact the traditional sections of the big bourgeoisie such as the Marwari big business houses were deeply religious and supportive of Hindu interests, but they demarcated when it came to secular class interests and had always predominantly supported the Congress. The 1990-91 period saw the first major break. Advani on his first visit to Calcutta after the rathayatra was feted to lunch by the Birlas with top industrialists attending. A public entertainment programme followed in the evening with children from Birla-run schools performing. This public display of support and recognition was extended to the 1991 Lok Sabha elections, when for the first time a section of big bourgeoisie saw the BJP a credible alternative to the Congress(I). The supply of funds that followed found the BJP outstripping the Congress(I) in resources in many places especially since the latter was handicapped with being out of power.

This situation has not lasted long. There is a discernible shift back to the Congress(I) after the new economic policies initiated by the Narasimha Rao government. This restored confidence in big business circles about the Congress(I) regime and a consequent dampening of enthusiasm about support to the BJP. The big bourgeoisie now hankers for stability to facilitate the new economic policies. It sees the achilles heel of the BJP - the mish mash of economic philosophy which oscillates between naked support to big business and landlords interests to petty bourgeois critique of economic policy and opportunist slogans to retain popular support.

ECONOMIC POLICY

The BJP is for liberalisation and privatisation. This is clear from its policy pronouncements and actions in Parliament. Though the recent economic policy statement (adopted at Gandhinagar in May, 1992) has tried to muffle this naked stand in a lot of verbiage, the BJP stands for :

Freeing All Controls On Monopolies : The BJP 1991 election

manifesto called for drastic dilution of the MRTP Act i.e. raising the ceiling defining monopoly houses from Rs. 100 crores to Rs. 1000 crores. In line with this the BJP voted for virtual scrapping of restrictions on monopolies in the MRTP amendment bills moved by the Rao government last year and ensuring its passage.

Dismantling of the Public Sector : The BJP is for dismantling the public sector in some limited areas like defence and certain infrastructural industries. It wants disinvestment of public sector units' shares. In fact after the recent scandal about the first round of disinvestment when the shares were sold at incredibly low prices, the BJP came forward to bail out the government with the suggestion that a disinvestment corporation be set up so that the sale of shares can be conducted properly.

Privatisation of Banks and Finance Sector : The BJP wants the nationalised banks restricted and private banks encouraged. In line with its bogus Swadeshi slogan it now demands restrictions on foreign banks and encouragement to private Indian banks.

Hostility to Land Reforms : Though the BJP talks of land reforms in a very perfunctory fashion, it has been notably hostile to the implementation of land reforms and the record of the BJP-run governments in this respect is dismal.

The retreat from the Nehruvian path of economic development by the Congress(I) is seen as a vindication of the BJP's backward economic philosophy. For the Jana Sangh-RSS stream has been consistently opposed to the concomitants of the Nehruvian model of planning, public sector and rapid industrialisation from the right-wing point of view. The BJP spokesmen in Parliament like Advani and Jaswant Singh have gone on record welcoming the new economic policy by stating the Congress(I) is only implementing what the BJP had been long advocating.

It is evident to all perceptive observers that the BJP does not differ from the Congress(I) in its basic economic policy positions. It has however, in the past few months tried to sell the slogan of Swadeshi taking the cue from the RSS campaign to oppose the penetration of multinationals. The absurdity of propagating Swadeshi by calling upon people to patronise Indian big business and not

multinationals has confused even the BJP cadres when Indian big bourgeoisie is eagerly welcoming collaboration with these very multinational corporations.

It is a pedestrian and hollow attempt to talk of "liberalisation with self-reliance" as the BJP has done in its Bhopal national executive meeting in August, 1992 when the very process of liberalisation will undermine self-reliance in the Indian situation.

The hallmark of the BJP's economic policy is ambiguity and obfuscation of the real economic issues before the people. The economic policy document adopted in May 1992 is grandiloquently titled a Humanistic Approach to Economic Development (A Swadeshi Approach). It does not talk of concentration of wealth in the hands of the monopolies, nor the concentration of land in the hands of the landlords; it does not advocate taxing the rich, neither does it want any regulation of the corporate sector. It spends pages talking of farmers but is unable to write even one sentence on the roots of agrarian exploitation. It seeks to mask its class stance by such opaque and meaningless passages as :

"This then is the credo of the BJP. Rapid economic development with full employment and reasonable stability in price level - through 'Swadeshi' and 'Swalambhan' judiciously combined with self confidence.....We believe that the development of the nation depends on the mobilisation, galvanisation and optimisation of national will, national potential, national energy, national resources, national self-confidence, national pride, national effort with people's involvement". No amount of 'national' commonsense can decipher what this means.

