

How Much Truth In BJP's Propaganda

We consider all people of India, irrespective of caste, religion or creed, language and community as Indian. The only fundamental distinction we make, or basic division in society we consider, is that of class division. But when, in this write-up and elsewhere, we make a division between different communities on the basis of religion, caste etc. we do it to reflect our opinion in regard to the propaganda and keeping in mind the common parlance used by the parliamentary and fundamentalist parties of our country.

Proclaiming themselves as the champion of the Hindu people, the BJP-RSS combine has for the past years been raising the question that in a secular democracy equality should be maintained and no community should get any special privilege. In this context they point an accusing finger at the Muslim minority community and propagate the idea, in various ways and at various levels, that this community has been appeased and become pampered to such an extent as to push the people of the majority community to the status of 'second class citizens' in their own country. Moreover, the BJP is warning the people of the majority community that they are in danger of becoming a minority and doomed to live in an Islamic state, because under the Muslim Personal Law the Muslims take four wives and multiply much faster.

To begin with, let us examine the accusations made by the BJP on the basis of facts and reality to determine, if, or how far these are true. The question that arises first is : Have the Muslim people in India really become a pampered community and if so, what exactly are the special favours they enjoy ?

In our country all common people are exploited, oppressed and deprived, irrespective of caste or community. Still then, the plight of poverty, illiteracy and overall backwardness is even worse among the Muslim masses, just as among the Adivasis also. Thus, the per capita income among the Muslims in India is 5 per cent less than the national average. (*India Today*, Oct. 31, '92) Their rate of literacy is only 42% against the national average of 52.11% and is especially dismal among Muslim women at 11% against the average national female rate of 39.42%. (*Planning Commission Survey*, 1987-88) Naturally that is reflected in the job opportunities available for them. Hence, although the Muslims comprise about 11 per cent of the entire population, they constituted a mere 2-4.08 per cent among engineers, doctors, IAS, IPS, and in the posts of State Government (Class 1), Banks, Private Enterprises in the seventies, according to the Minorities Commission Report, prepared by late Dr. Gopal Singh. But this dismal picture is by no means an indication of discrimination but is the direct result of the backward system of *Madrassa* education prevailing for so long in Muslim society, under the influence of fundamentalist and orthodox leaders, which has blocked the educational advancement of

the Muslim people so that they have been unable to effectively compete with others.

Hence in these most vital questions of life, can any sane person claim that the Muslim community is pampered ? Even the reservation policy in force for the scheduled castes, the backward tribes and classes is absent in their case too. This is not to say that it would help to uplift the standard of life of the common Muslim masses if a provision for reservation was made for them — as experience with the above has shown — nor are we raising this demand, because with government moratorium on new recruitment, not to speak of privatisation, the lure or hoax of reservation is used by parliamentary parties merely to gain some electoral advantage while sowing dissension and division among the ranks of the people and hence it cannot solve the problems in the present conditions. The demand to be raised, is to provide jobs for all. But what we want to emphasize is that even in regard to reservation they do not enjoy any privilege.

That leaves the question of concessions under Muslim Personal Law, branded by the BJP as highly discriminatory to the Hindus. The BJP is painting the fact that Muslim Personal Law allows a man to take four wives as unfair concession or privilege for the Muslims which the government had sanctioned in order to appease them. But does the BJP not know while propagating such a view, to what condition this provision of the Muslim Personal Law for marrying several times and practice of *talaq* without maintenance has reduced the Muslim women, for whom such a 'privilege' means nothing but oppression and deprivation ? Far from being a 'privilege' — has not the existing law for the minority community reduced the women to the position of a disposable commodity to their utter indignity and humiliation ? Does not this special 'appeasement' or 'privilege' obstruct the path of advancement of the Muslim society ? Besides, does not this system carry in it the danger of providing the Muslim men with a social sanction for debauchery which is incompatible with a civilized society ? To call this system a 'privilege' reflects a very bad taste to say the least. Now let us turn to facts.

