

## **A tribute and some more**

*(Communalism Combat, August – September 2003)*

*K. Balagopal*

Prediction is a demanding expression, but prescient commentary is a quality that any movement magazine can aspire to. Most do, but few achieve it.

One could not help thinking so vis-a-vis Communalism Combat when Gujarat ‘happened’. The only other equally striking instance one could think of was Balraj Puri’s commentary on Kashmir spread over the eighties, which made the rise of militancy in Kashmir seem so natural when it finally happened. Except that in that case the realisation was not altogether unpleasant, whereas here it was some thing of a shock.

Today one can read through the back numbers of Communalism Combat and piece together the story of the Sangh Parivar’s ascendancy in Gujarat. All –most, at any rate - the things they did along the way until they finally could manage to mobilise thousands of ordinary people to commit the most gruesome carnage India has known. If Godhra had not given them the opportunity, they would have invented one.

We certainly did require a publication devoted exclusively to the propagation, protection and advancement of secularism, plurality, communal amity, whatever you want to call it. It is arguably the most central political task today, even counting the fight against globalisation. The reason perhaps is that perversion of the mind is more dangerous than appropriation of matter. Granted that globalisation does not stop with matter, the Sangh Parivar’s brand of poison is yet a more urgent concern.

This is not the place to put forward strategies – assuming that one had any - but it is yet necessary to recount the requirements that should guide strategic thinking in this area. It should be apparent that Communalism Combat has chosen a mix of uncompromising opposition to Hindutva and the need not to make every believing Hindu feel that he/she is an enemy of what secular minded people stand for. The same evidently goes for Muslims and Christians, too. The anti-communal agenda does not seek the creation of more atheists and non-believers. It strives to open a dialogue with the average mortals - who are almost all believers, in some measure and will remain so for ever, in some measure – so that they may be encouraged to despise the hatred and the violence that are practiced in their name. There is no need to idealise religion, no need to declare grandly that ‘the essence of all religions is one’ (a popular but rather doubtful proposition), no need to ignore the baneful social effects of socio-religious dogmas and traditions. Without succumbing to any desire to indulge in such simplifications, one may yet hope to appeal to the positive side of religious belief in the fight against its systematic perversion.

The problem perhaps is that religious fundamentalism offers an answer to a kind of insecurity that is not always easy to handle. The reference is not to the ‘heart of a heartless world’ kind of insecurity.

That insecurity is real, and it is equally real that religion, including the bigoted forms of it, offers solace to its victims. But that, at any rate, is an ideologically and philosophically unproblematic form of insecurity, whatever may be the practical difficulties of rendering the security offered by religion in such a context dispensable. A more relevant insecurity, from the point of the genesis and spread of religious conservatism and bigotry, is the insecurity wrought by the spread of democratic aspirations. The uncertainty created by the upturning of social roles generates insecurity in more quarters than the one-dimensional analyses of social inequalities that we are habituated to would tell us. Hindutva and other fundamentalist forces have capitalised extensively on this widespread anti-democratic insecurity among the people. Even more than on the rational insecurity of unemployment, poverty, urbanisation, crime, etc. That is why the if-you-don't-have-a-job-then-fight-unemployment-and-not-muslims kind of argument will not easily succeed.

There can be no compromise here too. There can be no sanctioning of reversal of the democratisation process to pull the rug of insecurity from under the feet of the success of the Sangh Parivar. And yet, the people who are the subjects of the success cannot all be despised, a tendency not uncommon among upper caste elite secularists. Hints of an awareness of this dilemma are evident in the stands Communalism Combat has been taking on the problem it has posed for itself and for us. It must be brought out more openly and strategies devised to answer it.

Hope that Communalism Combat will see more theoretical and political debate on these issues in the coming days. That would be a fitting way to continue its remarkable work.