



Communalism and fascism: The Nature of the RSS

Behind the BJP stands the Sangh Parivar. The ideological fountainhead of the *Sangh Parivar* is the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

The Gujarat Carnage had forced the question of the characterisation of communalism of the Sangh Parivar.

It was now necessary to analyse whether the RSS and the Sangh Parivar were merely Hindu communal forces or were they fascist organisations.

The RSS came into being as a social and cultural organisation devoted to the aim of uniting and organising all Hindus to bring about a rejuvenation of the Hindu community and Hindu nation. It explicitly claimed distaste for politics and expressed its determination to keep away from politics. In practice it meant keeping away from the national independence movement, from the *Congress*, and from the then dominant politics of Mahatma Gandhi, and of course strong opposition to the left political ideas. The RSS spoke (and sang) a lot about Hindu and national glory. Its nationalism had no real substance then because it did not oppose the British colonial rule. The claim to nationalism and love for the motherland could not hold true in popular perception when no efforts were made to free the motherland from the yoke of foreign rule. The opposition to the Muslims was the strong card the RSS had. The militancy of Muslim separatism gave its position some reality and strength. The two nation theory adopted by the communalists from both sides also provided rationality to its existence. The ultra-nationalism came to the fore later, after independence, when the ideology of cultural nationalism and the goal of a Hindu nation were seriously advanced.

The RSS by then also realised the need for direct political participation and the *Bharatiya Jan Sangh* (JS) was born in 1952 as a political party. The JS had to be a constitutional parliamentary party to

be legal and in the mainstream. The debate particularly in the recent years has been secularism versus communalism (or *Hindu Rashtra*). The RSS ideology is not one of theocracy – though all Hindu supremacists defend directly or indirectly, wittingly or unwittingly, the Brahmanical order, as a component of the ideology. The RSS ideology at its core is also not one of Hindu ritualism though public religiosity is encouraged for political purposes. The ideology is of exclusive Hindu primacy and supremacy. It may not have great problems with a formally secular polity and even with recognition of definite rights of the minority. Its problems are with any notions of equality of all communities, with any notions of pluralism, of multi-culturalism.

The core ideology of Hindu organisation, *Hindu Rashtra*, Hindu primacy and supremacy, as well as Hindu cultural nationalism remains intact and non-negotiable. It does not however mean that the entire *Sangh Parivar* has a perpetually homogeneous ideological structure. Each organisation within the family as an organisation has different priorities and interests. The emphasis in pronouncements and activities is at least apparently different. The multiplicity of the organisations and the slightly different stances has created some difficulties in recognising the nature of the *Sangh Parivar* at times.

The analysis and characterisation of the RSS and the *Sangh Parivar* occupies this section. The question was always is communalism something totally different from fascism? The contemporary extra-parliamentary right wing in India and its activities had brought the question of fascism squarely into debate.

RSS did not invent *Hindutva* or notions of Hindu supremacy, even in modern times. The thoughts can be found in different forms in the writings and speeches of other thinkers and political leaders before the RSS was born in 1925. Not all of these were however fascist thoughts. They often lacked the essential components of fascism, though they were certainly communal. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (popularly known to his followers as *Swatantryaveer* – hero for freedom/ independence) crystallised the fascist thinking. The RSS did not adopt his thoughts or thinking for many years. Now in its clearly fascist phase he is one of the chief ideologues for the entire *Hindutva* combine – though many might find his ‘rational’ thoughts on many subjects difficult to digest.

01. Communal and/or Fascist?

This immediately raises the question whether there is a recognisable distinction between *communal* and *fascist*. This also touches upon the debate regarding the characterisation of the Hindu right in India. Is it adequate to characterise it as communal or is it necessary to recognise and name it as fascist? This also necessarily touches upon the characterisation of the BJP. (For many years the Left had castigated the BJP as Hindu rightwing communal but not necessarily termed it fascist – except in a non-precise propaganda description. Com Ajit Roy, editor of *The Marxist Review* has been quite critical of the CPs for this omission. He considers this a theoretical, political, and organisational weakness of the CPs.)²⁸

Communalism is a form of identity politics. It bases itself on religious identity. It considers **only** that identity as legitimate and relevant in social and political matters. It utilises this identity to organise and mobilise masses. The masses are thus organised to claim a share (often disproportionate and/or illegitimate) of resources and opportunities in economic terms, prestige in social terms and power in political terms – for members of a particular religious community (or more practically their 'representatives'). (This of course means that legitimate and just share of the above to members of other communities is denied and snatched away.) The community it seeks and cherishes is pre-given. One does not belong to it by choice or conscious decision. Nor can anyone alter that belonging.