Even though the Muslim men are entitled by law to take more than one wife, does the majority of them make really use of it ? Reality shows a different picture. Actually, this practice of polygamy, about which the BJP is raising such a hue and cry, is becoming gradually extinct even in Muslim society. First of all, among the educated section of Muslim society, polygamy is frowned upon and is practically absent. Second, just as polygamy has still survived to some extent among the downtrodden and illiterate, the neglected Adivasis and so-called low-caste poor in Hindu society, in the same way among the poor section of Muslims who adhere to religious customs, polygamy is still somewhat in use, but compared to the whole population this is very negligible. In fact, surprising as it may sound, the prevalence of polygamy is

lowest among the Muslims, as has been found by different investigations carried out independently. For example, by the Social Studies Division of the Registrar General covering 587 districts distributed all over India, for the period of 1951-61, as well as by government investigations which, based on the 1961 census and covering 10 lakhs of marriages, both found that prevalence of polygamy was lowest among the Muslims. The figures provided by them being 4.3 and 5.7 per cent respectively for Muslims which is lower than those for Hindus at 5.06 and 5.8 per cent respectively.

Such being the facts, how can the right under the Muslim Personal Law for polygamy, for a practice which is dying out and even less in use among the Muslims than among the Hindus, be called a special concession and appeasement of the Muslim community, and how can this possibly turn the majority community into second class citizens ? No sane and honest person would utter such allegations and falsehood. While playing up these Personal Law 'concessions' given to the Muslim minority community the BJP is however silent about the concessions enjoyed by the Hindus, to whom special tax benefits are given under the Undivided Hindu Family Act.

Of course, all these cannot obscure the fact that a common civil code is desirable for all the people in any country. The Muslim Personal Law had been sanctioned at the time of independence for certain historical reasons in the particular conditions pertaining at that time, about which the BJP is silent and to discuss which is beyond the scope of this writing. Today, for the introduction of a common civil code a socio-cultural-democratic movement from within the Muslim society is a prerequisite, because without such social sanction no law can be effective. But precisely when such a movement started from within the Muslim community against some medieval codes of the Personal Law, was it not the duty of a democratic government to encourage the same ? Yet what role did the then Congress Government at the Centre play ? When the intellectuals and democratic section of the Muslim society demonstrated their support for the Supreme Court verdict in the Shah Bano case in 1985-86 (which upheld the right of

Proletarian Era

Organ of the SOCIALIST UNITY CENTRE OF INDIA
(Fortnightly)

Founder Editor-in-Chief :
COMRADE SHIBDAS GHOSH

Volume 26 No. 11 March 24 1993

Price : .30 P. Air Surchage : .5 P.

Bulletin No. 1

maintenance against the provisions of the Personal Law) it was those aspirations for social and democratic reforms pent up for long, that found their expression. Ignoring the threats and opposition from the religious leaders and orthodox Muslims, the Muslim women openly came out on the streets in Delhi symbolically displaying themselves with letters and appealing to the Rajiv Gandhi Government not to obstruct them on their path of liberation from medieval shackles. But what did the Rajiv Gandhi Government do? To satisfy the orthodox leaders, the Rajiv Government, solely for the sake of some petty electoral gains, annulled the Supreme Court verdict through the introduction and adoption of the 'Protection of Muslim Women's Right' Bill which pushed the women back under the supreme authority of the Muslim Personal Law. For the common people, is that an appeasement or exploitation! Hence it is the

fundamentalist leaders and reactionary forces bent on perpetuating their dominance over the common Muslim people by trying to arrest them within medieval conditions and making use of their lack of education, religious faith and sense of insecurity naturally flowing from their minority status, in whose hands the Rajiv Gandhi Government had played, while cynically trampling the interests and democratic aspirations of the Muslim people, which by no means are antagonistic to, but one and the same as the aspirations of people from all communities. This act of the Congress (I) Government and appeasement of fundamentalists for its parliamentary interests actually a discrimination against the Muslim people, especially the women. And precisely this discrimination against the Muslim people, is what the BJP, by twisting and distorting facts beyond measure, in an utter travesty of truth, is shamelessly presenting as a discrimination against the Hindu community, claiming that it has relegated them to the status of second class citizens while the Muslims are being pampered. The BJP's claim is, therefore, far from true — rather a deliberate and false propaganda to whip up the feelings and sentiment of a large section of the unconscious and unorganised majority community people to reap dividends in narrow election politics.