The BJP President MM Joshi carries on in the same vein : "We must liberalise, industrialise and modernise - but it has to be done in the Indian way."

The dismal record of the BJP run state governments on the economic front stems from the pro-big business-landlord-trader bias of the BJP. A detailed examination of these government's economic performance is outside the purview of this article.

The BJP represents a reactionary counterforce to the opposition mounting against the new economic policies. The BJP's opposition to the November 29 industrial strike and June 16 general strikes, the significant refusal of the RSS-directed BMS to join the united protests are graphic illustrations of its right-wing approach.

PSEUDO NATIONALISM :Distorted Defence of National Unity

The BJP's concept of nationalism has not outgrown the old Jana Singh formula of Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan. The concept of Hindu Rashtra of RSS is now set out as the cultural concept of Hindutva.

The BJP has been aided in projecting its Hindu majoritarian nation idea in the decade of 80s when serious threats to national unity developed. The growth of secessionist forces and fundamentalist ideas among the minorities in Punjab and Kashmir and earlier in the North East have been the most serious challenge to national unity since independence. The BJP and the Hindu communal forces have responded to this threat by taking the offensive for Hindutva. In contrast to the working class and democratic response which defends national unity while recognising the cultural and national diversity of India, the BJP stands for defending national unity by imposing a Hindu majoritarian state. Instead of seeing the root-cause of the strains on national unity within the undemocratic state structure which denies federalism and fosters uneven development due to capitalist growth, the BJP is actually for a more centralised authoritarian structure.

AGAINST FEDERAL SET-UP

The BJP has been hostile to any restructuring of Centre-State relations which leads to more states' autonomy, and creation of a genuine federal set up. That is why it talks about formation of small states, breaking up existing states, on the basis administrative convenience. The BJP would like to see at least sixty such states in India. The weakening and division of existing linguistic states would destroy the basis for states' autonomy and strengthen the Centre's hold and powers over the states. The BJP wants a strong Centre and weak states without any cohesive linguistic-nationality principle. It must be recalled that the Jana Sangh alongwith the big organisations had bitterly opposed the formation of linguistic states in the fifties.

The BJP's allergy to strong linguistic states with more powers stems from its authoritarian concept of Indian nationhood which denies the linguistic/cultural/religious diversity of the country. Similarly, the BJP advocates the presidential form of government which in a diverse and complex country like India is an invitation to authoritarianism.

The success that BJP has registered in recent years is partly due to the growth of separatist trends among the minorities. It plays upon the apprehensions of the majority community who are targeted in the states like Punjab and Kashmir where they are in a minority. The playing upon the fears of the majority community conceals the fact that the BJP's response to the threats to national unity is a profoundly disruptive and distorted one. Harping upon Hindu interests strengthen the separatist and fundamentalist threats among the minority community. Making the Ram temple at Ayodhya, an issue of "national unity" and "national honour" is pernicious as it excludes non-Hindus from the national integrative process.

The BJP has in fact a vested interest in the perpetuation and fostering of fundamentalism and separatism amongst the minorities as it provides it with the target of an enemy against whom communal mobilisation is possible.

What is to be realised is that any step or advance made by the BJP in mobilising people or influencing public opinion in favour of Hindutva is a sure step towards disunity and disintegration of India. The more the BJP harps on the Hindu communal platform, the more the sectarian elements among the minorities get active and both these forces feed and nurture each other. The result is damage to Indian unity and providing fertile ground for all varieties of divisive forces.

The BJP's stance on vital question of national unity is therefore to be concretely exposed. Its nationalism is a pseudo-nationalism as it leads to striking at the roots of Indian unity. The Khalistanis, the Hizbe-Islami or the north-eastern separatist forces find in Hindu majority communalism the validity for their disruptive activities.