Communalism can be both defensive and offensive – like all identity politics. Its essential limitation is that like all identity politics it relies upon a primordial identity fixed and determined by birth. Such identities raise barriers between 'us', and 'others'. They necessarily define inclusion and exclusion. These barriers moreover are impenetrable, insurmountable, and unbreakable. They signify a permanent divide. The divide many times leads to a demonisation of the 'other', the 'they' – and a concomitant glorification of the 'self' or 'us' – these are not however essential features of such a divide. Identity politics and communal politics in particular are reactionary also because they seek to eclipse, deny, and if possible eradicate modern secular identities – particularly the class identity.

²⁸Reprinted as *Footfalls of fascism* in **Fascism and Democracy: The Indian Experience**; Vikalp Series I/ 2004: Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Mumbai; September 2004 [B.L41.M1].

A relevant question is should one restrict the identification of communalism to India and to our times? If that is done then communalism will be seen necessarily as a vicious and violent phenomenon essentially of the Hindu right. A number of commentators consider communalism to be the specifically Indian - Hindu form of fascism. This may be useful for immediate political actions but creates two problems. One, it prevents an adequate understanding of fascism. This may lead to an inability to understand fascism that does not take a necessarily communal or Hindu form. Second, this may lead to an inadequate understanding of communalism so that one fails to recognise the soft versions that do not necessarily call for brutal violence against the minorities as forms of communalism.

Communalism – however reactionary – may not *necessarily* be fascist. Minority communalism immediately springs to mind as an example. It is often reactive and defensive. Even in its extreme forms, it may lead to separatism and at worst secession. It does not necessarily acquire fascist characteristics. Majority communalism has the ever-present dangerous tendency to lead to enslavement of the 'other' and to fascism, including its violent manifestations.

An interesting example will be of the *Shiromani Akali Dal* (SAD). This particular party has happily been a part of varied alliances – those claiming to be progressive and secular as well as those opposed to both these ideas. More interesting is the fact that the 'progressives' have happily allied with or hobnobbed with the SAD. It is a party exclusively of the Sikhs tied to the religious institutions and structures of the Sikh community (the *Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee* or SGPC, in particular). It claims to represent no one but the Sikhs though some of the pronouncements may be in the name of Punjab. The Punjab of the SAD is however always a homeland of the Sikhs. The homeland is necessarily a territory to protect and further *with priority* the interests of the Sikh community. It does not even pay lip service to the notion of separation of religion and politics. The SAD is not however a fascist party by any stretch of imagination. It does not base itself on any hatred or demonisation of the 'other'. (The exceptions were some 'tracts' published in the name of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale that seemed to echo any such diatribe by any of the *Sangh Parivar* outfits, this time against the Hindus). It does not call for an active enslavement or subjugation to a secondary status of any other community. Only certain sections of the *Khalistanis* (those who proposed and even struggled for an independent sovereign nation exclusively of and for the Sikhs to be

termed *Khalistan* – literally the *land of the pure*) preached such hatred and expulsion of non-Sikhs from the holy homeland ‘once it was established’. A simple equation of communalism with fascism would blur all such distinctions.

Similarly, it should be clearly remembered that fascism might not necessarily be based on religious identity. Historically, in fact, the relations between the fascists and religion have been quite varied and problematic. In Nazi Germany, they were adverse; in Fascist Italy, they were ambiguous and opportunistic. In Salazar’s Portugal or Franco’s Spain religion was a strong element in the fascist ideology – whereas race was not. In fact, fascism has shown greater affection for ethnicity and (imagined) nationality rather than religion. In fact, the classical fascist organisations and movements thought that they were spiritual movements too – and thus imagined that they superseded other religions. The writings of Mussolini and Gentile definitely make this claim. The later accommodation of the Italian fascists with the Vatican was purely opportunist.

