

On CAA the Opposition is— Peddling False Narratives, Spreading Misinformation, Betraying Refugees

- Dr. Anirban Ganguly

While giving his unassailable, pointed, inspiring and historic replies in the both Houses of Parliament, Union Home Minister Amit Shah asked a number of questions which the Congress and the communist parties have never dared to ask in these seven decades of independent India. Where have the minorities of these three neighbouring countries – Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan- gone over the years? There has been a distinct depletion of their numbers in these countries, where have they gone, asked Amit Shah? If our brothers and sisters are afflicted, face persecution and attacks in these countries, should we just look the other way, where else will they go except come to India, should we drive them away then”, he asked.

On the definition of secularism, Home Minister Shri Shah asked how is that, “just because this Bill does not speak of Muslim, you dub it is as anti-secular, but you do not see that it includes all minorities in the countries mentioned, why don't you see that it speaks of Christians, Sikhs, Jains, Parsis, Buddhists as well”. He also pointed out, how this Bill was meant to confer citizenship and not to take it away. He clearly stated a number of times on the floor of the House, that Muslims who are citizens of India had nothing to be apprehensive of and should not fall for false propaganda spread by a section of the opposition. The CAA, Shri Amit Shah, has time and again pointed out, does not take citizenship away, it is meant to “give citizenship to religiously persecuted refugees, it is not to take away citizenship of any Indian.” Both Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Shri Amit Shah, BJP working president Shri J.P.Nadda have repeatedly asserted, in various forums, programmes and rallies that the CAA is not meant to take away but to confer citizenship.

In its 2019 vision document, released during the campaign, the BJP, clearly stated its intent of bringing about the Citizenship Amendment Bill. Since its first national session in Kanpur in 1952 the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) and later the BJP have always advocated the need to provide citizenship to these beleaguered minorities of Pakistan, to protect them and to fulfil the promise India made to them

at the time of partition. In its 2014 Vision Document, the BJP stated (p.40), "India shall remain a natural home for persecuted Hindus and they shall be welcome to seek refuge here." In its 2019 Vision Document the BJP clearly states, (p.12), "We are committed to the enactment of the Citizenship Amendment Bill for the protection of individuals of religious minority communities from neighbouring countries escaping persecution. We will make all efforts to clarify the issues to the sections of population from the North-eastern states who have expressed apprehension regarding the legislation. We reiterate our commitment to protect the linguistic, cultural and social identity of the people of the Northeast. Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs and Christians escaping from India's neighbouring countries will be given citizenship in India." It was with this Vision Document that the BJP went into elections and won with a historic majority. It has adhered to each section of the promise it made in this paragraph on the CAB, why then this hue and cry by a section of the pseudo-intellectual class and the Urban Naxals?

While speaking on atrocities on minorities in Bangladesh, Shri Shah, also clearly stated in both Houses of Parliament that minorities in Bangladesh were best protected during Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib's period and their condition deteriorated after that. It was bad during Pakistan's rule as well, and degenerated after Mujib's assassination. Shri Shah pointed out that the situation since the coming to power of the Sheikh Hasina led Awami League government has seen a vast improvement. Therefore the current dispensation in Bangladesh need not pay heed to distorted versions of what Shri Shah said that is being dished out by a section of the communists and pseudo-secular political elements in India and worldwide, they should instead base their assessment and stand on Shri Shah's statement made on the floor of the Indian Parliament. This said, the Bangladesh government ought to also accept the historical reality of discrimination and atrocities on minorities in East Pakistan, and in Bangladesh, especially during martial rule and later during the BNP rule of Khaleda Zia.

It also was unclear on what basis or what drove parties such as the BSP to oppose the passage of the Bill? Had the BSP leadership, which had supported the abrogation of Article 370 on the ground that it would provide for reservation to the marginalised sections in the region, read up the history of India's partition in some detail, especially how partition had affected the Dalits of East Pakistan, it would have perhaps had a rethink. Most of the persecuted minorities of these countries are Dalits, the persecution of the Namasudras – the valiant Matuas in East Pakistan and later Bangladesh is one of the most disturbing episodes of our recent history. Most of those who had to therefore leave their homes in East Pakistan and Bangladesh were Dalits.

The present BSP is certainly not the one which late Kanshiram had founded. It is allowing itself to be held hostage to the politics of appeasement and

vote-bank. A large number of Dalit Hindu refugees are loudly asking this question, how is it that the BSP leadership did not stand by them? How is it that a political entity like the BSP and other parties which have built up an entire political career professing to work for the empowerment of Dalits oppose the CAA?

A sample for those self-professed Dalit, communist and Congress leaders who have opposed CAA. In their seminal study, "Religion and Politics in Bangladesh and West Bengal: a study of Communal Relations" Sukumar Biswas and Hiroshi Sato, for example, document how in January 1950 (the period when the attacks on minorities in East Pakistan intensified) a pogrom was unleashed on tribals – Santals by East Pakistan police, "Village after village was indiscriminately burnt down, peasants were beaten and tortured mercilessly. They created a reign of terror by free looting, and raping of the Santal women went at will. 24 Santal peasants succumbed to death due to police torture...Innumerable Santals were killed in Nawabganj and Rajshahi Jails...The pervasive and multi-directional torturing compelled several Santal peasants to emigrate to West Bengal..." These Santals were active participants in the historic Tebhaga movement led by communist party leaders in East Pakistan! Yet, both Mayawati and Sitaram Yechury have opposed the CAA, they do not want ST and SCs, among others, who came away to India due to religious persecution, to be conferred with Indian citizenship!

