

On Communal Problems

Decadent capitalism engenders divisive sentiments, and communalism, racialism, parochialism are a menace to people, particularly in countries with incomplete democratization of society. This address spells out the scientific approach to the vexed question of communalism, its causes and the correct process to solve the problem.

Dear friends and brother delegates,

I thank you for electing me a delegate to your Democratic Convention. I fully endorse the declared objective of the Convention, namely, to fight communalism in order to safeguard peace and amity between different communities living in India. It would have been a pleasure to me if I could personally attend the Convention and participate in its deliberations. But preoccupied as I am, it is not possible for me to attend the Convention in person. So, I take the liberty of sending my views on the communal question in our country for your consideration. I do hereby extend, on behalf of myself and our party, the Socialist Unity Centre of India, fraternal greetings to the Democratic Convention and wish it a grand success.

Friends, it is no good mincing matters. The interest of our people calls for a thorough scientific probe into the causes of the dangerous social malady of communal violence and the acceptance of correct remedies for it. Should the Democratic Convention finish its duty simply by condemning communalism and its concomitant evils and expressing pious wishes to maintain communal peace and harmony, then it will fail to reach its declared objective. For, could pulpit speeches denouncing communalism and extolling the virtues of peace and amity between different communities solve the problem of communalism and communal violence then that problem would have been long solved in our country. Had not great personalities like Deshabandhu Chittaranjan^[1], Mahatma Gandhi^[1] and Netaji Subhas Chandra^[1], all of whom enjoyed unquestionable confidence of the Indian people at large, equally condemned communalism and communal violence and extolled the necessity of maintaining peace and amity between different communities living here? And what has been the net result of those

exhortations ? We are not an inch nearer to our goal compared to their time. Communalism still remains with its deadly influence over our people, manifesting itself in the ugliest forms of communal frenzy and communal violence at the slightest provocation, as before. The failure on the part of these leaders to solve the communal problem does not mean that they lacked in sincerity in this regard. Rather, the cause lies in their failure to correctly find out the breeding ground of communalism and, consequently, adopt the correct remedial measures. When such powerful personalities failed to eradicate communalism even by a whit, by simply appealing in the name of national interest, religious tolerance and humanistic values, we can expect no better results if we follow the same path and avoid the painstaking process of completing the unaccomplished tasks of social and cultural revolutions in our country.

Friends, please do not take me amiss, if, in expressing my honest conviction, I injure the feelings of some of you. As a brother delegate, sharing your concern for the consequences of communalism and communal violence as also your determination to eradicate them from the socio-political life of our country, I only crave the indulgence of your lending me a scientific ear without bias. You have every right to reject my views but, before rejecting, please take the trouble of examining them on the anvil of science. This is my request to you. I had the fortune of hearing the speeches of some of the important organizers of the Democratic Convention at Delhi Hall, Calcutta, in October, 1964, and of reading the draft manifesto of the Convention. It is my study that the organizers of the Democratic Convention are aiming at solving the communal problems in our country on the basis of religious tolerance and a vague humanistic appeal to goodwill and by raising nationalistic sentiment of our people. I do not, for a single moment, doubt their sincerity but I must say that the path advocated by them is bound to fail, as it failed in the past, because it is unscientific. Did not the prophets of almost all religions teach us to practise religious tolerance ? Nevertheless, today their preachings have been of no avail in the matter of removing communalism from our socio-political life. This is so not because of any lack of sincerity on the part of the organizers but because of the unscientific nature of their approach to the problem and the process suggested by them for the purpose of eliminating the virus of communalism. It must be realized that it is the process that ultimately matters. Hence, if the Democratic Convention really means business, it will have to analyse scientifically the root cause of communalism in our country and adopt the correct process for eliminating it. Appeal for

religious tolerance will not solve the problem. Rather, a correct process will bring about religious tolerance in the masses.

