

P r e f a c e

I was quite aware when I began this work of the difficulties I would face. Three problems were obvious. One, there is a gigantic body of literature on fascism. It is perhaps not humanly possible to read all that has been written in English, forget other languages. The existing literature also touches upon almost all possible aspects of fascism, some generally considered central and germane, others somewhat esoteric at least at first sight. Further, the various scholars are not in agreement. It is difficult to critique any of them without equally deep study of the area they examine, except at abstract theoretical levels. Second, a massive amount of literature, particularly dealing with specific histories and particular conditions, is in languages other than English, to which I have no access. Third, any real in-depth study would require far more time and far greater resources than what were available to me. The work I knew would hence be quite preliminary and somewhat superficial. I however expected it to be a general survey and help in explaining some definitive characteristics of fascism.

I did not at all expect difficulties in writing a 'preliminary introduction' to fascism. The original plan was to do a schematic text on fascism, based on some 'authoritative' works. The Indian situation and communalism were, under this plan, to figure (more or less) only as 'appendices' to the main text. The idea changed completely as I attempted actually to begin the writing. I sought to write in the first instance some preparatory reflections, just to compile and consolidate my thoughts. I found that the Gujarat Carnage of 2002 as well as thoughts on the Sangh Parivar occupied a fair amount of space in these reflections. Even then, I planned not to use that in the final writing. Somehow, my thoughts changed at that point of time. I found that the Narendra Modi Praveen Togadia brand of communalism may be deniable and unpopular but a soft Hindutva had become prevalent in the country. This *soft*-Hindutva could be dangerous as it always harboured the possibility of ultimately being soft towards hard communalism too, if it was to arise again, or (at least indirectly) of preparing the grounds for it.

The debate over the possible existence of fascism in the present age and that too in a country like India is also politically important. There is no need to stick to the word 'fascist' as long as the danger is clearly recognised and its characteristics understood. The other difficulty was a little different. All problems laid at the feet of communalism are interpreted very narrowly. It is forgotten that threats to democracy lie also outside *communal* forces. (Let me not mince words. The blindness is to 'secular' or at least non-communal fascism.) In fact, this is also a failure to distinguish the reality of fascism from the Holocaust or rabid racism. Repugnant as they are, they are only the extreme, perhaps terminal - symptoms of what is wrong with fascism, not its core. This attitude also builds up the soft Hindutva, one without massacres.

I then felt that I needed to share this with the potential readers of what I would write. It was then necessary to begin with the concrete reality of India. The understanding of the Gujarat Carnage and of the vision of the forces that perpetrated it had to come right in the beginning. This vision then had to be compared with fascism. I felt that this alone would make sense since it would also tell the readers why it is necessary to be concerned with understanding fascism. I decided at this stage to change my arrangement of the material and to present it in its current form. It is in a way different from normal writings of this nature. The presentation runs parallel to the track of my explorations. The conclusions do not obviously dominate or come first with the empirical reality being only the substantiation. In a sense then this writing is an invitation to the readers to make a journey of exploration with me to understand the natures of communalism and fascism and to gauge what they portend for the future of democracy, particularly in India.

I have no wish to be polemical in this writing. It is not at all an exercise of that nature. There were some questions that I could not escape. First and foremost is the question whether fascism poses any threat today or is a 'dead and gone' occurrence of only historical interest. Second, whether there is any potential threat of fascism to India or is it 'just' communalism that we have to tackle. Third, was fascism an aberration, a pathological situation as many writers suggest or was it a product of exceptional but non-aberrant circumstances? A supplementary point also needs to be raised here and that is of differentiating between the existence of a fascist movement, organisation, and regime. Obviously one needs to differentiate between

genocide and fascism, though this too is not obvious to all. It is also necessary to understand the relationship between capital and fascism, particularly in the light of numerous current writings that exonerate capitalism completely from the sins or at least excesses of fascism. Last but not the least it is necessary to explore the possibility of fascism in the age of globalisation. These are questions and issues that create a debate. One cannot avoid these, since they are crucial, only to avoid argument or expression of difference of opinion. The mass psychology of fascism is another such issue. Scholars of great repute have written about this mass psychology of fascism yet the question about the existence of any mass psychology of any political ideology must be raised.

I have not adequately dealt with yet another issue. This omission may be considered criminal. This is the issue of the holocaust. My only weak plea is that a half-way decent description and analysis would have made the writing much longer than it is at present. An analysis of the holocaust needs a detailed discussion of the specificities of Germany and Nazism, which was beyond my scope or perhaps even competence.

I attempt this writing for some reasons. The most important reason is self-clarification. Organising the bits and pieces of information and understanding picked up from the ocean of studies in a systematic manner, however haphazard the experts may consider it, is helpful to grasp the subject matter. In this process some questions also arise that demand some answers, however tentative. These can be of any worth only if the questions and the tentative answers are shared and discussed. That can only be possible if the glimpses of understanding, however questionable, are presented for comments. Last but not the least is the fact that a sponsored study needs to produce a written report.

It should be clear from the above that my reading was very preliminary. It is not a *study* by any stretch of imagination. The base is secondary sources, mainly well known published works. There is no new information. There *may be* a few tentative insights. I have left out details of historical occurrences associated with the rise of fascist movements in Europe or with the emergence of fascist regimes. The writing at best provides a general survey and an introduction, nothing more. I do not believe that the debate regarding the nature, causation, and

characteristics of fascism is settled. A real contribution to the debate would have been very satisfactory. This particular writing does not play that role. It is too preliminary and tentative to do so.

I have generally followed the convention of using fascism (with a small case f) to denote generic fascism - the phenomenon in general and Fascism (with a capital F) to denote the specific occurrence in Italy. Unfortunately there is some inconsistency in this regard particularly since all writers do not follow this convention and I do use some quotes to illustrate various points.

My efforts might not have produced any tangible results like a writing if Centre for Education and Documentation had not provided me with a scholarship. I am grateful to CED for the support. I do wish particularly to thank John and Raajen for making the support and the study possible and for believing in me despite the horrid delays.

It was not so planned but the writing has been completed and likely to be published in the year that the Sangh Parivar celebrates the birth centenary of its most famous supreme leader (Sar Sangh Chalak) M S Golwalkar, known within the Sangh Parivar as Guruji. The Sangh Parivar will of course glamorise him as a great national leader. It is satisfying that this writing will strike a different note and expose his views for what they were.

I have discussed my ideas with various people at different times. Their comments have been extremely useful. Many friends and colleagues had to suffer unwarranted discussions of fascism whatever the actual topic of the particular conversation. Some of them did point out to me that there are other political phenomena besides fascism in the world and that one cannot view all happenings through a simple fascist/anti-fascist dichotomy. These discussions were invaluable. I am guilty of ignoring many of the suggestions and comments. The inadequacies and errors in the writing are of course all mine.