Feeding On Communal Violence

There is considerable body of liberal opinion in the country which sees the BJP as basically a right of centre party which can be persuaded to adopt a more moderate tone on the communal question. They see the stridency of the BJP on the Ayodhya issue as an aberration and expect to see the BJP to evolve as a part which takes up other economic and social issues and emerge as a responsible centre-right party. This is a naive expectation. The BJP has tasted blood with its Muslim-baiting, anti-minority platform. The mix of distorted nationalism and catering to Hindu apprehensions in a period of deep societal and economic crisis has helped it garner new support away from the secular constituency.

At the core of the BJP's electoral expansion has been the groundwork put in by the RSS and its allied organisations. A sustained period of propaganda and activities which target the Muslim community as the enemy and the organisation of communal riots. A study of the incidence of communal violence and communal polarisation in different parts would show close correlation between the BJP's electoral gains and the outbreak of communal violence. Gujarat is a classic example. For the past two decades, Hindu-Muslim riots have become a regular occurrence in the cities and towns of Gujarat. Ahmedabad, Baroda, Surat - all are periodically convulsed by riots and bloodshed which have systematically led to communal polarisation and the steady accretion of strength of the BJP and the communalisation of the police and other state institutions. The BJP polled fiftyone percent votes in Gujarat in the 1991 Lok Sabha elections.

Further south, the BJP has been struggling to establish its political presence for long without much success. It has now made major gains in Karnataka. Here also the recent period has seen riots in Belgaum, Davangere and many other areas. The RSS has spread out from its traditional area of influence in South Kanara. The BJP polled 28 percent votes in the last Lok Sabha elections. A electoral shift was evident in UP towns in the ninth general elections consequent to the worst rioting since independence in the November-December 1990 period.

The BJP has literally harped a harvest of votes on the sufferings and hatred fomented by spreading the communal poison. It is this

menacing quality of the party which makes it an implacable enemy of Indian democracy and secularism - both of which are vital to sustain India as we know it since independence.

There can be no illusions about the BJP as it is a right-wing communal party. It is further a reactionary force being a party of majority communalism. Despite its rhetoric and active work to woo scheduled castes, tribals and other socially oppressed sections, it is a party which is grounded in the defence of the moribund Hindu social order. In this sense it is profoundly hostile to the social emancipation of sections including women who were ordained a low social status in the caste-oppressive Hindu order.

ORGANIC LINK WITH THE RSS

No discussion on the BJP can be complete or accurate without underlining its unique feature - its ties with the RSS. The BJP in its present incarnation is tied to the RSS by an umbilical cord. The advent of Advani as President in 1986 made this link explicit. Advani justified the relations with the RSS and looking up to it for guidance by likening it to the Congress leaders consulting Gandhiji for guidance during the freedom struggle even though he was not a formally elected leader of the Congress. The BJP makes no bones about the BJP belonging to the Sangh parivar. That the RSS is the fount of authority and sustenance is made clear by the open summoning of BJP leaders to RSS conclaves to report and discuss matters with the RSS leadership.

The RSS dictates the stance of the BJP on the Ram temple issue and coordinates the overall campaign conducted by other front organisations such as the VHP. Increasingly the RSS is directing various aspects of the BJP's organisational functioning including government activities. Whether it is the Kalyan Singh or Patwa ministries - the RSS has a say in major government policies.

The RSS while posing to be above the mundane level of politics keeps the strategic interests of Hindu rashtra in view. It sees the BJP in its present avatar as a convenient instrument. But it should not be forgotten that the RSS has often come out in appreciation of the Congress(I) when it feels the tactical interests of Hindu communalism demands it. The RSS would ideally want the major

national party to become Hindu oriented. In 1987, the RSS Sarsangchalak, Deoras, in his Vijayadashami address said : "We are not anti-Congress. Our founder leader was a Congressman. Our organisation is opposed only to the Congress policy of appeasing the minorities." More recently, the late Bhaurao Deoras, the influential brother of Balasaheb Deors, went on record to state that Narasimha Rao was the best Prime Minister the country ever had. The RSS was clearly hoping that Rao heading a minority government would work out an entente with the BJP to remain in power.

The autonomous growth of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad another front of the RSS has also enabled it to tighten its grip on the BJP. The RSS with the enhanced clout of the mass movement for the temple is now in a better position to influence the electoral oriented BJP and direct the drive to Hindutva.