02. Sangh Parivar: From Communalism to Fascism

Let there be no confusion, the argument is not that the *Sangh Parivar* or BJP or Hindu communalists of today are not fascist. Quite to the contrary, the argument is that they are not merely communal but present fascist or neo-fascist tendencies that may (and do in some important respects) differ from the classical conceptions of fascism but fall within the same ‘matrix’. This writing attempts to explore and locate the tendencies in the *Sangh Parivar* and its programmes that are akin to the fascist agenda. In no way does this piece argue that the term fascist can be applied in the *classical historically specific sense* to any occurrences in India or that capitalism and capitalists in India – leave alone on a world scale – face a crisis of the proportions that would require a ‘solution of the last resort’ namely fascism or that it is the only path now open to capital. Numerous problems beset capital in India, some of which are quite grave. These may need fairly drastic solutions. That does not automatically mean that fascism is the only solution for the crisis or that fascism or neo-fascism or semi-fascism can be a stable – however temporary that stability may be – solution for capital in India.

It is however also necessary to make a distinction between the possibility or existence of a *fascist regime and the existence and appeal of fascist organisation/ movements* in a society. It is necessary to explore whether it is possible that reasonably significant fascist organisation/s

and/ or movements exist in a nation wielding some influence and being a threat to the democratic and republican nature of the society and polity without ever being able to establish a fascist regime or state. It is further necessary to examine the implications of such an occurrence. This writing is a *partial attempt* to explore communalism and compare it with fascism. The effort is to find similarities and distinctions between the two dangerous phenomena. The argument in fact is that one cannot *per se* equate communalism with fascism – even taking only the formal features of fascism into account. It is necessary to bear in mind specific features of fascism and apply them in analysis.

Another feature that some may consider tangential for the main argument needs mention here.

The RSS had a great attraction for fascism right since its inception. It was initially very enamoured with Mussolini and the Fascist Party in Italy. Later it admired Hitler too. It also was hostile in the main to democracy and perhaps confused about the notion of a republic.²⁹ It was not

²⁹The confusion is quite apparent in many of the stances and stray statements of the leaders of the RSS, though it never perhaps openly advocated any other form of state. Implicitly it always cherished the idea of an oligarchy – based on ‘merit’, ‘learning’, and traditionally accepted superiority. It was always uneasy with the notion of territorial nationalism. The nation it sought to re-create was an imagined ‘historical’ nation – which was anything but republican. V D Savarkar who seems to have paid the most attention to various complex issues of Hindu resurgence actually struggles with differentiating between citizenship and nationality. Hindus to him are *nationals* of the new or resurgent India while others may have to be granted formal *citizenship* rights. Savarkar, however, is somewhat different from the RSS ‘thinkers’ – he was extremely keen on modernisation and also some forms of modernity and modernism. Like all writers glorifying history, golden age, and past greatness of the Hindus had some attraction for the ancient forms of rule – or at least for the ancient kingdoms – of Shivaji and of the Peshawas. On the other hand, he did not want the burden of a backward system as a drag on the resurgent Hindu nation. Savarkar was a prolific writer and his writings are easily available (**Savarkar Samagra Wangmaya**: Maharashtra Prantik Hindusabha; Poona 1964 – is the collection of all his works; besides this **Hindu-Rashtra Darshan**; L G Khare; Bombay 1949 and **Hindutva** [written under the pen name A Maratha]; V V Kelkar; Nagpur 1923 present the core of his thought). There is an excellent summary in Marathi of his writings (in S H Deshpande; **Savarkar te Bha Ja Pa: Hindutva-vicharacha chikitsak alekh**; Rajhans Prakashan, Pune; 1992). Similarly there are other analyses (a supportive one by Shesharao More – **Savarkarancha Buddhivad: Ek Chikitsak Abhyas**; Nirmal; Nanded; 1988 and a somewhat more critical one by Y D Phadke – **Tatvadnya Savarkar**; Tatvadnyan Mahakosh Mandal, Pune 1986) again in Marathi.