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Permanent Peril: An Indian View

It is obviously very difficult to pinpoint an exact year or event as the turning point in the history of any country, any people. Usually it is a chain of events, very often not very dramatic, that together have an impact, generally in an insidious manner. They are often not even recognised as crucially significant as they occur and unfold.

The *one* event that symbolically *and* substantially affected the society and polity in India in recent times was the *Rath Yatra* (chariot tour) undertaken by the then president of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) L K Advani in 1990.¹ This tour was part of the campaign to build a Ram temple in place of the Babri Masjid (mosque) in Ayodhya. The temple was of course, above all else a symbol, of Hindu *unity*, Hindu *organisation*, and Hindu *supremacy*. This of course meant that the *Rath Yatra* was a campaign to put the Muslims in their place, to teach them a lesson, to make them pay for the alleged sins of a Muslim ruler who existed 500 years ago and had allegedly destroyed the original temple.

The *Rath Yatra* did not emerge out of the blue. The *Sangh Parivar*, till then part of the political, periphery gained political acceptance and legitimacy with participation in the agitation led by Jay Prakash Narain in the early seventies.

The then incarnation of the BJP, the *Jan Sangh* merged with other outfits to form the *Janata Party* in 1977 which won the elections and became the ruling party. The rule of the *Janata Party* did not last long.

¹ It is probably not necessary to mention that L K Advani undertook a tour from the western coast up to Ayodhya in 1990. He travelled in a van decorated to resemble in looks a Rath or chariot – the medieval horse drawn vehicle used by the royalty and high nobility for transportation and far more as a war vehicle. The symbolism of the chariot – its ancient nature, prevalence prior to the incursions by Muslims – so an almost Hindu/ Vedic lineage - and its military use (the charioteer was a high born warrior, above all an archer, generally from the ruling clan who was considered a very adept warrior with specialised skills; it was not a common soldier's fighting vehicle – in fact only some persons had the royally conferred right to use or ride a chariot) – should not be overlooked. The effort was to project a certain warrior-ruler image of the BJP leader and relate him to an India of the medieval ages.

The party itself broke up. The *Jan Sangh* came out of it to acquire the new name and shape of the BJP. For a decade thereafter the BJP remained a marginal party. Following the *Rath Yatra* it emerged from obscurity to soon become the principal opposition party. The increase was seen as a 'mandate' for Hindu consolidation and for championing aggressively Hindu interests.

The hunt was for a symbol, for a single slogan that would fire pan-Hindu imagination that would divide the country squarely into the strident pro-Hindu and secular camps. The attempted Hindu consolidation had been challenged, perhaps unwittingly, in the only way it could be - through the card of caste divide. The announcement of reservations of seats in government jobs and educational institutions for the Other Backward Castes (OBC) had brought out into the open the caste antipathies and antagonisms within the Hindu community. Special efforts were necessary to overcome this challenge, to bridge the gaps and to forge pan-Hindu unity (however transient) once again. A common quest, a common symbol, a common simple demand, a common direct countrywide action, and a common enemy were urgently necessary. The temple at the birthplace of Ram, *Ram Janmabhoomi*, fit the bill. The *Rath Yatra* by the 'new iron man of India' was to consolidate this unity, this Hindu organisation, and to convert it into a political base as well as into a vote bank².

The *Rath Yatra* left a trail of hatred, violence, murder, mayhem, and blood across the country. It never reached its destination Ayodhya since the state government of Bihar led by Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav stopped it and arrested Mr L K Advani. The assault on the "symbol of shame for the Hindus", the Babri mosque, could not take place. Part of the aim had however been achieved. A communal divide steeped in blood had been created across the country. The division had also crept into the polity.³

The BJP achieved a significant gain with this *Rath Yatra*. It brought the issue of *Hindutva* a chauvinist *political* mobilisation of the Hindus

²The votes should not be discounted. Even Mussolini and Hitler craved votes, at least as an indication, particularly when they were not yet in power. Interestingly their parties also never got a majority of the votes.

³Apart from communal divide the agenda projected quite firmly the image of India as a Hindu nation and evoked the 'golden ages' of the medieval period – an imaginary period when India was considered to be a great country and arguably the greatest civilisation on earth. Clearly, the call was to feel pride in that achievement and to resurrect that India. This was of course, never spelt out. On the contrary, the BJP leaders talked of modernisation and development. They proposed modern development combined with the ancient culture.

against the minorities - onto the centre stage of politics. Secularism became the plank of those opposed to this vicious ideology.⁴ Henceforth, riding the wave of violent *Hindutva*, BJP was to become one of the two major parties in the country.

Contrary to expectations, the next elections did not deliver power into the hands of the BJP. The *Congress*, now led by Mr P V Narasimha Rao, after the assassination of Mr Rajiv Gandhi by Sri Lankan Tamil terrorists of the LTTE,⁵ managed to gather enough numbers to form the government. The BJP did win legislative power in some states but power at the centre eluded it. One more push was necessary.

That came towards the end of 1992.

On 6th December 1992 Hindu mobs organised by the BJP and other organisations within the *Sangh Parivar* assaulted and demolished the Babri mosque. The BJP blithely violated the undertaking it had given to the Supreme Court as well as the Central Government that the action would be one of peaceful protest, of beginning a symbolic construction (or 'reconstruction') of the temple. Many prominent leaders of the BJP were present on the scene. Some of them cheered the mobs and incited them to the action. The BJP was the ruling party in the state of UP wherein Ayodhya is located. The state government did not prevent the demolition of the mosque.

There was no active, massive protest against the action by the secular forces. They condemned the action in strongest possible words but did not come into the streets to express the condemnation (at least not immediately, the marches came much later and they were against communal violence and for communal harmony). This omission perhaps was vital in its impact on the entire country. The protests were by the Muslims alone – and these too were local, spontaneous, sporadic, and in some cases violent, against symbols of the state. The followers of the *Sangh Parivar* were of course jubilant with their achievement. They saw the demolition of the mosque as a decisive victory.⁶

⁴The BJP characteristically termed these people pseudo-secularists and abrogated to itself the title of being secular – meaning 'fair' to the majority, the Hindus.

⁵Incidentally with claims as Hindu as well as Tamil.

⁶They, in fact, had their own term for the mosque – they stopped calling it the Babri mosque or even the mosque – they called it the 'disputed structure', in almost Orwellian New Speak. They also termed the mosque stigmata of shame, a monumental insult to the Hindus.

