Buffalo Nationalism: A Critique of Spiritual Fascism

Kancha Ilaiah

Samya

Reservation

Seats through reservations in the colleges and universities to the majority of the Sudra youth who have not had education for centuries, whose parents were illiterate, to whom books were never known at home, definitely opened up a new world . . . indeed, the renaissance of the rural masses—SC, ST and Backward Classes—in a way began with the implementation of reservations (which began in 1967 in Andhra Pradesh) . . . What impact does such a rural renaissance have on the village system? Our parents kept talking about the children who were studying in the state capital. Those who got into medical or engineering courses became an important focus of discussion at the time when people came together at festivals or marriages. Every poor BC, SC and ST mother was dreaming of educating her growing child... The Hindu superstitious values that Sudras, particularly untouchables, were suffering from were being dispelled. The wearing of trousers and bush-shirts, which was a privilege of the sons of landlords, Brahmins and Banias, spread to these families. The landlords' sons occasionally mingled with those boys where were in the colleges, though the parents desisted from such an interaction. It was really an experience to go through this change. The first day my brother and I wore trousers and bush-shirts was a festive day in our house . . .

From 'Secularism: The Predicament of OBCs'

The Left had adopted secularism as an unavoidable ideal in the Indian context without altering its received European definition in any sense. Ambedkar, however, tried to read the direction which secularism was likely to take in India. He seemed to have thought that one could not be an upper caste Hindu and pretend to be secular at the same time. One could not practice untouchability and claim to be a secularist. For Hinduism is not a spiritually democratic religion like Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. Hinduism is in essence communalism operating through the invisible hand of caste. Those who have been suffering at its hands know that casteism is the worst form of communalism. In that sense secularism in India always remained a cover for the caste operations of the Indian brahminical elite. Because Ambedkar de-essentialized secularism the Dalits chose Buddism and Christianity as instruments both of spiritual liberation and of poltical empowerment. As of now the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) have no idea how to engage with the project of secularism...

There is this talk of secularism being the only alternative to the present morass of the Indian polity. But what does that mean to the OBCs who want some space in all national

structures? During the whole phase of the secular Nehruvian polity, the OBCs were not allowed to grow in any structure. The Dalits acquired some space in that secular polity because they challenged Hindu religion and began to construct themselves as a religious minority at the same time as they began to move into Buddhism and Christianity. The secular parties are entering into a crisis with Hindutva recruiting more and more OBCs, first as muscle men and later as minor partners of state power. (p 78)

From Secularism: The Predicament of the OBCs'

The brahminic castes that were controlling the political economy of the nation were willing to accommodate the Dalits in certain spheres but they were not willing to accommodate the OBCs as that would take the casteocracy to its logical end. Before the OBCs started asking for a share in the national cake, the national cake was shared by the *dwija* castes like Brahmins and Banias and some Sudra upper castes. If the OBCs that constitute a vast majority of the population join that casteocracy, brahminic hegemony slowly but surely gets sidelined . . . Sonia Gandhi does not seem to have the necessary conviction and strategy to set aside the upper caste feudals and fill the party with an OBC, SC and ST leadership which would have given a new meaning to its secularism in the face of the rise of Hindutva.

The communist leaders are suffering from their caste baggage and cannot think of a caste-secular party in the near future. They have not shown any initiative in de-casteizing the party. The communist parties' growth in India has been casteocratic and the OBCs do not seem to look up to them. This is a tragedy in itself but upper caste communist leaders seem to be willing to celebrate this political tragedy indefinitely. [pp 78-79]

From 'The End of Dalit Ideology?'

Dalits have three great prophetic images—-Buddha, Jesus and Ambedkar—to confront the Hindu divine images. As the spread of these images within Dalit-Adivasi society increases, the Brahmins have no option but to recognize the socio-spiritual strength of Dalits. The OBCs neither owned these images nor did they construct alternatives to improve their transformative abilities. That is the reason why the OBCs as a social category will not be able to challenge the brahminic social order.

There is no alternative philosophical discourse among the OBCs and that is enough for them to be ignored in every sphere of life. The Mulayam Singh and Laloo Prasad phenomenon will not have a lasting impact on Indian society since the socio-spiritual Hindu system is not afraid of them. They are still operating a slightly repositioned numbers game within the broad electoral system. That itself does not have transformative impact on society . . .

The reason for the non-existence of a transformative agenda among the OBCs is that there is philosophical poverty among the OBCs in particular and the Sudras in general. So long

as the brahminic philosophy is not afraid of the power of a community it need not recognize its existence, leave alone its identity . . .

The OBCs are still at the primitive level of consciousness and therefore do not pose any threat to the oppressors, the community rather remains a threat to itself. [pp- 129-30]