Before I come to the main issue, I consider it my duty to condemn, with all the force at my command, that section of the Hindu and the Muslim community, who, in the name of history, falsifies history and asserts that there can be no unity between the Hindus and the Muslims, let alone national integration of the two communities. However loud and assertive, this is no logic nor is it corroborated by facts. How can we forget that though the Muslims constitute a substantial portion of the Burmese people, yet the Burmese people have emerged as a nation? The Indonesian people also have emerged as a nation notwithstanding the existence of huge number of Muslims there. China and the Soviet Union have Muslim population of no mean proportion. Still the Chinese and the Soviet peoples have emerged as homogeneous nations. In none of these countries do communal riots between the Muslims and non-Muslims break out periodically as in India and Pakistan. In none of these countries the Muslims demanded or demand separate nationhood, as the Muslims demanded in pre-partition India. None of these countries has had the misfortune of being dismembered on the basis of Muslim and non-Muslim population, as it happened in our case. It may be argued, I know, that the British imperialists, in order to perpetuate their colonial rule and economic interest, resorted to a divide-and-rule policy in our country and deliberately antagonized the Muslim masses to the nationalist movement. This is, no doubt, true. But did not the British imperialists adopt the same divide-and-rule policy in Burma also? Is it not a fact that the Dutch imperialists, too, were by no means less active than the British rulers of India in their attempts to disrupt the unity of the Indonesian people fighting for national independence? Why then of all these countries did India face the peculiar problem of communalism, leading to periodic communal disturbances, demand for separate nationhood by the Muslims and ultimate partition of the country on the basis of religion? To try to explain this peculiarity of the Indian situation by simply referring to the divide-and-rule policy of the British rulers of our country as its sole cause is to deceive oneself and refuse to acknowledge certain basic weaknesses from which our national liberation struggle all through suffered. As a means to weaken the anti-imperialist national liberation movement in our country, it was only natural for the British imperialists to create conditions for continuous antagonism between the different communities, especially the Hindus and the Muslims, and to disrupt the unity of the

anti-imperialist forces and, thereby, retard the process of formation of India as a nation. None but a simpleton can expect a better deal from the then imperialist rulers of our country. Besides, in every dependent country there always remain some anti-nationalist forces and elements, who collaborate with imperialism and oppose the national liberation movement. This pro-imperialist, anti-nationalist section represented by the rajas^[2], nawabs^[3], zamindars^[4], comprador bourgeoisie, high officials and agents of imperialism knew that for maintaining its vested interests the imperialist rule in India was a necessity. So, the anti-nationalist role of these forces and elements was also not unexpected. How then can we account for the failure of our nationalist leadership to prevent the imperialist rulers and their lackeys from isolating the Muslim masses from the mainstream of nationalist movement and using them against the forces of nationalism ?

The cause of this failure lies in the very nature of the leadership of the national liberation movement in our country. However much some of our nationalist historians may claim to the contrary, it is a hard fact that in the pre-British era India had never been a political whole. In fact, we had at that time a large number of separate principalities. It was only during the centralised British administration that India became a political whole, which created, step by step, the material condition, so long absent, for the emergence of a modern all-India concept. During the centralised British administration of India associated with the emergence of a national market and intercourse of trade and commerce on an all-India basis between the people, and in the course of the Indian people's fight for national independence against the imperialists, the different nationalities in India speaking different languages and different communities professing different religions were in the process of merging together and forming a nation. Had the leadership of this national movement in our country been in the hands of the working class, it would have been possible not only to eliminate imperialism completely but also to take the country along the non-capitalist path of development and solve the nationality, communal or racial questions once for all, as it has been done in China and the Soviet Union. But unfortunately for the Indian people, the leadership of our national liberation movement lay in the hands of the national bourgeoisie of our country. And this accounts for the peculiarity of the Indian situation.