The common person was however not jubilant. The common Indian by and large was stunned and shocked as the news spread. The news bulletins of the BBC – that was now available on television sets in most (middle class) homes through the newly opened skies, a sign of the policies of globalisation officially adopted by India in mid 1991 – played a role in changing that mind set. The BBC news bulletins repeatedly telecast an interview with Mr L K Advani in which he expressed a formal regret at the demolition of the mosque but immediately, at least obliquely, justified it by stating that 40 Hindu temples had been demolished in the past few years in Kashmir. (This was not a fact but a lie as later on-the-spot investigations revealed. Mr Advani either wilfully lied or spread information that he had not confirmed. The BBC also did not check the veracity of the statement). This, coming from Mr Advani was a clear signal to the Hindus, particularly those under the influence of the *Sangh Parivar*, that the demolition of the mosque was a justified retaliation, that the Hindus need not feel contrite about the act, that the Muslim protests were uncalled for, and that the Muslims had no grounds or right to protest against the demolition of the mosque. Almost the entire country was soon engulfed in communal violence reminiscent of the partition riots.

Large numbers of Muslims were slaughtered, properties looted and burnt, women raped. The violence affected not only cities but also rural areas. Only a few states did not witness horrific violence against the Muslims. The *Sangh Parivar* remained defiant; it condoned and encouraged the violence. This gave rise to another more gruesome and far more organised orgy of violence in January of 1993 – particularly in Mumbai.

This reaped its own gory harvest in March 1993. Serial bomb blasts – 13 in number - shook Mumbai killing over 200 persons and wounding many more. The horrid bomb blasts were a clear though dastardly retaliation for the violent pogrom of December 1992 and January 1993. Subsequently it was known that they were orchestrated by part of the Mumbai underworld with assistance from the Inter Services Agency of Pakistan. Nevertheless, some of the persons involved in the bomb blasts were neither hardened members of the underworld nor agents of Pakistani intelligence. They were angry and wounded persons from the Muslim community, some of them directly victims of the brutal, inhuman violence.

The BJP made spectacular political gains as a result of the demolition of the Babri mosque and the violent aftermath. Its language now was of strident communalism – of *Hindutva*, of creation of a *Hindu Rashtra*. It won power in some states, including Maharashtra (as a junior partner of the Shiv Sena). It also laid claim to power at the national level. This dream it realised in 1998.

BJP in power at the centre tried to sound reasonable and moderate – more concerned about governance and development than *Hindutva* or *Hindu Rashtra*. It flew numerous kites and tested the mood of the people for its *Hindutva agenda*. It attempted a review of the Constitution, it initiated nuclear weaponisation of India, it fought a mini-war with Pakistan, and it even attempted (twice) a peace process with Pakistan. None of these measures yielded the desired results. There was actually only one option left – of another gory bout of communal violence. That was put into effect with the Gujarat Carnage that began on March 1, 2002.⁷

The *Rath Yatra* of 1990 culminated in the Carnage – an unprecedented occurrence in independent India in terms of the brutality, intensity, spread, duration, administrative complicity, open (state) governmental support, absence of remorse, and above all the mass support generated in that state.

The violent communal divide of the period surrounding independence and Partition was successfully resurrected by the *Sangh Parivar* with its *Hindutva* campaign, *Rath Yatra*, demolition of the Babri mosque, widespread communal violence, capped by the Gujarat carnage.

The *Sangh Parivar* in all probability did not aim at continuous actual communal violence. Its aim was a (Hindu) *culture* of permanent violence. It may not actually believe that it can eliminate all Muslims from India – anyone can realise that their numbers are too high – they can neither be physically liquidated nor driven out of the country. Far more important perhaps is the fact that if there were no Muslims in significant numbers in the country the *Sangh Parivar* will lose its target hate object, and the basis of its politics of hatred, fear, and violence. (The *Parivar* believes in constant and permanent struggle – total elimination of the chosen enemy

⁷It is possible that the real immediate political reasons behind the Gujarat Carnage 2002 were the impending state legislative assembly elections in the state and the reduction in the popularity of the BJP in the state.

will make the struggle impossible!) The content of this politics was Hindu consolidation, Hindu organisation, and Hindu supremacy.

The Hindu too was a category that arose because of specific circumstances – as the only possible category for Indian sectarian identity politics.

The concept of the Indian nation arose only in opposition to British colonial rule. India in fact acquired modern nationhood while it was a colony, and as it opposed the imperial power. Nationalists of all hues had struggled with a definition and understanding of the precise content of Indian nationality. Under British rule different far off regions of the subcontinent experienced commonality and uniformity of administrative machinery, legal system, and economic activity for the first time. Till then there was no such commonality. Even real contact and communication between the different areas was not a real experience but only a sporadic occurrence. British administration gave the subcontinent a commonality, a task that earlier empires had not achieved. The barriers of differences of language, economy, political history, and nuances of cultural traditions had kept the different areas distinct and separate from each other.

The freedom movement made the *perception* of commonality a fairly widespread and popular sentiment. It sought to override the differences on the ground with the united opposition to British rule and with the demand for independence for the sub-continent, now named India.

This commonality was the basis of territorial nationalism that arose in India.

The basis of this nationalism was quite weak and unstable. First and foremost the political economy of different regions was quite different including sources of accumulation. Some areas did not relate integrally to the 'national' economic 'mainstream' at all. There was no common language of communication – there was no real lingua franca in India of the period, except perhaps English – the language of the colonial power – even for the elite. The promotion of Hindi as the 'National Language' (*Rashtra Bhasha*) upset numerous linguistic communities in the country. This situation changed quite slowly. It is worthwhile to remember here that secessionist sentiments were quite strong in Tamil Nadu for quite some time after independence. In fact, the right to secession of the states was withdrawn through a Constitutional Amendment only after the so called 'China War' in early 1960s. That too did not put to rest the anti-Hindi, and at least covertly secessionist, sentiments in Tamil Nadu for at

least a few more years. This was not surprising since there was no 'Indian' culture in existence. The disparity was not based only on the formal difference of language or the particularities of historical development or the more substantive caste differences (that perhaps are not understood to their fullest extent even today). Even at a formal level the very construction of music and dance was vastly different. The differences in food habits and cuisines have also been quite glaring.

The basis of the territorial nationalism in India was a territory that essentially had only one commonality. It was British administered. Territorial Nationalism was no doubt a modern and advanced (over the medieval, racial or religious) concept but it was not without its myriad problems.

In the first instance the creation of a territorial nation was in historical terms a short process in India. The more or less complete sway of the East India Company was established only in 1818 with the final rout of the Peshawas (euphemistically called the defeat of the Marathas). The direct rule of the British crown came into existence only in 1858. The first national (and what was to become later nationalist) organisation the Indian National Congress was founded in 1885. The period during which Indian nationality was shaped and defined was thus quite short. India as an independent nation state was a reality in 1947 – now separated from the Muslim majority nation state of Pakistan, itself separated into two wings (the East and the West) thousands of kilometres apart!