The proposed new constitution for the country circulating in the RSS circles very clearly demonstrates an oligarchic prescription. It is republican only negatively – in that it does not advocate monarchy or any other form that denies the notional sovereignty of the ‘nationals’ – read Hindu. The non-democratic character is very clear. Again, it is necessary to remember that one important militant organisation within the *Sangh Parivar*, the VHP, expressed shock, and pain at the possible dissolution of the monarchy in Nepal in 2006. It wanted Nepal to continue as a Hindu monarchy.

however an *effective* fascist organisation all the time. It cherished an elitist and essentially anachronistic mould of supremacy not only of the Hindu but also of the Brahman. It talked of organising the Hindus but ended up only organising the traditional elite of the Hindu society. Its *Hindutva* did not become a political programme and organism but remained a ritualistic religious entity.

Under the third *Sar Sangh Chalak* – Supreme Conductor of the (Rashtriya Swayamsevak) Sangh – M. D. ‘Balasaheb’ Deoras, the RSS reputedly underwent a transformation.

In this period, it did away with the bramhanical rituals that had become a part of its daily practices – or at least effectively de-emphasised them. Individuals may have remained very bound to, and by, the rituals but they were no longer major activities of the organisation – except on occasions to invoke the Hindu tradition and roots. The RSS in this period also sought, cultivated, and nurtured non-Brahman activists and brought them to leading positions – particularly amongst the front organisations including the BJP. These were mainly from the OBC sections. The RSS moreover expanded its activities to enter different sections and to take up different issues. *It entered civil society organisations including trade unions.* Its political front the *Bharatiya Jan Sangh* in this period sought to align with other non-Congress parties to oppose the government and even participated in joint movements.³⁰

Various organisations of the *Sangh Parivar* now began to acquire mass character and took up mass activities. From a near cloistered cadre organisation the *Parivar* began to become a mass backed organisation. Through the network of varied militant, rough, and tough, or service-oriented organisations directed towards specific sections of the society the *Parivar* created a virtual mass movement. This culminated in the frenzy of the nineties that led to the demolition of the Babri Mosque.³¹

³⁰The Bharatiya Jan Sangh (JS), the earlier incarnation of the Baharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had entered into some tactical alliances – post-election – in 1967 to form the *Samyukta Vidhayak Dals* (loosely ‘Joint or United Legislative Fronts’) in order to form state governments in some states where the Congress had been defeated. These were purely tactical fronts to form governments. It did become part of the Grand Alliance later in 1971 – a strange coalition again of mainly right wing parties with the sole aim of ousting the Congress from power. Socialists of various hues were enthusiastic partners of this Grand Alliance due to their obsession with anti-Congressism that prompted them quite often to forget the socialism they held up as basic ideology.

³¹The website of the BJP <http://www.bjp.org> provides links to the RSS homepage that lists the various organisations in the ‘family’, the *Sangh Parivar*.

One should remember here that the RSS or even its political wing the BJP had never engaged in any mass struggles in the early years. The initial incarnation of the BJP was the *Bharatiya Jan Sangh* (JS). The JS came into existence in the years when politics still operated in the realm of mass activity under the influence of the independence movement. JS was perhaps the unique political party that did not engage in any mass organising, mass mobilisation, or mass struggles. The RSS cadre did participate in communal violence – planning, inciting, and perpetrating various ‘riots’ (read pogroms). The organisations of the *Sangh Parivar* never took up during this period any mass activity related to the problems of the masses or even to the sentiments of the masses. Even its front organisations carried out only ‘cultural’ activities. The trade union wing of the RSS – the *Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh* – too came into its own only in the ‘70s. The JS entered the arena of mass activity on the coattails of Jay Prakash Narain (JP) during the *Sampoorna Kranti* (Total Revolution) or Bihar agitation of the early ‘70s. The first independent mass activity was perhaps the effort to mobilise the Hindu masses for the construction of the temple at *Ram Janmabhoomi* (literally birthplace of Ram) – the site of the Babri Mosque – at Ayodhya. This too had two phases. One was of the demand, and then the preparation of the bricks including ritual worship of the bricks (*shila-nyas*) to be utilised for the construction of the temple. The second phase really marks the culmination of the transformation that was coming about. It was the ‘chariot tour’ – *Rath Yatra*³² – by the then BJP chief L K Advani in 1990. (L K Advani is often referred to as the Iron Man of the BJP – a sobriquet originally given to Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel.) The tour that passed through numerous cities and towns leaving behind a bloody trail of communal violence was the first serious effort to mobilise and galvanise the masses on a wide scale. It was the first time that the RSS succeeded in creating a ‘national’ symbol, a pan-Hindu agenda, and came up with a definite, specific action programme with a recognisable aim to achieve. This was a watershed for the RSS. Until the JP agitation, the *Sangh*