First, it should be noted that in India the process of formation of nation started in the second half of the nineteenth century, when capitalism, as a world social force, had not only lost its

revolutionary character but also become definitely anti-revolution. Over and above this general characteristic, Indian capitalism had its specific features. Unlike western capitalism, which grew independently, Indian capitalism grew and developed under the domination of foreign finance capital with feudal relations surrounding it. As a result, it had a stunted growth. The nationalist section of the Indian bourgeoisie was naturally stirred into movement against imperialism; because, the imperialist rule in our country stood as an insurmountable obstacle in the path of establishing its class rule here and freely exploiting the Indian masses. But, like all colonial bourgeoisie in the epoch of imperialism and proletarian revolution, it was mortally afraid of revolutionary mass struggles against imperialism. For, it apprehended that the revolutionary struggle by the Indian people for national liberation, if successful, would not only end the imperialist rule in our country but, along with it, also remove the national bourgeoisie from the leadership of the struggle, open up the path of non-capitalist way of development and completely shatter all possibilities of establishing a capitalist rule in India. Antagonism with imperialism, on the one hand, and mortal fear of the revolutionary struggle by the people against imperialism on the other hand, made the nationalist section of the Indian bourgeoisie maintain a *reformist oppositional* role against imperialism. Its role against feudalism was equally compromising. Indian capitalism, therefore, tried to develop through compromises with both imperialism and feudalism. The result of compromises with feudalism was that the Indian bourgeoisie could not and did not carry out the tasks of social and cultural revolutions essential for the democratization of the society and complete merger of different nationalities speaking different languages and different communities professing different religions, into a nation. In the course of the political movement against imperialism, the Indian people speaking different languages and professing different religions became a nation politically but for failure on the part of the leadership of our national liberation movement to accomplish, in the main, the tasks of social and cultural revolutions for democratization of the society against feudalism, feudal disunity and religious bondage, the Indian people remained socially and culturally divided into different communities disunited by religion, caste, language, race, etc.

This is not all. The Indian nationalist leadership not only did not try to free the Indian masses from the bondage of religion and democratize the society by carrying out the tasks of social and cultural revolutions, it took up, on the contrary, religion as a vehicle of propagating nationalistic

ideas. Indian nationalism, therefore, was basically religion-oriented. This religion-oriented nationalism manifested itself in the form of Hindu religious revivalism. The psychological reaction which the Hindu revivalist Indian nationalism created in the non-Hindu masses was, *by and large, responsible for keeping them, especially the Muslim masses, away from the national liberation movement in our country.* Furthermore, it also gave every opportunity to the British imperialists and the anti-nationalist, pro-imperialist Muslim leaders to impress upon the Muslim masses that India, when freed from the British rule, would be no better than a tyrannical rule by the Hindus, where no Muslim would have any security and freedom of faith. In the circumstances, will it not be wrong to lay the entire blame on the Muslims in pre-partition India for demanding a separate homeland for them? Why talk of the Muslims alone? What about the so-called lower caste Hindus? Since the tasks of social and cultural revolutions were not carried out the people belonging to the socially backward strata of the Hindu community remained not only in religious bondage but also under the social and cultural suppression by the so-called upper castes among the Hindus. And, in this regard, Indian nationalism could not even express itself as a broad Hindu revivalism. In spite of the attempts by Gandhiji and some other leaders to the contrary, it identified itself rather with the revivalism of the Brahminic cult dominated by the Brahmins^[5], Kshatriyas^[5], Kayasthas^[5], and Baidyas^[5], in Bengal and other so-called higher castes. It is, of course, true that the concept of religion as expressed in the idea of Hindu revivalism, was more humanistic than sectarian and more tolerant than militant against other religions. But the point is not that. The point is that the nationalist leadership of India, instead of coming out from all sorts of religious complexes and thereby integrating all the different communities of people professing different faiths into a homogeneous nation, adopted the tolerance and broadness of Hindu religion as the means to unify them into a nation. Precisely because of this, it could not find out a way to win over the Muslim masses on to its side other than incorporating in its programme the demand of *khilafat*, a movement for the restoration of the mediaeval Islamic anachronism, which the Turks themselves under Kamal Pasha most energetically repudiated for the emergence of a democratic Turkey. These attempts by the nationalist bourgeois leadership to integrate the Muslim masses into the Indian nation on the basis of tolerance and broadness of Hindu religion, or by helping to preserve the Islamic religious customs inconsistent with the principles of a democratic society, only widened the gulf between the Muslim masses and the nationalist forces. It was but inevitable. For, real unification