ANTI-COMMUNISM

The BJP's anti-communist virulence derives from the clear-sighted view of the RSS that the Communists are the sworn opponents of Hindu rashtra and obstacles to establishment of Hindutva.

The RSS has been concentrating on developing its base in Kerala and West Bengal the bastions of the Left movement. The annual report of the RSS General Secretary H.V. Sehsadiri presented at the RSS parthinidi sabha in Lucknow in March 1992 targets the two states. The report states the RSS programmes in Kerala and West Bengal have signaled that "Communists whose ideological-cum-power base had already collapsed at the global level, have started losing out fast to the nationalist forces here."

Much before the current offensive, the BJP-RSS had perfected the art of combining with the Congress(I) and the UDF to defeat the LDF and the CPI(M). In the local elections in 1988, the and in the Lok Sabha elections in 1989 and the assembly elections in 1991, the RSS-BJP had shifted votes in favour of selected UDF candidates.

Second only to its bete noire - the muslim minorities, the BJP-RSS targets the communists for attack. In Kerala the RSS-BJP has been waging a systematic campaign of violence against the CPI(M) cadres

and supporters to win for itself a militant anti-communist constituency. The recent killing of a 16 year old SFI student in Kottayam illustrates this visceral hate campaign.

The BJP thinks the current international climate of anti-communism with the reverses in the socialist countries can be utilised to step up its domestic anti-Communist campaign. In fact among all the bourgeois-landlord parties, only the BJP has been sustaining a systematic anti-communist campaign in the wake of the destruction of the Soviet Union. The BJP backed by the RSS sees this as the golden opportunity to defame socialism and Marxism and woo sections who were attracted to the socialist ideal. The CPI(M) comes in for special attack and abuse as it is perceived to be the main barrier to its growth in West Bengal and Kerala.

FOREIGN POLICY

The BJP like its predecessor, the Jan Sangh, adopts basic foreign policy positions which are marked by its absence of any anti-imperialist content even though the party claims to be champion of national interest and sovereignty. The integral humanism of Deen Dayal Upadhyaya which has been embraced by the BJP does not recognise the reality of imperialist exploitation. For the BJP, in the words of its President, M.M. Joshi " much of the economic inequalities in the present world arise from the belief that it is possible to have unlimited growth on a planet with limited resources and environment. Our experience tells us that a balanced growth model is far less exploitative." In analysing the present economic inequalities in the world the BJP cannot see imperialist exploitation as the root cause. Instead its consistent anti-communism makes it naturally tilt to pro-imperialist positions. In a presidential address to the party in 1986 Advani noted that the Janata Government (1977-79) had tried to improve relations with Western bloc which gave India's non-alignment credibility. He bemoaned the fact that relations with the Western bloc had again been marked with distrust. The BJP would have welcomed India having a close and strategic partnership with the USA but for one factor which is inhibiting - Pakistan. The support given by the Soviet Union consistently to India on the Kashmir issue was the major reason which prevented the BJP from advocating an open alliance with the USA and reined in its anti-Sovietism to some extent.

Unlike other right-wing forces, the BJP sees the world through the prism of its anti-Muslim outlook. The BJP's strident advocacy of relations with Israel and its happiness of the Rao Government's full diplomatic relations is motivated by its intense desire to cultivate Zionism which sees as its effective counter-weight to Islam in the Middle-East. During the US and allied forces war on Iraq the BJP refused to condemn the wanton destruction of Iraq and its cadres spontaneously countered anti-US feelings among the people with slogans praising George Bush.

In the current world situation, the BJP sees the reverses for socialism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union as an ideological vindication of its anti-communism. Unable to conceal its glee at the happenings in the Soviet Union the BJP leadership continues to strike its traditional hypocritical posture of steering a path clear of of communism or capitalism which in essence is nothing but deep-rooted adherence to capitalism.

With the absence of the Soviet Union, the BJP would be only glad to have India as a junior partner in the American scheme of things if only the latter could jettison Pakistan. The visit by L.K. Advani to USA in January 1992 and the speeches he delivered at US right wing forums like the Heritage Foundation were clear signals to the US ruling circles : the BJP is a party which backs liberalisation and privatisation. The BJP welcomes the close cooperation and ties with USA. It wants the USA to back India rather than Pakistan in South Asia.