³²This was actually a simple tour across the country from the west coast to Ayodhya. The purpose of the tour was to create a mass frenzy for the construction of the temple at the very same site where the Babri Mosque stood and thus obviously for the demolition of the mosque. The sub-text was the communal mobilisation of the masses on an anti-Muslim platform. The symbolism was quite interesting. The tour was propagated as a chariot tour – invoking images of mythical warriors and kings and their campaigns. Such tours were also campaigns for conquest sanctioned by religious practices – almost crusades. Advani toured part of the country in a special vehicle decked up like a chariot – *Ratha*. The symbol was repeated later too but did not yield the same results.

Parivar was really a fringe player politically. With the *Rath Yatra* of 1990, it became a mass force.³³

There are many reasons for this transformation – and for the earlier absence of mass activity. Some have their roots in the objective situation and others in the thinking of the *Sangh Parivar*. Independence of the country saw the partition and unprecedented grotesque violence. The RSS obviously had a role in the violence. However, it had not solely organised or conjured up that violence. It was also unable to take any great organisational advantage of the violence. The very fact of independence had fired the masses. They did not see the partition or the violence that accompanied it as legitimate or welcome. Mahatma Gandhi de-legitimised the violence almost completely. Anti-Muslim sentiments did run high particularly in certain parts of the country but nation building was a far more important agenda for the masses in the country. The stigma of Mahatma Gandhi's murder did stick to the RSS whatever the denials. The country was not ready to accept the murderers of the Mahatma as serious leaders in anyway. The *Sangh Parivar* then could not appeal to any real existing mass receptive to its pleas. The working class and peasantry were not on its agenda. Moreover, it was not even on the horizon of these populous sections. The ruling bloc had no need for the *Sangh Parivar* – the *Congress* was capable enough to represent all 'national' elements – including the bourgeoisie – industrial/commercial and agrarian, actual and potential. The mass base of choice (of the RSS/JS) – the lower middle class and middle class – was numerically too small and socially too subsidiary to matter. Last but not the least the *Sangh Parivar* had vague notions of Hindu organisation/consolidation and of the creation of a pan-Hindu identity but had no clues how to go about the task. It had probably never figured out how to overcome the internal (caste) divisions of the Hindu

³³Predictably there are numerous books on, RSS and the *Sangh Parivar*. A comprehensive one is Anderson W K & Damle S D; **The Brotherhood in Saffron**; [B.R17.A1] Vistaar Publications; New Delhi, 1987. Christopher Jefferlot; *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1925 to the 1990s*; Viking, London; 1996 as well as Thomas Blom Hansen; **The Saffron Wave**: [B.L41.H2] Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India; Princeton University Press 1999 and OUP, India 2001 along with Thomas Blom Hansen and Christophe Jefferlot (Ed); *The Compulsions of Politics: BJP and Competitive Politics in India*; OUP, Delhi, 1998 remain important recent analyses. Ram Puniyani; in **Fascism of the Sangh Parivar**; [B.R17.P1] Media House; Delhi provides a frontal attack on the *Sangh Parivar*. Achin Vanaik's numerous works are also important contributions to the understanding of the *Sangh Parivar*. Marzia Casolari; *Hindutva's Fascist Heritage*; EPW Jan 22, 2000, reprinted in *Communalism Combat* (<http://www.www.secularindia.net/index.htm>) documents the influences of Fascism on the RSS. There is similarly plenty of material on the Shiv Sena – though perhaps not very satisfactory. The best essay remains Jayant Lele; *Saffronisation of the Shiv Sena: The Political Economy of City, State, and Nation* in Sujata Patel & Alice Thorne (Ed) **Bombay: Metaphor for Modern India**; OUP, India; 1995 [B.J06.P1]. In the same volume Gerard Hueze; *Cultural Populism: The Appeal of the Shiv Sena* examines the cultural aspects of the issue.