Second, the territory lacked any kind of integration – particularly emotional, except in opposition to colonial rule. Nationalists of different hues were hard pressed to define the commonality of the territory. It is interesting to note that even the modernists – in the simple sense of territorial nationalists – often fell back on a search for cultural and historical, essentially romantic and mythical commonalities of the 'nation'.⁸

⁸See for example, "The romanticist element is prominent also in The Discovery of India. Written in one of the dark periods of Indian nationalism, when Nehru loyally went to prison but doubted if the Congress had taken the right decision, the book is an emotional comprehension of India's past, a stress on her continuous culture, vitality and staying power through all ups and downs. It is a throwback, however sensitively formulated, to the cultural nationalism of the nineteenth century, and it is this which makes the Discovery poor in historical analysis. Soaked in Western culture but wishing to idealise all things and thought Indian, Nehru found a compromise in quoting such Western scholars as approved of and applauded India's past. (S Gopal, The Mind of Jawaharlal Nehru; Sangam Books - A division of Orient Longmans Ltd, 1980). If this could happen to Nehru, one can imagine the confusion of other nationalists of the period. This is not a stray and therefore accidental or uncharacteristic example. The Government of India published a White Paper on the India-China border dispute which invoked support from the Rig Veda, Mahabharata, and Ramayana for India's territorial claims.

The third feature is the fact that any territorial nationalism can only be a negotiated contractual entity. It does not have any recourse to emotional or mythical inviolable commonalities. In a certain romantic sense it is considered to be lacking in the basis of unity and united efforts at nation building.

There is yet another feature that has perhaps had a greater political impact on the fortunes of India to date. The status, interests, and demands of various religious communities were negotiated during the travel to the transfer of power. The same justice was not extended to the linguistic and ethnic nationalities (or sub-nationalities as it is fashionable to term them). Territorial nationalism thus also became an assertion – to an extent fairly illegitimate – to forcibly include numerous ‘peripheral’ nationalities within the definition of the ‘Indian’ without paying any attention to the rights of these groups *also, equally, and simultaneously* subjugated by the British – particularly their right to self determination. Territorial nationalism as passionately attached to the mythical boundaries of India as cultural (read Hindu) nationalism cynically ignored or suppressed ethnic groups on the borders of British administered ‘India’.

The communists in their formulations of 1948 (Programme of the Communist Party of India) at least perceived the problem and tried to define the new Indian nation state as a multi-national federation. Unfortunately they fought shy of their own vision, understanding, and insights and adopted a concept of territorial nationalism akin to that of the Congress.

One of the major permanent perils for democracy in the sub-continent is this lurking concept of cultural nationalism – that ultimately acquires the form of Hindu nationalism and Hindu patriotism – that often masquerades as territorial nationalism.

The *Hindutva* forces not only seize upon this anomaly and weakness but elevate it to a virtue.⁹

⁹A brief but interesting review of the *Hindutva* (in essence) position regarding nationalism is provided by Prabha Dixit in *The Ideology of Hindu Nationalism* in Thomas Pantham & Kenneth L Deutsch (Ed) **Political Thought in Modern India**; Sage; 1986. Dixit covers a range of Hindu nationalist thought from Aurobindo Ghosh via Lala Lajpatrai to V D Savarkar and M S Golwalkar. The similarities are more frightening than the obvious differences. Thus Aurobindo refuses to equate Indian nationalism with Hindu nationalism and considers the latter obsolete but believes that in India the Hindu will naturally dominate. Lala Lajpatrai shares the urge for ‘de-Islamisation’ with the Punjab Hindu Sabha and believes that Hinduism is necessary for nationalism. Savarkar and Golwalkar of course consider only the Hindus the core and legitimate nationality and effectively deny those rights to any other religious group – particularly the Muslims and the Christians.

This particular brand of nationalism has had varied impacts, not the least important being an equation of nationalism and patriotism with the Hindu. Nationalism once again recedes today into an ethno-centric definition. The mythical homogeneity of the *ethnie* – the true or the core nationality is often based on a religious definition that many times begins to sound racist. Communalism in India is thus a political position. The religion is only a criterion to identify the core nationality. The conflict is over the denial of nationalist, patriotic, and ultimately national claims to other ethnic and by extension religious groups.

In consideration of fascism the divide or contradiction is between republican democracy and narrow definitions of nationality and nationalism, not necessarily between religious communities. Take Savarkar’s attempts to define the Hindu in terms of the *Pitrubhumi* (fatherland) and *Punyabhumi* (holy land). The struggle is both to include and to exclude. The ultimate identity for him is on the basis of the ‘bonds of blood’. The exclusions are very clear – far more so in Golwalkar.¹⁰ Interestingly the problem of Hindu nationalism is as much inclusion as exclusion. The struggle is to lay claim to the various religions and sects that arose within India as versions of Hinduism. There is a desperate attempt to claim that Sikhs, Jains, Lingayats, Buddhists etc., are all members of the Hindu community – in fact sects of Hinduism rather than distinct religions. In recent past this has been glamorised into a category of *Indic religions* – perhaps as distinct from the Semitic religions.

The concern here is not about history, neither exclusively nor even primarily. The concern is *contemporary* reality.

The *Rath Yatra* of L K Advani and the aggressive virulent *Hindutva* campaign at least partially eclipsed the concept of secular nationalism

¹⁰M S Golwalkar says in **We or Our Nationhood Defined** (Nagpur, Bharat Prakashan, 1939; also quoted by Prabha Dixit cited above), [R.L 41.1] “The non-Hindu peoples in Hindustan must either adopt the culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but that of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture----- or may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment – not even citizen’s rights.” Golwalkar, and later even in recent years, the RSS ‘elevated’ this dire warning into a policy of Indianisation or Hinduisation of all ‘alien’ religions! It must be admitted that this is more ‘liberal’ than the Nazi prescriptions! The Jews were given no chance to Germanise or Aryanise themselves! It is of course difficult to draw that conclusion since in the same book Golwalkar also has great praise for anti-semitism that was seen in Germany. He says: “To keep up the purity of the Race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her (sic) purging the country of the Semitic Races — the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well nigh impossible it is for Races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by.”

and brought Hindu nationalism and Hindu patriotism back on to the agenda. Now it had a new name, of course, *cultural nationalism*. The RSS once again forcefully renewed its calls to Christians and Muslims to Indianise – read Hinduise – themselves. The BJP leaders too cautiously repeated the call.