of the people differing in religion, language, caste, race, etc., into a homogeneous national whole can never be achieved by lending support to religious customs, the force that impedes the process of unification. Real integration of different communities into a nation can be achieved only by making religion completely powerless, in so far as the social activities of individuals are concerned, through democratization of the society in the course of accomplishing the tasks of social and cultural revolutions. Neither the nationalist bourgeois leadership nor those forces who spoke of the necessity of establishing a leadership alternative to the nationalist bourgeois leadership did perform these essential tasks of formation of the Indian nation. So, notwithstanding the sincerity to unify all the communities into a nation, the wrong process adopted for the purpose failed to integrate the different communities, particularly the Muslims, into a national whole. I am referring to the past history not for academic interests but for drawing lessons from history. The nationalist leadership which ought to have risen above the religious complex and carried out the tasks of social and cultural revolutions could not do so because of its reformist oppositional role against imperialism and feudalism. Faced internally with this weakness and externally with the necessity of developing the Indian people as a nation, it turned its face backward and tried to integrate different communities professing different religions into a nation on the basis of the tolerance and broadness of the Hindu religion. Even after coming to power the nationalist leadership did not rectify the wrong approach of theirs in this respect. The present rulers of our country, in place of carrying out the tasks of social and cultural revolutions, are only aiding more enthusiastically, in the name of secularism, the anti-secular forces and tendencies by encouraging all sorts of religious customs, conventions and prejudices, which have increased several times compared to the pre-independence days. It is no wonder that in the circumstances the slogan of Hindu revivalism is finding a strong foothold now. It should be realized that true secularism does not mean encouraging the individual to profess, practise and propagate his religious faith. Nor does it presuppose state patronage to every religious faith so as to widen the influence of religion over the masses of the people. Far less does it aim at giving some premium to a given community professing a particular faith by offering it special privileges on religious consideration alone. A really secular state considers religion the private affair of its citizens and does not, therefore, interfere, either by encouragement or by opposition, in the profession, practice and propagation of religion by the individual. On the contrary, it guarantees full freedom to the believers to profess any faith as well as to the non-believers. By carrying out

the tasks of social and cultural revolutions, it democratizes the society and takes the wind out of the sail of religion, in so far as its influence on the social activities of the individual and on the state is concerned. As a result of the strong Hindu revivalist tendencies of the present ruling bourgeoisie of our country, even today the Indian people are a conglomeration of socially and culturally different communities distracted by language, religion, caste and race. If the modern nations of the west, that came into being through democratization of society by successfully conducting social and cultural revolutions against feudalism, feudal disunity, the church and its influence over the state, cannot be completely freed from religious fanaticism, racialism and race riots (the black persecution in the USA and the race riots in the UK are instances of it), then it can be easily imagined how deep-rooted the grounds of communalism, casteism, and linguistic fanaticism are in our country when socially and culturally the Indian nation is divided into Brahmins^[6], Kshatriyas^[6], Vaisyas^[6] and Sudras^[6], caste Hindus and Scheduled caste Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains and Christians, Assamese, Bengalis, Oriyas, Tamils, so on and so forth. The correct process of solving the communal problem in our country, therefore, lies in democratizing the society through social and cultural revolutions.