The BJP was the only party in the opposition which welcomed the Indo-US joint naval exercises. Advani defended these exercises in a press conference and said it will be in the interest of India to conduct such joint exercises.

The BJP has been virulently anti-China in its postures till recently. Now it has reluctantly come around to the view that improving relations with China is important given the changed world situation though in the same breath the BJP demands the separation of Tibet from China.

The BJP's foreign policy posture has been in stark contrast to the positions adopted by all the other nation bourgeois parties. It has

never supported non-alignment, anti-imperialism or the fight against neo-colonialism. Its world outlook is flawed by its chronic anti-communist outlook which makes it see the world in a distorted fashion.

PAST LESSONS TO BE LEARNT

Any tolerance and concessions to this mix of communal pseudo-nationalism will be disastrous for Indian unity and secular democracy. In the past, the exigencies of electoral politics saw unprincipled compromises by secular parties which enabled the BJP to acquire legitimacy and access to popular discontent against the Congress. The Janata Dal-National Front committed the opportunist mistake of entering into an electoral understanding with the BJP in the Eighth General elections. The BJP prospered by this at the expense of the secular parties. In future also, such opportunism will arise in the secular camp as bourgeois parties pay primacy to vote gathering over basic principles.

The other aspect whereby the BJP gets strengthened is the willingness of the secular bourgeois parties to appease minority communalism. The Shah Bano case and Rajiv Gandhi's unscrupulous compromise was a boon for the Hindu communalists. The Janata Dal has also shown itself partial to fundamentalist and communal demands of the minorities in order to muster support of sectarian leaders. V.P. Singh's visit to the Imam of Jama Masjid to solicit support in the ninth general elections was one such damaging instance.

The defence of minority rights must be so conducted so that it does not lead to nurturing minority communalism and fundamentalism. The BJP bogey of minorityism must be systematically exposed for its reactionary and anti-democratic content. The muslim minority in India is discriminated and socially disadvantaged. This is the truth which must be substantiated and concretely elaborated with facts and figures. The attitude of the State to the minorities is the acid test of a democracy.

A society which cannot protect its citizens belonging to religious minorities can only be a a imperfect and flawed democracy. The secularism practised by the Congress and other bourgeois parties

sees secularism as the right of all religions to be treated equally. It does not conceive of the separation of religion from State and politics. The BJP uses the definition of "Sarva dharma samabhava" to argue for the recognition of Hindutva as the basis for secularism. Unless the secular forces can be firmed up to defend secularism as separation of religion from state and politics, the erosion of secular values cannot be checked and national unity be defended. The Left campaign that no swamis, mullahs or grahtis can be allowed to use religion and religious places for political activity must become the principle of all secular and democratic forces.

The Left forces have not registered sufficient growth all over the country in the eighties through the development of the class and mass struggles. This inability to expand to new areas and the basic classes has enabled the BJP to capitalise on the mass discontent arising out of the deepening problems of the bourgeois-landlord system and the decline of the Congress mass base.

The BJP has to be fought at the level of its communal ideology and politics. But this struggle will become effective only when the BJP is simultaneously taken for its reactionary class platform as a whole. The exposure of its economic policies and the building up of militant mass struggles against the policies of its state governments are of crucial importance. The defence of national unity and the struggle against separatism must not be allowed to be exploited by the BJP and Hindu communal forces. Like the consistent role of the Left, the secular-democratic forces must be rallied to the cause.

The BJP's authoritarian outlook can be countered by the vigorous struggle to federalise the Indian state structure and to decentralise powers to the states. The BJP talks of more fiscal powers for the states and complains of Central discrimination now that it is running four state governments, but it is against any genuine federal structure that the forces of separatism can be contained and neutralised.

At the level of ideology, there has to be a sustained campaign to expose the anti-democratic, anti-minority, pro-imperialist and pro-bourgeois-landlord character of the BJP. The vast reservoir of patriotic and democratic consciousness of the people must be harnessed to checkmate the BJP's distorted nationalism which endangers national unity. The advance of the Left and democratic

forces will very much depend on how this task is fulfilled while waging a determined struggle against the class policies of the Congress(I) government.