The implications of this call are apparently very innocuous and nationalist. The call hence appealed to the middle class either naïve or already under *Hindutva* influence. At a superficial level all that it meant was that people of all religions must hold India dear – and realise that their religious identities too are shaped by Indian– basically Hindu culture. This is not just an assertion that all religious identities and cultures in India are syncretic and share elements from different sources. It is on the contrary an insistence that all religious and ethnic groups accept their Hindu origins, (almost) recant their religious persuasions, and accept the superiority and primacy of the Hindus in India. The bottom line was that only Hindus had any legitimate claims (material and cultural) since they alone could be considered nationals and nationalists. All others, particularly Muslims were then considered suspect in their nationalism and patriotism – and constantly considered on probation, continuously asked to prove themselves. This view considered them anti-national in actual fact, or potentially, or by aspiration. The anti-national here is not only an ideological position – not merely indicating opposition to nationalism as a political creed. The anti-nationalism here means that they are collaborators of inimical foreign powers, conspiring against the people of India, attempting to enslave and harm them. They are thus also projected as enemies of the people – not only the state. This obviously divides the people and creates an ideological base for a permanent communal divide and conflict.

This attitude of suspicion and ‘branding’ was not only popularised but also carried to the administration and to administrative thinking.

There is some background to this occurrence. The violence of 1992-93 produced the first massive terrorist strikes in the country by Muslim individuals. These were the bomb blasts in Mumbai. The strikes were clearly terrorist actions, even if some of the perpetrators, particularly the lower ranking ones amongst them, were motivated only by the urge for revenge, without exact awareness of the politics of terrorism.

The Mumbai bomb blasts led to a chain of actions that actually

propelled forward the BJP and in all probability also the ISI agenda. The police investigations followed the usual roughshod path. Muslim youths were indiscriminately arrested and allegedly tortured to unearth the conspiracy and to arrest the perpetrators. Numerous police officers have congratulated themselves on the impeccable investigation and yet almost one fifth of the accused many of whom have been incarcerated for the past 13 years were acquitted by the special court trying the case under the now repealed TADA (Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Prevention Act) recently. The investigations by the police only terrorised the entire Muslim community and alienated it from the mainstream even further. The young men (and sometimes women) particularly saw themselves treated as forever suspect aliens. They swelled the ranks of the extreme isolationist organisations of varied brands. Terrorist actions by varied extremist Muslim organisations have now become a constant feature in India. It is fashionable to blame all this on Pakistan and its intelligence agencies. That is obviously not the whole truth. There are enough locals driven to despair and to participation in such actions. The attitude of the police force in Mumbai has not changed at all. If anything it has become hardened. The city has been attacked by terrorists many times. The latest serial attacks were on July 11, 2006 in local trains at a crowded hour. The police were once again accused of targeting the Muslim community specifically and carrying out a witch hunt against it. The point here is not that the police have been rough or unmindful of human rights.¹¹ The substantive point is that even before the investigations begin the law and order agencies or rather their officers have already pinned responsibilities in their minds on particular groups. There are numerous examples of such behaviour. The investigations into the latest (July 2006) bomb blasts provide the latest amongst them. The

¹¹The human rights record of any security agency in the world is not particularly good. It is certainly not so in India. The problem in that regard is with the peculiar nature of the tasks of the security agencies. Letter of the law and considerations for human rights may operate in cases of individual crimes. The security – law and order - agencies then may perhaps play a neutral and autonomous role. In any society that experiences social conflicts the role of the security agencies is necessarily coercion and suppression, on behalf of the ruling class against the subjugated whether they rebel or do not. Repression cannot be carried out with respect for facades of democratic spirits – not if the conflict acquires any intensity or if the status quo is seriously threatened. Mr LK Advani when he was the Deputy Prime Minister and also held charge of Ministry of Home Affairs had expressed an opinion that personnel of the security forces should be exempt from action for violation of human rights if they served in disturbed areas. The statement was tactless (and of course offensive on many counts). It should however be considered an honest statement by a minister of a class-caste-community rule. It admitted that human rights of the subjugated cannot be and need not be protected.

varied statements of the top ranking officials, who are increasingly desirous of media (particularly electronic) exposure, reveal this mindset. Despite these statements the courts released three of the nine initial accused for lack of basic evidence in the first hearing. Again, despite loud claims, made straight to the media, no irrefutable evidence of the involvement of Pakistan in the blasts has been made public. In fact, it could not even be presented to the international community.

Similar enthusiasm is not shown by the administration if the perpetrators of even terrorist-like acts are Hindu individuals or organisations. The Bajrang Dal has not been actively prosecuted even when implicated in certain bomb blasts in the recent past. The arms recovered from the vehicle of a Shiv Sena leader during the anti-Muslim violence of January 1993 have not led to any prosecution or conviction. No action has really been taken against those found guilty by the Commission of Inquiry that investigated the communal violence in Mumbai of December 1992-January 1993. The list is actually endless.

Terrorism however is a fact of life. India has been a repeated target. The terrorism factor has been a great boon to the *Sangh Parivar*. The above mentioned attitude of the security forces is of course widely shared by the *Sangh Parivar*. It has even been able to generalise this attitude and fear. The moderate statement these days is, 'not every Muslim is a terrorist but every terrorist is a Muslim'. It is perhaps needless to say that this attitude (apart from being incorrect on facts) totally refuses to analyse the nature and causes of terrorism in this country. The riots of 1992-93 led to the outbreak of terrorism by Muslim groups in the country. The Gujarat Carnage has only strengthened the hands of the terrorists. The failure of justice in Gujarat has compounded the situation. It is also forgotten that the failure or unwillingness to find a peaceful and political solution to the Kashmir problem combined with the routine excesses of the security forces led to insurgency in the state that later acquired even terrorist forms. The international situation too was responsible for this situation.

A notable feature is that in other instances of terrorist actions there were excesses by security forces and gross violations of human rights but no ethnic or communal definition of terrorism was advanced.

The BJP continuously blames other governments – notably the current *United Progressive Alliance* (UPA) government led by the *Congress* – of being soft towards the terrorists and of being so because of its policy of appeasement of minorities. The BJP and the entire *Sangh*

Parivar, along with a section of the bureaucracy (particularly the security forces) clamours for exceptional laws to deal with terrorism. Exceptional laws are laws that give a licence to the security forces to openly violate democratic rights. They essentially curb legislative and judicial curb over the executive and upset the system of checks-and-balances that has been a pivot of the democratic republican polity in India.

The tendencies have been present for a long time. The record of Indian government and security forces in the border states, of the north-east as well as in Jammu and Kashmir, is quite shameful. Draconian laws like Armed Forces Special Powers Acts have always existed and have been applied to these areas. The developments in the country after the *Rath Yatra* sought to make this situation routine and generalised.

The only dangerous features of the *Rath Yatra* were not that the *Sangh Parivar* began to proudly spout communal venom openly or that it periodically indulged in orgies of communal violence or even that it managed to generalise the communal feelings (sometimes in a disguised form) in a large number of the citizens of this country. It really inaugurated occurrences that threatened the very roots of democracy in the country. A well known fact must be emphasised even at the risk of repeated repetition. Democracy in a multi-religious and multi-ethnic country like India can only be secular democracy.