I know, you may ask me why is it that even in the western democracies, where the nation was formed in the course of anti-feudal revolutionary struggle by the rising bourgeoisie and consequent democratization of the society, race riots still break out? The reason is not far to seek. It is true that in the western democracies the process of nation formation has been essentially completed in so far as feudal disunity is concerned. Hence, communal or religious difference exert little or no influence on the national life there. But no bourgeoisie is capable of fully completing the process of democratization which it had itself started. So, under the bourgeois rule, some tasks of democratic revolution still remain unaccomplished. The national question is such an unaccomplished task. In all the capitalist countries where there are more than one nationality, the dominant nationality suppresses the other nationality or nationalities. Under capitalism, therefore, people are subjected not only to economic exploitation but also to nationality oppression. The race riots in the western countries are reflection of this suppression of the national minority by the dominant nationality. Besides, capitalism, which for the sake of national integration and formation of nation at a certain stage of its development tried to unify different communities of people in a given territory, also tries at a different stage of its

development, i.e. in the imperialist stage, to disrupt the unity of the people for its own security against popular uprising. The more acute its crisis becomes, resulting in more intense struggle by the working people against the capitalist order, the more fascistic capitalism becomes, when it tries to fan up religious or racial sentiments of the people to misdirect popular struggles against capitalism. It is for this reason we are increasingly noticing symptoms of religious fanaticism, racialism and race riots even in the bourgeois democratic countries of the west. Thus, so long as capitalism will exist, there will remain the root cause of anti-people ideas like communalism, casteism, racialism, etc., and, consequently, the ground of communal violence will also be there. Only when the working people led by the working class will capture power, eliminate the survivals of capitalism and fully complete the tasks of democratic revolution in order that socialism can be successfully built, will national, communal and racial problems find their permanent solution. Those who really intend to eliminate communalism and communal disturbances in our country for good should keep this teaching of history in mind and cannot but work for the overthrow of capitalism and establishment of socialism.

Should we then sit tight and wait till our people capture power and root out communalism? No. That would be the height of foolishness. To argue that since India is a capitalist country and since capitalism engenders and fosters anti-people ideas like communalism, casteism, etc., and, therefore, keeps alive the ground of communal or racial riots, and so communal or racial violence is sure to break out in our country periodically, is to surrender to fatalism. The root cause of communalism lies, no doubt, in the present socio-economic structure of our country. But the mere presence of the cause does not automatically lead to its effect under all conditions. By discovering the cause and strengthening the force that could ultimately eliminate the cause man can restrict and even temporarily prevent the effect. Hence, only by constantly strengthening the democratic movement which is the anti-thesis of communalism, can we restrict communalism in our country and temporarily prevent communal violence.

But it cannot be denied that the democratic movement so far conducted by the democratic forces in our country has been confined only to the movement for realizing political and economic demands. The tasks of social and cultural revolutions have never been incorporated in the programme of democratic movement in our country. Such a half-hearted programme will not do. So, the programme for the democratic movement should not exhaust itself in economic and

political demands alone as in the past. It should include the tasks of social and cultural revolution in our country, which remain unaccomplished even today. Unless these tasks are completed and our people freed from the bondage of social and religious prejudices, conventions and institutions and unless the barrier separating them socially and culturally are demolished and they are transformed into a homogeneous compact community, not only politically but also socially and culturally, communalism cannot be done away with in reality. I like to emphasize once again that this is not a movement directed against religion as such. Rather this movement bases itself on equality and freedom of both believers and non-believers. Religion will certainly continue to exist but it shall have to be solely the private affair of the individual, having no relation with the affairs of the state and no influence on the social activities of the individual.

