



By DALE LUIS MENEZES

Political Parties and the Rhetoric of Partial Truths

Much too often, the statements of political parties and the rhetoric that accompanies it hides more than it reveals. It obscures the issues faced by the people in the interest of maintaining one party's legitimacy to continue to rule. Alternately, facts and truth are selectively used by the opposition to turn the heat on those who are in power.

In this context, let us consider some recent statements made by members of political parties. As reported in an English-language daily, Curtorim MLA, Aleixo Reginaldo Lourenço claimed that beef was not banned during the Congress regime in Goa. His reason for the claim was that, except for the meat of female cattle (or cow), other bovine meat was available to the Goan people for consumption. Lourenço was reacting to the recent statement made by BJP's Amit Shah, who said that the beef-ban was in existence in Goa before prior to the BJP and added that "it was there when the Congress government was in power, but no one posed questions to the Congress".

In the jostle between Messrs. Lourenço and Shah, or Congress and BJP, one thing appears to be sadly true: both are partially right. Lourenço is right in saying that the consumption of the meat of the female bovine was prohibited, just like Shah is in claiming that the ban on cow-slaughter pre-dated the BJP; it also predates the Congress, for it was the MGP government that brought in the legislation in the 1970s, making Goa one of the first states (then a Union Territory) to bring in a ban. However, when the Congress came to power, it introduced a law which, in addition to maintaining the prohibition on the slaughter of female bovines, also created a license raj around the sale and consumption of cattle meat.

Writing in *O Heraldo* some time back, Albertina Almeida made a critical observation, "But then came the Goa Animal Preservation Act, 1995, enacted during the Congress rule in Goa. This was in the aftermath of the Ayodhya dispute when Congress was looking to playing the B team of the BJP after being on the verge of losing its majority on account of the political traction BJP was being able to gain by playing the Hindutva card". One can argue that this legislation played neatly into the hands of Hindu majoritarianism.



Surprisingly, one would expect that someone like Lourenço would recognize that a part of the blame lies in Congress policies. Especially since Lourenço has been one of the few politicians to be vocal against Hindutva in recent times. Is it simply a matter of safeguarding party interests from its rivals, or do the finer nuances of how fascist politics operates escape many politicians, not only Lourenço? It certainly seems so, given his assertion that the cow was sacred to Hindus and hence, out of respect, Goans refrained from slaughtering the female bovine (or the cow). Effectively, Lourenço suggests that the issue of cow-slaughter should be solely seen through the lens of upper-caste Hindu morality. How is this position any different from that of the BJP?

As has been time and again pointed out by many commentators, the issue of the beef-ban or cow-slaughter affects laboring caste and class persons more than it does those who only consume beef, or those who solely worship the cow. What happens to the finances of a farmer, already a member of an economically precarious group, who is saddled with the burden of maintaining a non-productive cow?

The Chief Minister, Manohar Parrikar's comments following the Central Government's new rules to regulate cattle markets is another example of how members of political parties indulge in the rhetoric of partial truth. Goa, he said, did not have a cattle market and hence the rules did not apply. However, such an assertion masked the fact that the livelihoods of hundreds of Goans, not to mention the nourishment of thousands, were endangered. The inhuman laws that have been introduced by various governments have, in fact, created difficulties for the laboring poor. Who will own up to these mistakes?

One thing is very clear, spokespersons of political parties perpetually evade any blame for the problems caused by the ideology of their respective parties. In such an appalling political culture, where 'blame game' and 'whataboutery' dominate, one is reminded of the proverb: 'when elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers'. Indeed, the issues pertaining to the lives, and livelihoods of people as well as the issues of environmental degradation remain unaddressed.

In recent times, Goans have witnessed a 'blame game' on various issues. If we know for sure that an environmental disaster is imminent, owing to the skewed developmental policies, is it really a question of conflicting ideologies of political parties? Will evading responsibility or blaming the other political party for the failure of governance help in preventing an environmental disaster? The same applies to preventing a growing humanitarian crisis, wherein lowered-caste and minoritized groups are routinely lynched and killed. Eventually, the bickering of political parties whitewashes the horrors that people have to face on a daily basis.

The rhetoric of partial truths simultaneously hides and reveals the truth (or truths). But what it hides is far more important – and has greater consequences – than what it reveals. It creates an aura in which issues seem to be debated and discussed, as in a democratic setup. The manner in which the rhetoric of partial truths hides certain facts, it also excludes certain people. The facts that are hidden by rhetoric indicate that real people are affected by state policies and ideological politics. It is precisely in the nature of the rhetoric of partial truths to create a discourse that marginalizes groups to the extent that they are disenfranchised.

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