The *Rath Yatra* brought the BJP to power, first in some states and then at the centre. The rule of the BJP always places the remote control in the hands of the RSS, its ideological parent. The RSS always scoffed at mere governmental power. It did not consider itself a political organisation in that sense. It saw itself as an ideological organisation. Its aim always and quite openly was the total reconstruction of the Indian society and the creation of a new man. This aim was to be achieved in line with a Hindu ideal and a Hindu vision so that ultimately a Hindu nation could be created. This should not be confused with dreams of a Hindu theocracy or a medieval regime based on Brahmanic rituals. It is a dream akin to the fascist vision of reconstruction of the society in all its aspects. The governmental power of the BJP was for the RSS merely an instrument towards this aim.

The rule of the BJP – particularly when in power by itself-hence showed some features that were unique. It also had tremendous impact on the polity in India.

Under the BJP the state governments in particular gave up in theory and practice all notions of neutrality and impartiality of the government machinery and administration. The state governments now became openly partisan in policies as well as in governance. The partisanship also shifted from a class bias to a communal bias. Prior to the advent of BJP rule the governments always protected the interests of the ruling class. The policies always favoured the big business houses of the national economic mainstream and the regionally dominant sections as their junior partners. Nevertheless a certain balance was also maintained. The BJP governments championed the supremacy of the Hindu and by implication the upper castes. This was seen in various policies as well as in the implementation of even the innocuous policies. The government of Gujarat reached new depths when it even communalised the relief measures after the disastrous earthquake of 2001. The state administrations and even lower judiciary were communalised though most glaring was the communalisation, of education. The administrative and particularly the police machinery was utilised to carry out numerous blatantly unconstitutional measures – including unofficial census of minorities, illegal curbs on NGOs – particularly those suspected of connection with other religions, illegal tracking of inter-religious marriages, etc. In the same states militant organisations of the *Sangh Parivar* like the *Bajrang Dal* and *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (VHP) began to act like auxiliary security forces. They carried out the actions that the parliamentary wing of the *Sangh Parivar* – the BJP – or the administrative machinery could not, for fear of legal implications. The *Sangh Parivar* in December 1992 had already demonstrated its willingness to flout legal and parliamentary norms as well as its contempt for such niceties. In power the BJP took the process even further. The strong arm organisations were now assured of protection and virtual immunity.

This overcommunally based partisanship was one of the factors responsible for seriously undermining the legitimacy of the legislature and of the administration and for their devaluation. Even the lower judiciary came under pressure and at least in some states allowed gross miscarriage of justice. The fate of the cases related to the Carnage in Gujarat that attracted the attention of the Supreme Court is only the famous example. Numerous others can perhaps be unearthed in other states as well.

The decline in the legitimacy of the legislatures and administration is also at the heart of the current conflict between the judiciary, the legislatures and the executive. The judiciary was first seen by others as the only guardian of the letter and spirit of the law and constitution. It now perhaps sees itself as the only institution untainted by narrow considerations. This potentially can lead not only to a crisis in governance but also a serious conflict over the content of the notion of popular sovereignty.

Another independent body, the Election Commission, has also gained in importance. It is the constitutional authority charged with ensuring free and fair elections. A dispute has been raised regarding its strict adherence to letters of law and more so in specific interpretations of the laws. The fear is that the process of the elections is becoming depoliticised and thus the very basis of the electoral process and universal adult franchise is losing at least part of its significance.

The *Rath Yatra* has thus set in motion events and forces that threaten the concept, processes, institutions, and norms of republican democracy in India. This is the source of the fascist threat since the RSS already looms large on the horizon as the alternate state.

The tragic fact is not that the BJP achieved all this but that it could do so, with near impunity. It is necessary to investigate what made this possible. It is necessary to unearth and understand the material and ideological forces that facilitated these developments.

Appendix 01:

Death of a Party Manager

A recent incident shook the *Sangh Parivar*, and particularly its parliamentary political front, the BJP. It has the character of a parable, of representing in it various aspects of the politics of communalism and fascism in India.

The General Secretary of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (henceforth BJP) died on May 3rd, 2006 at a relatively young age (particularly for the leadership of BJP characterised by gerontocracy) of 56 years. Shot by his younger brother, probably over some family dispute, he battled bullet injuries for 12 days in a hospital. Political analysts considered Mr. Pramod Mahajan a dynamic leader and a rising star in the BJP leadership. Some also considered him prime ministerial material.

The media, print and electronic, blocked out almost all other news. They only extolled the life and virtues of the master strategist of BJP. This went on for many days.

There is no need to dispute the 'qualities' of Mr Mahajan and their crucial utility for his party. He was a wheeler-dealer and fixer par excellence – capable of striking deals with almost anyone in the social, business, and perhaps even political world. In that sense, he represented the 'modern' – read 'value-free' - 'globalised' face of the BJP. He was also media savvy, television-friendly, witty if not profound, and always good for a quotable quote if not particularly logical or perceptive, with a beaming smile – a true political ramp walker. Reportedly he had good relationships with people from many different political parties – some close enough to be called friendships. (Ironically, he reportedly had many rivals within his own party – persons who did not like him very much at a personal and political level.)

The amount of space and time the media choose to devote to the health, death, and funeral of anyone is an editorial/managerial decision. The media controllers are free to consider that the only newsworthy occurrence of the fortnight if they so desire! The hyperbole did provoke comments and reactions from the most unlikely quarters.

The Resident Editor of *Times of India* (Mumbai Edition), Bachi Karkaria recently (TOI 6th May 2006) expressed her unease about the way the press and electronic media were obsessed with details of Mr Mahajan's injuries and health. She also criticised the fact that this obsession eclipsed all other news including the massacre in Doda and the violence in Vadodara.

The real problem is a little different, not just this obsession.

Mr Mahajan rose to political prominence – along with his party – on a wave of aggressive *Hindutva*, of violent communalism. He was reportedly an architect and chief planner of the first *Rath Yatra* (chariot tour) of Mr Lal Krishna Advani in 1990 that left a trail of communal violence in its wake across the country and further polarised the society and polity in India on communal lines. It laid the foundation for the demolition of the Babri mosque, of the resultant orgy of violence, of the electoral victories of BJP, and ultimately of the Gujarat Carnage 2002. Mr Mahajan may have been suave, with a great command over language/s, very proficient with the use of information and communication technology but he worked for *Hindutva* and a *Hindu Rashtra*. He was adept enough in *real politic* to put hard core *Hindutva* on the back burner when that became necessary for the sake of electoral power. He was definitely not crude. He would not use abusive or intemperate and provocative language. He did not however hide his agenda, viz., *Hindu Rashtra*, *Hindutva*, and Ram Temple at Ayodhya. In his last public speech at a rally in Nagpur, the day before the now fatal shooting, he repeated his commitment. He was equally proud of his links with the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (henceforth RSS). Often accused of seven-star lifestyle and too high a dose of sophistication, he nevertheless remained a committed *Swayamsevak* and thus a volunteer soldier of *Hindutva*. The media circus after the shooting and death decidedly ignored this aspect of Mr Mahajan's politics. After the reverses for the BJP in the parliamentary elections of 2004, Mr Mahajan did say that the Gujarat Carnage was a mistake but never protested against it earlier. Then too, he probably felt, it was a political error – not a transgression against morality, humanity or civilisation and culture.

