

Short-Sighted

HOW political myopia can lead people to choose odd allies is best illustrated by the statement issued on the eve of the assembly elections in Delhi by some leading representatives of the Sikh intelligentsia who appealed to their co-religionists to vote for the BJP. The reason given in the statement was the following: "It is imperative to ensure the killers of innocent Sikhs are not installed as rulers of Delhi. Therefore, Sikhs should vote and support the party which can defeat the Congress... we feel that if the Sikhs vote for BJP in Delhi, the BJP can defeat the Congress."

It goes without saying that people like H K L Bhagat, Sajjan Kumar and other Congress(I) candidates, who had been indicted for their participation in the massacre of the Sikhs in 1984, should not be elected and allowed to run the administration in Delhi. One should go further and assert that they should have been prevented from contesting the elections, to begin with. But one evil cannot be fought with another. The BJP is surely no substitute for the Congress. The signatories to the statement expressed the hope: "The BJP has promised to punish the perpetrators and culprits of the 1984 riots and to accept the other demands of Sikhs. We hope they will fulfil their promise, after coming to power."

Since when has the BJP been known for keeping its promises—and for punishing perpetrators of riots? The signatories to the statement include prominent persons like the former high court chief justice R S Narula, former vice chancellor Amrik Singh, writer Mahip Singh and A S Narang of the Delhi University. They are surely aware of the events preceding the demolition of the Babri Masjid—the promises made by the BJP leaders assuring the government and the courts of keeping the mosque intact—and how today these same leaders are brazen-facedly owning up to its destruction. Has the BJP, during its governance in the different states, ever punished any of the culprits responsible for the killing of thousands of Muslims in communal riots there?

While one shares the anger and indignation of the Sikh intellectuals at the continued protection given by the Congress(I) government to members and leaders of its party who have been accused of killing Sikhs in 1984, one expected from them a similar disapprobation of the acts of the BJP cadres and leaders who have been responsible for the systematic elimination of Muslims in different parts of the country. Do they get sensitive to the human rights issue only when people of their own community are

assaulted, and choose to remain blind when others suffer the same plight?

Such a sectarian approach to the tragic events of 1984 invariably leads to the opportunistic tilt towards the BJP that was found in the statement issued by the Sikh intellectuals. But their amoral call inviting votes for a comtounal party that has been notorious for persecuting another minority community, threatens to misguide members of the Sikh community in a dangerous direction, and create disharmony in Sikh-Muslim relations.

A READER

New Delhi

Civil Rights: Broadening Concerns

THE eighth state conference of the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC) was held at Kurnool on December 11, 12 and 13, 1993. The occasion marked the 20th anniversary of the formation of the organisation.

The conference bid farewell in gratitude to K G Kannabiran who ceased to be president of the organisation after a 15-year stint as its head. The period 1978 to 1993, during which Kannabiran was president, was a period of growth, repression, expansion and sacrifice for APCLC. The conference elected M T Khan, journalist and writer, in his stead as the new president.

To reflect the range of civil rights concerns to which APCLC has over the years extended its activity, the conference formally amended the organisation's manifesto. The amendments are to the effect that

—we consider it necessary to fight caste and patriarchy as sources of civil rights violation, in addition to the state machinery and private property;

—we consider it necessary to fight for democratic values in politics and society, such as for instance secularism and protection of minorities' rights;

—we will actively criticise the state's economic and other policies from the point of view of democratic rights, values and principles; in particular from the point of view of social, political and economic justice; accountability of the government to people's aspirations; concurrence of government policies with the constitutional directive principles, etc.

The conference also approved resolutions to the effect that, with the aim of democratising the organisation's structure and broadening its outlook, special effort will be made to induct cadre from a broad democratic stream irrespective of specific political ideology; and also to develop cadre and leadership from scheduled castes, tribes, backward castes, women, minorities and other underprivileged sections of society.

The conference also approved a resolution welcoming the resolution passed at the recent annual conference of the Organisation for Protection of Democratic Rights (OPDR) that the OPDR would strive for organisational unity of the civil rights movement in Andhra Pradesh. The conference resolved to work more closely with OPDR and strive for unity.

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