Thus, the movement aims at placing religion in its proper place. It may be argued that if religion continues to exist, it is bound to influence social activities of the individual. I do not find any tangible ground for this apprehension. In my opinion, this apprehension arises out of confusion between religion and religious or social customs. Religion and religious customs are two different things. Customs had changed in the past and will change in future as well to fit in with changed social conditions. So, anyone fighting for a change in the existing religious customs cannot be accused of hostility to or renunciation of religion. Did not Kemal Ataturk, even remaining a true Muslim, fight against the Islamic religious customs which were retarding the democratic process of Turkey? Is not Nasser^[7], a Muslim, even though he is liquidating many of the Islamic religious customs and institutions in his country? Will any Muslim brand Jinnah^[8], a non-Muslim for his non-observance of practically all Islamic religious customs? Have not the Hindus given up many religious customs which they used to observe earlier? The democratic movement will certainly wage relentless struggle against all sorts of religious customs, inconsistent with present social requirements but not against religion as such. The Indian bourgeoisie is incapable of carrying out the tasks of social and cultural revolutions in our country. It goes without saying that they cannot also be performed through individual efforts, however great and powerful that individual may be. Hence, the duty of performing these tasks rests on the democratic forces of India. The Democratic Convention, therefore, should not only align itself with the broader democratic forces in our country and link up its programme of accomplishing the tasks of social and cultural revolutions with the struggle by the democratic

forces for the realization of political and economic demands but also essentially rely upon the working masses fighting for emancipation from capitalism. The strength of the democratic movement under correct revolutionary working class leadership is the only guarantee for the safety and security of the members of the minority community in our country. So, the Democratic Convention should adopt a programme so as to bring the members of the minority community out of the fold of the ruling bourgeoisie and help them fight in alliance with the members of the majority community against the present reactionary regime for democratic demands — political, economic, social and cultural. It is idle to think of putting an end to communalism and communal violence only by administrative measures. For, who does not know that the administrative machinery in our country itself is infected with communal bias under normal conditions and becomes arch communalist in times of communal tension. It is equally futile to leave the question of solution to the communal problem to the inherent values of our people. There is no dearth of goodwill in our people. But when communal fever rises, it comes to no help. The condition will remain like this, so long as the breeding ground of communalism cannot be destroyed, the tasks of social and cultural revolutions remain unaccomplished, and our society is not completely democratized and religion is not relegated to the position of an exclusively private affair of the individual, having little or no bearing on his social activities. To reach such a state I suggest *inter alia* the following programme :

1. Educational institutions should be freed from all sorts of religious influences.
2. No religious customs should be observed in functions sponsored directly by the state or under state patronage.
3. Inter-caste and inter-religion marriage should be effectively encouraged.
4. Common association of different communities in social and religious functions should be actively encouraged.
5. Public meetings, group meetings, etc., of members of different communities should be organized in large numbers to discuss the communal problem and devise ways and means to solve it.

6. Periodicals in different languages should be published where all writings on communal questions, except those which overtly or covertly support communalism, should find a place.

7. People's committees at all levels should be formed with representatives of different communities to conduct anti-communal movement, care being taken to mobilise and enlist mass participation in large numbers in these movements.

8. Social sanction, even to the extent of ostracism, against those who preach or practise or cause to preach or practise communalism should be actively enforced.

Friends, there are other measures also. But, for the present, I think, we can start with these. Before I conclude, I would request you again to make a beginning in the right direction, even in a modest way, rather than following the oft-beaten track and making no contribution towards the settlement of the vexed problem of communalism and communal violence. We all have heard enough of vague humanistic appeals to rouse good sense in our people and safeguard national interests as a means to counteract communalism. Let these hackneyed utterances eulogizing communal peace and harmony be replaced by concrete tasks of social and cultural revolutions to give a lead to our people. Let this Democratic Convention perform this historic task. Thank you, friends and brother delegates.

**Written address sent to be read out
at the Democratic Convention in
Delhi held in November 1964.**

Notes

1. Outstanding leaders of Indian freedom struggle.

2. Rulers of principalities.

3. Muslim rulers.

4. Landlords.

5. Upper strata in the caste hierarchy of Hindu society.

6. Four divisions in caste hierarchy of Hindu society.

7. Late Gamal Abdel Nasser, president of Egypt, wellknown leader of non-aligned movement.

8. Late Mohammad Ali Jinnah, most prominent Muslim leader of India and first governor general of Pakistan.