Of course, Mr Mahajan faced a serious dilemma in the past few years. The dilemma he shared with the BJP – or at least those elements in the BJP that *think*, at least pragmatically. Many Indians are perfectly willing to accept a parliamentary conservative or right wing party that

may at times spout strange ideas. They are not necessarily willing to accept a fascist party that attempts to destabilise the society and polity constantly through continuous violent actions or threats of violence. These Indians give 'respectability' to a right wing party and bring it close to power. Abandoning core fascist agenda however confuses the staunch cadre and may even imperil the fanatic support with serious implications for power, even parliamentary power.

The BJP has constantly faced this dilemma throughout its entire existence in the present incarnation - that is as BJP, in the post *Bharatiya Jan Sangh* (henceforth JS) phase. It began its existence with a ridiculous irony – embracing two anathema words as its ideology – Gandhian Socialism! These were the two ideologies the RSS and its offshoots had always considered evil and inimical, the bane of their *Hindu Bharat*. It was a crassly cynical move to adopt 'Gandhian Socialism' as the ideology of the party; a major electoral concession at the cost of principles and basic worldview. This was to be the moderate, popular, parliamentary mass face of the party. The RSS was to preserve the basic *Hindutva* ideology in its pristine form! The appearance and the reality have been at loggerheads. At least for a section of the BJP the parliamentary conservative stance was not a façade but a political reality and necessity. Many members of the party and certainly the RSS and some other members of the *Sangh Parivar* (VHP and *Bajrang Dal* in particular – but not only them) have been uneasy if not out right angry with this dilution of the ideology. (BJP has tried different permutations and combinations to define its ideology; mixes that escape precise definition – Integral Humanism, true – as opposed to pseudo – secularism, *Hindutva*, and Cultural Nationalism. *Hindutva* is of course the implicit and explicit ideologically persistent element.)

The BJP through its *Rath Yatra* and Ram Temple Campaign of the '90s whipped up aggressive *Hindutva*. A defining feature of *Hindutva* and *Hindu Rashtra* – whatever be the confusions and somersaults over the precise definitions – is Hindu supremacy, Hindu domination and subjection of the minorities to the will of the Hindu majority. The confusions at the level of definitions are many. The definition of Hindu itself is quite unclear – to the ideologues of *Hindutva*, though not to the murderous campaigners. Similarly, *Hindu Rashtra* often confounds the political leaders and becomes very imprecise in their formulations. What remains constant are the quest for Hindu primacy and supremacy combined with a suspicious intolerance of the minorities, particularly the

Muslims – often leading to their violent suppression and/or subjugation. The plank of *Hindutva* tremendously increased the vote share and parliamentary seats of the BJP, serving of course as the political mass parliamentary front of the RSS. This increase, though dramatic, was not enough to bring the BJP – and by proxy the RSS – to parliamentary power. It could win state level power only in some states – not in a majority of the states. The spread also remained geographically confined to the Hindi speaking areas – the so-called Hindu Heartland or Cow Belt. Despite great efforts, it has not made any great inroads into the eastern or the southern states. It is also equally clear that there is no other path but the parliamentary one to power in India – at least in the prevailing circumstances.

The *Sangh Parivar* could increase the extent and the intensity of the communal hatred and violence in the country but could not provoke a civil war. It also could not provoke a systemic crisis of the state in India. In 1975, Jay Prakash Naryan called upon the bureaucracy and security forces not to obey "illegitimate" orders of an "illegitimate" government. The call fell mostly upon deaf ears. In 2004, one incumbent Minister called upon the security forces not to allow a 'foreigner' to become the Prime Minister of the country. No one took him seriously. It seems that the RSS through its various overt and covert front organisations attempts to train young men and women to appear for the varied Public Service Commission examinations and thus to become bureaucrats in various branches of the state machinery including the police force (and for all we know armed forces officers). Such persons have not carried out the will of the RSS as a united cadre – as a coordinated body of officials. Their communal/ fascist actions have been at worst as individuals. In those instances too, the subversion has been tactful without openly violating the letter of the Constitution of India or the law of the land. (The exception is of the state of Gujarat – the 'laboratory of *Hindutva*' – where almost all branches of the administration exhibit clear fascist tendencies, though there are significant and crucial individual exceptions.) The international situation perhaps provided the third factor. The powers behind globalisation were perhaps not ready to sacrifice formal market democracy in India, and even moderate economic sanctions would have created serious crisis for the very existence of any regime in a globalising country.

To capture power then the political front of the *Sangh Parivar* had to win the elections and secure a parliamentary majority. The parliamentary elections of 1996 and 1998 showed that the politics of

communal violence could yield limited results. The tag of largest single party is not enough to guarantee parliamentary power. Drastic amendments of the Constitution are again not possible with such numbers or even with simple parliamentary majority and without majorities in majority of the state assemblies. Aggressive *Hindutva* itself had also isolated the BJP in the political spectrum. The only ideological ally it had and has was the *Shiv Sena* from Maharashtra. Other regional parties and similar formations – including many versions of the social democrats – though fuelled by a strident opposition to the *Congress* could not ally with the *Hindutva plank* of the BJP. For these parties such an alliance might have been equivalent to a political suicide. Their own populist stance, middle to lower caste base and alliance with the minorities could not allow them to take such a stand.

The BJP faced on its own, critical restriction of numbers and in broader terms political isolation. The choice was very simple. It could remain forever in political isolation, smug in ideological purity. This could mean banishment once again to the fringes of the political spectrum. It could alternatively seek to attract allies and lead coalitions to power. This it did after the failures in 1996 and 1998 to form the government on its own. Though invited to form a government by the President in 1996, the ministry resigned even before it actually faced a vote of confidence in the parliament. In 1998, it had to form a coalition with numerous parties – based on an ‘agenda of governance’. This agenda for governance was almost a pledge to the allies that though it would remain a fiercely nationalist party it would not make *Hindutva* a programme of the government. The ‘Hindu agenda’ was hence ‘put on the back-burner’. The BJP had to abandon explicitly the three specific issues of Ram Temple, Uniform Civil Code, and cancellation of the special status of Jammu & Kashmir. It had earlier described these three points as the key programmes of a Hindu nationalist party – itself – in power. It had to explain repeatedly to its members – and far more so to the cadre of the RSS and allied organisations of the *Sangh Parivar* – the compulsions and thus limitations of coalition politics. It had to stress time and again that though it was the leading partner in the ruling coalition, the government was not of the BJP based on *Hindutva* but of the *National Democratic Alliance* based on the National Agenda for Governance.