Plenty of records and documentation exist on how people from these sections of society were driven away, along with others, from East Pakistan. Here are again a few more samples, the Amrita Bazar Patrika reported on March 6, 1950, for instance: "...After a month since the atrocities had been committed on the Santals, disturbances again started on February 28 last. Since then, hundreds, of Hindus of all classes began to cross the border into Maldah district in the Indian Union. During their journey these people have been subjected to all sorts of harassment; their womenfolk especially suffered great indignities...The Ansars are snatching away whatever these unfortunate people have with them...In Singhrill village one Rahim Bux occupied a house belonging to the leader of the Mahato community of the village. Thus people of the village became very much panicky. As a result of this widespread Hindu-baiting, Hindus of all classes began to leave those areas for India."

The Amrita Bazar Patrika issue of 23 March, 1950, for example, reported how, the Pakistan armed forces and Ansars, on the point of rifles, "drove away 20 families [Santals] of village Hariharpur, adjacent to Balurghat, and broke open the roofs of the houses and took away huge quantities of C.I. sheets, paddy, rice, mustard seeds, jute and utensils..." It was a continuous situation of this magnitude which compelled the minorities of East Pakistan to flee to West Bengal.

The Nehru-Liaquat Pact of 1950 failed to protect the minorities in East Pakistan and this was compounded by Nehru's peculiar and irrational refusal to

effectuate a total exchange of population on the eastern front and to provide the refugees, flowing in from East Pakistan, only with relief and not rehabilitation under the logic that they will have to go back. Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee, speaking in Parliament on 7 August 1950, pointed out that the Pact had failed, it had failed to prevent atrocities and attacks on minorities in East Pakistan. These continuing attacks, desecrations, killings had shown, Dr Mookerjee told the House, that the “entire social and economic structure in which Hindus lived has collapsed and it is impossible for them to live there.”

Nehru refused to even consider their plight, when at the Jaipur session of the AICC in 1948, a delegation of Bengali Hindus refugees belonging to the Nikhil VangaBastuharaKaramParishad (NVBKP) led by Gandhians and Congress leaders of East Bengal, among them the veteran Congressman and Gandhian, Amritlal Chatterjee, all of whom had to come away from East Pakistan and take shelter in West Bengal, called on Nehru to submit a deputation requesting the Central government to provide for rehabilitation for refugees who had come from East Pakistan to West Bengal, he told them, point blank that they were foreigner and that they must get in touch with the AICC's foreign affairs bureau instead!

This was the attitude of the Congress leadership, it left a huge historic challenge unaddressed, and despite assuring these hapless people of protection and shelter it had the gumption of turning its back on them once partition was done and the pogrom against the minorities began. While Dr Ambedkar, in his seminal book Pakistan or the Partition of India, had advocated a complete exchange of population, “That the transfer of minorities is the only lasting remedy for communal peace is beyond doubt...”, Mahatma Gandhi is on record having said on 16 July 1947, after his customary post-prayer meeting address, that “There is the problem of those Hindus who for fear imaginary or real, will have to leave their own homes in Pakistan. If hindrances are created in their daily work or movement or if they are treated as foreigners in their own land, then they will not be able to stay there. In that case the duty of the adjoining province on this side of the border will be to accept them with both arms and to extend to them all legitimate opportunities. They should be made to feel that they have not come to an alien land.”

The CAA aims to accept these people with both arms, to extent to them all legitimate opportunities and to make them feel that they have not come to an alien land. But ironically, the Congress then, and the Congress now continues to oppose this move. Nehru had also promised these people during partition that they would be protected and looked after if the need ever arose, he had said, “our duty to those who will be in peril in East Bengal, will be to protect them in their own country and to give them shelter in our own country if there is no other way and the situation so demands.”

But Nehru never made any serious move to fulfil or to stand by this promise, while his political heirs today have actively opposed the conferring of citizenship

on minorities persecuted and evicted from these three countries. Nehru's heirs have whipped up emotions, have attempted to generate a communal frenzy through a deliberate misinterpretation of the Act, have displayed a colossal ignorance of partition history and a stony and disdainful indifference to the plight of the refugees who, for seven decades, have been living a near invisible existence.

Historically West Bengal has been the first port of shelter for these persecuted minorities of East Pakistan, why then is the Trinamool Congress dispensation in the state and especially Chief Minister Ms Mamata Banerjee, spreading deliberate misinformation about CAA, actively perpetrating a state of communal tension and calling this Act passed by the Parliament and assented to by the President of India as unconstitutional? How can an elected Chief Minister refuse to pay heed to an act of the Indian Parliament and that too on a subject which clearly falls under the jurisdiction of the Union government?

The reality is that Ms Banerjee is determined to protect her infiltrator vote-bank and at the same time prevent the Bengali Hindus refugees from becoming citizens of India. So fierce is her hatred for these refugees that she allowed a section of lumpens to create unrest, vandalises public property and terrorise people. That an elected head of a state government can allow and encourage such public acts of violence is in itself deplorable, that she does it in the name of protecting the Constitution is doubly deplorable. It is ironical that in West Bengal, a state in which the Bengali Hindu refugees have waged the longest struggle for Indian citizenship rights, the ruling party is resolutely opposed to implementing the CAA because it is worried about the dilution of its infiltrator vote-bank!

The CAA is a civilizational move, it is the fulfilment of a historic promise and the rectification of a historic wrong, it is a move that will further concretise the vision of a new India, it announces the start of new phase, a phase in which those long suffering and ignored will at last find a place of dignity and contribute their energies to this vision of a New India. Those who oppose it today are the ones who have habitually sided with separatism, the forces of disintegration and elements who wish to see India's march retarded and captive to the old narrative of fear and division. The real India, is rejecting them, and will gradually reject them entirely and comprehensively.

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