

# Right and Left in Disarray

Ranjit Sau

One verdict of voters is usually not enough of information to evaluate parties. But the 15th general election in India was unusually eloquent to unravel party politics. The right and the left fronts both have lost credibility in the eyes of the people, albeit due to different types of blunder - the right for its excessive exuberance with afterlife, the left for its abundant promise of milk-and-honey here on earth now.

Human reason does two functions: theoretical (aka: pure, or speculative) reasoning, and practical reasoning. Right and left fronts have fallen short in both. The right has *Hindutva* as its core theory: left a constricted model of materialist-dialectical class struggle as its theoretical anchor. In practice, they failed to deliver.

*Pure Reasoning* : *Hindutva* is a way of life, a civilisation, of Hindus, who lived originally on the bank of river Sindhu (Indus). Hindus are home-grown Aryans, not immigrants from Caucasus, contrary to historians' opinion nowadays. So spoke the right.

If so, then, why was the term Hindu not to be found in the contemporary Sanskrit? Because, retorts the right, while Indian Aryans were known among themselves by the name of river Sindhu, commoners addressed them as Hindu, the letter S of Sanskrit having degenerated into H in the colloquial tongue of Prakrit. Ancient scriptures did have plenty of Sindhu in the slokas, though.

This argument by the right is not supported by valid evidence. Indeed, Sindhu appears in the *Rigveda*, for instance, as many as 12 times, but always pointing to the famous river, never to the people.

Who is a Hindu? There are two tests. First, a Hindu has Hindu ancestors. Second, he regards India as the holy-land, the land of pilgrimage, of gurus, and of his culture. In effect *Hindutva* would possibly disallow full citizenship to Christians and Muslims, even though Christianity had reached India about two millennia ago, and Islam over one millennium ago.

But, the first test has incurred the logical fallacy of circular reasoning. For Hindu appears in the subject and also in the predicate of the sentence; the remaining data is insufficient to identify a Hindu. Ask: Who were the ancestors of the first Hindu? As for the second test, a person may have none, or more than one holy-land, say, India, Germany and Mecca. In such cases the second test would be ambiguous.

The *Laws of Manu* delineated caste hierarchy on the basis of so-called purity. Of the human body, it decreed arbitrarily, the part above the navel was pure, and that below impure. And the mouth was the purest of all. Manu applied this formula to grade four varnas and numerous castes.

But, Manu did not know what constituted purity. His frequent pronouncements on purity were weird if not insane. 'A woman's mouth, a girl's breast, a child's prayer, the smoke of the sacrifice, are always pure.' 'There is nothing purer than the light of the sun, the shadow of a calf, air, water, fire, and a

girl's breath.' What is common between a woman's mouth, a girl's breast, and the shadow of a calf that makes them all pure? What did Manu mean by purity?

To the left, India is feudal-capitalist that warrants an innovative democratic process on the way to socialism and communism. At the moment, it is committed to socialism, secularism and democracy as enunciated in the Constitution.

The left sees itself as a defender of the interests of peasantry and proletariat, but shows little concern for the freedom of the peasantry. A peasant is free if (a) no outside interest - feudal or capitalist - comes between him and his land; (b) he is subject to no bond-service; and (c) his work is productive enough to feed him and leave a surplus adequate to buy, at the very least what he needs. By this standard, a peasant who owns a plot of mere one-twelfth-of-one-acre land on average as it is in large parts of India can never gain freedom. Solution of the peasant question through the transformation of the peasantry in some other kind of social formation had served world history to augur best for democracy.

The peasantry of today, descendents of the tribes herded by emperor Chandragupta Maurya in 321 BC into farm labour-camps of crown villages and a few centuries later chained by the Gupta emperor with societal segregations, have not yet broken out of their inherited bondage. Some other tribes betrayed by their chieftain who decamped stealing their collective wealth and bribed his way into the 'civilised' society in the plain, still struggle for existence in the wilderness of forests and hills. These two groups together form one-third of the country's population. The left front, immersed in political class calculus, is unaware of the age-old socio-economic deprivation of these wretched of history.

*Practical Reasoning* : In the periphery of society and beyond its boundary walls there live millions who are unsure of their place in humanity and anxious to see lights of the universal civilisation. Evangelists of myriad faiths have converged there to assuage their tension. The right front of India's political spectrum offers those wretched of history a balm of Hindutva. But its ploy would not work for long. The people of periphery and beyond would not settle for anything less than full freedom—social, economic, political—which is alien to Hindutva.

Benumbed by a false sense of secularism, the left front keeps itself formally aloof from everything social or religious, whereas its leaders and cadres openly patronise and participate in religious rituals and idol worship. With a spectacular display of sham dialectics they indulge in deceptive bifurcation of personal domain from public sphere.

It was in the Age of Faith in medieval Europe that the concept of secularism would take shape, chanting the biblical sermon: 'Render unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's and unto God which be God's.' Centuries passed though crusades, wars of religion, and internecine civil wars; secularism evolved.

An interfaith initiative of Catholics and Muslims was inaugurated by Pope Benedict in the Vatican on 4 November 2008. The Catholic-Muslim Forum, the official name of the dialogue, is set to be held every two years. The forum would be extended to welcome the third Abrahamic religion, Judaism (Ranjit Sau. "On the Idea of India," *Frontier*, 41(41), 26 April 2009).

The Cairo speech of the American president on 4 June 2009 enlarged the reach of the interfaith contemplation. It said: "Indeed, faith should bring us

together. This is why we are forging service projects in America that bring together Christians, Muslims, and Jews. That is why we welcome efforts like Saudi Arabian King Abdullah's Interfaith Dialogue and Turkey's leadership in the Alliance of Civilisations.' The speech added: 'And I consider it part of my responsibility as President of the United States to fight against negative stereotypes of Islam whenever they appear.'

Religious, philosophical, or moral unity is neither possible nor necessary for social unity. People know, genuine social stability—not a mere balance of forces—must be rooted in a reasonable political consensus of comprehensive doctrines, religious or nonreligious. It is, therefore, incumbent on the part of polity to seek, facilitate and promote the required consensus, which is a constituent of secularism, an aspect of democracy, not a foe. Right, left, middle, all should be obliged to support formation of a common forum in India for conversation among Christians, Hindus, and Muslims, to begin with.

*Remarks* : Right front and left front, true to their name, are in opposite poles in their perception of human nature. Yet they are similar in that both are far away from '*manus*'—the common citizens, and equally myopic in their vision. □□□