There was obviously some euphoria amongst its own members that it was in power and among other *Sangh Parivar* members that some leading *Swayamsevak*s occupied prominent ministerial chairs. The BJP

nevertheless had to remind the hard-core supporters that it was not in power on its own and that it was not a regime of *Hindutva*. Obviously, a large number felt that such power was useless and almost impotent. The hard-core cadre of the *Sangh Parivar* was not interested in mere personal gains but in the fulfilment of a dream – of a Hindu Rule guided by *Hindutva* in the Hindu homeland on the way to becoming a *Hindu Rashtra*. As an immediate fulfilment of the dream, it wanted an open and immediate subjugation of the minorities – particularly of the Muslims. The *Sangh Parivar* itself consists of two kinds of elements. A deeply conservative traditionalist order-freak *brahmanical* original cadre of the RSS in reality incapable of fascist action, and another that revels in constant fascist nihilist violence. The former may wait indefinitely for the realisation of the dream but the latter is forever impatient. To the latter, nuclear weaponisation that did not lead to a nuclear war and total domination of the neighbours and the questionable ‘victory’ in the Kargil conflict were no symptoms of Hindu supremacy. These occurrences did not provide the orgy of immediate violence it craves.

The dilemma of the BJP was to satisfy this hard-core *Hindutva* cadre and at the same time to attract sufficient number of allies and neutral supporters to maintain parliamentary power. One objective almost works against the other. The immediate task was of course to convince the allies in the NDA that it was a respectable, thoroughly anti-*Congress*, and somewhat conservative and right wing yet pragmatic and essentially parliamentary party. A few personalities in the allies were so morally corrupt that they needed no persuasions of any kind. Lacking any stable mass base and hence responsibility and accountability to the masses they shamelessly justified even the most horrid acts during the Gujarat Carnage 2002 to continue to hang on to the coat tails of power. Some organisations within the NDA – however opportunist – were however genuine mass political parties. They drew lines. These allies needed careful handling. For them the BJP needed a modern, modernising, moderate, and sophisticated face. This could not even be a pure charade. It had to be so in practice – a right-wing parliamentary party capable of governance.

Actually, such change of track was not unimaginable. The RSS itself changed during the so-called ‘third period’. The third chief Mr Deoras realised the isolation and the near social and political irrelevance of the RSS and decided to rectify the situation. The RSS then broke out of its own ghettos. It de-emphasised the ritual aspect. It adopted a political

definition of 'Hindu unity' and 'Hindu organisation' – the then touchstones of RSS mission and ideology. It very consciously reached out to the non-Brahmin non-white-collar castes, particularly the OBCs. It inducted activists from these castes and brought them to positions of some responsibility. It also quite consciously tried to reach out to the non-Hindi speaking states. Further, the RSS in this period entered the civil society in a determined way. The *Sangh Parivar* also truly came into existence as the *Parivar* at this time. It launched various outfits and organisations to work with specific sectors and to tackle specific tasks. Through these various outfits it diluted the traditional orthodox ritualistic brahmanical discipline in an attempt to become a more mass based organisation. This policy in fact was responsible for the success in recruiting the street fighters. The leadership under Mr Deoras overhauled the structure and functioning of the family of organisations – the *Sangh Parivar*. There was obviously no change in the basic agenda, programme, or ideology. The transformation only touched the methodology, strategy, and tactics. That too was substantial enough to give virtually a new visage to the *Sangh Parivar* and to alter its political fortunes. The *Sangh Parivar*, for the first time since its inception, participated in mass agitation activity under the leadership of others and on secular non-communal issues. It thus participated in the students' anti corruption movement in Gujarat (the *Navnirman Andolan*), the movement led by Jay Prakash Narayan in Bihar, and later the weak protest against the Internal Emergency (1975-77). These actions in some ways ended the political isolation of the RSS and its then political front the *Jan Sangh*. That is precisely why the *Jan Sangh* was able to merge with other parties to form the *Janata Party*, in 1977 and to be part of the first non-Congress government at the centre. Some of its leaders acquired the status of mass leaders; and (what was to become) the BJP despite being a cause for the break up of the *Janata Party* that of a legitimate mainstream political party. All this occurred in less than a decade – that of the 1970s. Of course, the objective situation was conducive, but there is no doubt that the RSS showed enough acumen and flexibility to utilise the opportunities.

There was a crucial difference in the two 'alterations'. The RSS clearly attempted a pan-Hindu unity and an amelioration of caste differences to achieve the *Hindutva* agenda and to proceed towards *Hindu Rashtra*. The BJP in 1998 on the other hand had to shelve or postpone *Hindutva* and proclaim that it did not aim to achieve *Hindu*

Rashtra through the NDA. The RSS therefore faced no dilemma then – it only needed to fight some obsolete beliefs and attitudes, and to galvanise the organisation for an active role. The BJP had to make numerous ideological and operational compromises. It also had to contend with the tiger it rode to power – particularly in the shape of the VHP and *Bajrang Dal*. During the years as Hindu opposition, the BJP had constantly used incendiary and provocative language. Intemperate almost hysterical demagogues had whipped up frenzy even for electoral purposes. It now faced a far different task. It had now to talk of development, and governance. It had also played another dangerous game. It had joined in the *Sangh Parivar* chorus for the creation of a *Hindu Rashtra*, which actually called for dismantling the Indian constitution and restructuring the Indian state. This in short was a call for a fascist 'revolution'. It now – in its coalition phase had to disown this agenda and assure one and all – the entire non-RSS constituency that it had no such radical aims; that it was a genuine right-of-the-centre parliamentary organisation.

Mr Pramod Mahajan proved invaluable in these circumstances. He presented a new face of the party. He managed to convince the allies that the BJP was not a fascist ensemble but only a nationalist party. He became the emissary, mediator, and spokesperson for the BJP.

The media circus – and it was that to a large extent – waxed eloquent on many 'qualities' of Mr Mahajan, including some rather dubious achievements in the fields of fund raising and favours done to specific industries but never mentioned the *Hindutva* agenda of Mr Mahajan. The media verbosity failed to point out this aspect of Mr Mahajan's personality and politics. The media painted him as any other parliamentary politician. The public domain – at least the official established version of it – has lost all distinction between parliamentary conservatism, 'soft majoritarian' politics, and communal fascist stances. The communal fascist stances may come in for occasional criticism but by now have become legitimate, acceptable, and routine aspects of Indian polity. That is a dangerous occurrence for the people of India.