Let us examine the BJP's claim that the Muslim people will soon outnumber the Hindu people because Muslims can take four wives. Before going into the question of statistics, one thing needs a clear understanding regarding the nature of the question which by itself can nail the BJP's lies and false propaganda. It is known to all that only the women have the capacity to carry and give birth to a child. If we, for example, take up the question of any four Muslim women married to a single husband, as permitted by the Muslim Personal Law, vis-a-vis another position when each of them has a separate husband—is it a fact that in the former case these women will give birth to children four times in number than the latter case when they have four separate and different husbands?

Only a hypocrite and a downright mischievous party can play with people's interest so shamelessly, taking advantage of the ignorance of the people. And only those need to resort to lies who are intrinsically weak as they are not armed with truth.

Now, if every Muslim was to take four wives, there would have to be about four times as many women as men for it to become possible. But according to the 1981 census report, the number of Muslim women is actually 25 lakhs less than that of men.

It is of course true, that due to poverty and lack of education the rate of population growth is somewhat higher among the Muslim community than among others, but facts reveal that it is declining, while among the Hindu community it is slightly increasing. And there is no denying the fact that family planning measures are becoming increasingly popular despite opposition from fundamentalists and

orthodox Muslims. Thus, from 1980-89 the practice of family planning has increased by 11% among Muslim couples as against 10% increase among the Hindus, according to investigations carried out by Operation Research Group. (*The Telegraph*, 14.10.92) And from 1989-90 this trend among the Muslim community registered a further significant increase, according to the survey figures published in *India Today* (Oct. 31, 92), which clearly gives the lie to the BJP propaganda that Muslims don't want to adopt birth control. Moreover, in a country where the Muslim minority constitutes only 11.4 per cent of the population and the Hindu majority community still 82.6 per cent (according to 1981 census), is there even a distant possibility that the minority with a growth rate that is only 0.15% higher than that of the majority (and which is declining further) will soon outnumber the majority? This propaganda of BJP, too, is nothing but a mischievous hate campaign based on absolute lies to whip up frenzy among people, born of blind resentment coupled with blind apprehension to reap electoral dividends. And in doing so, the RSS-BJP combine itself has exploded another myth propagated by it: that they stand in defence of great Indian cultural heritage and values like integrity, justice and compassion!

In today's crisis-ridden capitalism which is reeling under a world-wide crisis of market and recession with the sky-rocketing of prices, and growing unemployment, all kinds of problems arise and people suffer from ever greater sense of insecurity. The governments in power, who stand in defence of this system, cannot resolve the problems in people's life and everywhere are trampling increasingly democratic rights, norms and values, resulting in growing resentment of the people. Thus the governments and parliamentary parties are resorting to all kinds of tactics to divert the attention of the people, by bringing up various non-issues and creating strife among the people. But the RSS-BJP combine in its aggressive majority fundamentalism has gone one step further and through its hate campaign against the Muslim community has resorted to the dangerous tactics of the true fascists of putting up a fake enemy before the people to channelise their resentment against the rot of the existing system into a false, blind alley.

In this context it should be borne in mind, that whereas minority fundamentalism is detrimental to the advancement and progress of people, the aggressive majority fundamentalism is more dangerous and detrimental by far. We appeal to all right thinking, democratic people to ponder these questions and oppose the hate campaign let loose by the RSS-BJP combine. We appeal to the people of all communities to foil the designs of the fundamentalist forces and forge bonds of unity and amity among the different communities, and to realise their own power which no force, party or government can ignore and resist.

Should we believe in myths or fact ?

Myth :	Fact :
Muslim community has been pampered	Muslim people are more destitute than even the so-called lowest caste Hindu people
Muslims take four wives	Prevalence of polygamy is lowest among the Muslim people. The following figures percentage-wise will reveal : Tribals 15.25, Buddhists 7.97, Jains 6.72, Hindus 5.8 whereas the Muslims 5.7.
Muslims do not want to adopt birth control. They will soon become the majority.	The Hindus constitute 82.6% of the population and the Muslims only 11.4%. The growth rate of Muslim population is only 0.15% higher than the Hindu rate and on the decline while the Hindu rate is on the increase.
Only Muslims can buy land in Kashmir.	Only the Kashmiri people, Muslims and Hindus alike, can buy land there, but people from other states cannot.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF : COMRADE NIHAR MUKHERJEE

Edited & Published by Sukomal Das Gupta from 48 Lenin Sarani, Calcutta - 700 013 and printed by him at Ganadabi Printers and Publishers Private Limited, 52B, Indian Mirror Street, Calcutta-700 013