

The Fatal Flaw In Communal Politics

■ Dr. M.N. Buch

On 1st April 2014 Sonia Gandhi is reported to have met Ahmed Bukhari, the Imam of Jama Masjid, Delhi. The meeting obviously had a political purpose, which is to garner Muslim votes with the Imam's blessings, because immediately after the meeting Sonia Gandhi is reported to have stated that in the 2014 general election secular votes must not be split. The context of this statement was so heavily Muslim oriented that by implication it meant that BJP is communal, BJP is a party of the Hindus who, therefore, ipso facto become communal, in contrast with the Muslims who, by definition, are secular. The communal votes should split but the secular votes must remain solidly with the Congress. The blatantly communal overtones of this statement, despite denials by the Congress, are horrifying in that it drives a clear wedge between Muslims on the one hand and Hindus on the other. Did it not strike Sonia Gandhi had if Hindus by implication are communal, against whom all Muslims must vote, then an appeal could be made to the Hindus to vote solidly for a party which stood for their interests? Has any one of the Congress realised that if twenty percent of the Hindu voters polarise and as a single bloc vote for the BJP, that party will run away with at least 300 seats in Parliament? Much though it might pain the people who are now offering themselves as champions of secularism, the partition of India was brought about not because Hindus could not live with Muslims but rather because the Muslim League, under the leadership of Jinnah, advocated that Muslims could not live together with Hindus. That most secular of persons, Mahatma Gandhi, till the very last opposed the partition of the country on grounds of religion, going to the extent of advising Jawaharlal Nehru that rather than accept partition he should offer the prime ministership of a united India to Mohammed Ali Jinnah. Without going into the merits of the case for Pakistan, the reality is that the Muslim League, manifestly and overtly a party representing the Muslims, insisted on the creation of a separate nation, whose state religion would be Islam.

One is not implying here that the Indian Muslim wants the creation of a theocracy in India. In fact huge numbers of Muslims opted with their feet for India by refusing to migrate to Pakistan, resulting in India having the largest Muslim population in the world after Indonesia. Since 1947, outbreaks of sporadic communal riots notwithstanding, the Indian Muslim has stayed true to this country. So much so that even after the 1993 riots in Bombay and 2002 riots in Gujarat, Muslims have not migrated away from either Maharashtra or Gujarat. At the same time Islam as a religion is openly practised and preached in India, so that there is a distinct Islamic identity to areas inhabited by Muslims. Whereas some people refer to Muslim localities as ghettos, they are not more so than a Rajput Mohalla, a Lohar Mohalla or the predominantly Brahmin Kartik Chowk area of Ujjain. In the magnetic field like-poles reject but in human relationships like does attract like. To read either secularism or communalism into this would be a travesty. Community groupings by caste, religion or class are to be found everywhere in the world and too much should not be read into it in terms of prejudice or preference.

One of the hard facts of electoral politics is that every political party seeks the blessings of particular groups to garner support. It is in this context that Muslims were always considered a safe group of voters so far as the Congress is concerned. The Left, the Socialists and the parties which emerged out of socialist fragmentation, not to mention the Congress, have all tried

to persuade the Muslims to vote en masse, not on grounds of acceptance of a particular political philosophy or ideology but as a solid anti Hindu vote to keep BJP out of power. At the time of the Babri Masjid demolition BJP did play a blatantly communal card in seeking Hindu support and this partially worked in favour of BJP. Since that date much water has passed under the bridge and no longer can BJP hope to get Hindu votes in the name of the Ram Temple at Ayodhya. The short point is that the Hindu is not prepared to be politically polarised because he votes on account of the party of his choice, caste factors, class stratification, even region or language. That is why whereas individual caste groups have been targeted as vote banks, the Hindus collectively are not considered a vote bank in the same manner as are the Muslims. There is a codicil to the above statement. If because of Muslim polarisation brought about by blatantly communal appeals by the Congress and the so called secular parties, with the Hindus being convinced that this is an anti Hindu vote rather than an anti BJP vote, then there can be real trouble because if specifically endangered in this manner there can be some possibility of the polarisation of at least a segment of the Hindu votes. Such communal divide has major law and order implications, but here I am referring only to politics. Sonia Gandhi's statement, I would respectfully submit, by its blatantly communal appeal has in fact facilitated the polarisation of Hindu votes. Why is Congress hell bent on suicide?

The one bright light in this murky scenario is that so far the BJP response to such nakedly communal politics is low key and restrained. The Ram Temple is not brought into focus, there is no mention of Hindutva, there is no appeal to Hindu dharma gurus to come out in favour of BJP as party of Hindus. In fact even Azham Khan's highly abusive reference to Narendra Modi as the elder brother of a puppy has not attracted abusive counter fire. Development, infrastructure, economic prosperity, national unity are still the key components of the BJP election campaign. It is the Congress, Nitish Kumar, Farooq Abdullah and others who refer to Modi as divisive and, therefore, unfit for the Prime Minister's post. Those who used violence to advocate Telangana, the Naxalites and the Left Wing Extremists, the leaders of the anti-Sikh riots, the sponsors and supporters of and participants in the 1993 Bombay riots are not considered divisive. Only Modi merits that epithet. It is precisely this type and level of politics that has built Modi into someone larger than life. Can we not revert to issue and policy based politics, bereft of communal innuendos and personal invective?