community and wield it into a single force. In fact, it was not sure whether it wished to do that. It is interesting to note that the votaries of *Hindutva* while claiming a timeless descent for it, struggle with the very definition of the **Hindu**. Even the operational definition of Hindu only congealed in the 'nineties and that too not fully. Take Gujarat for example – the *Hindutva* forces alternately woo and turn upon the Dalits and Adivasis.

The RSS in the Deoras era set aside earlier prejudices – particularly regarding caste, and actively wooed the Dalits and the OBCs. It is the legacy of the changes initiated in this period that a 'platform for social assimilation' across castes – the *Samajik Samarasata Manch* – comes into existence and Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar becomes a memorable/revered figure to be remembered/revered at daybreak (*Pratah Smaraneeya*). It also appealed to and organised women. It obviously did not shed its male patriarchal character. Communalism is male and tied to the notion of male supremacy and unquestioned male domination with only a limited role for women in particularly public matters. This subsidiary and secondary role of the woman is not a medieval role. The new formulation of 'Woman Power' (*Stree Shakti*) is to counter the idea of women's liberation (*Stree Mukti*). The difference is not a mere play on words. It asserts the subsidiary status of woman in modern society along with an assertive accommodation of the public role of women. It also loosened its ironclad discipline to accommodate riotous and rampaging lumpenised young men from the streets who were the ideal material for street battles. The language too changed from the Bramhanical litany of Golwalkar Gurujee to the rabble-rousing torrent of Uma Bharati, Ritambhara, and Pravin Togadia.³⁴

³⁴There is sufficient material available to draw such conclusions. The official documents of the JS are available as **Bharatiya Jan Sangh: Party Documents 1951-72**; Bharatiya Jan Sangh; New Delhi; 1973. The writings of the second supreme leader of the RSS, M S Gowalkar will be **Spotlights**; Sahitya Sindhu; Bangalore; 1975; **The Integral Approach**; Deendayal Research Institute; New Delhi, 1979; **We or Our Nationhood Defined**; Nagpur, 1941; [R.L41.1] *Patraroop Shriguruji* (Marathi); Bharatiya Vichar Sadhana; Pune, 1985; and *Vichardhan* (Marathi); Bharatiya Vichar Sadhana; Pune, 1987. Some writings of M D Deoras are also available. These include **Hindu Sanghatan: The need of the hour**; Suruchi Sahitya; New Dealhi, 1979; **New Horizons**; Jagarana Prakashan, Bangalore, 1977; **RSS and the Present Controversy**; Suruchi Sahitya; New Delhi, 1979; **With Delhi Newsmen**; Suruchi Sahitya, New Delhi, 1979; **RSS Marches On**; Jagarana Prakashana, Bangalore, 1979; *Smajik Samata va Hindu Sanghatan* (Hindi); and *Hamara Rashtriya Jeevan* (Hindi); both by Bharatiya Vichar Sadhana; Pune, 1981 and 1978 respectively; *Vijaya Dashamiche Bhashan* (Marathi); Rambhau Mhalagi Prabodhini; Mumbai. The VHP positions are available in *Trutiya Dharma Sansad Adhiveshan* (Hindi) and *Hindu Dharm Hi Kyon?* (Hindi). The speeches of Sadhvi Ritambhara were circulated as audio cassettes in the early nineties. They numbered seven in all. The ideological elaboration of the basic position of the *Sangh Parivar* of the early post independence period is to be found in Upadhyaya, Deendayal; **Integral Approach**; Deendayal Research Institute, New Delhi, 1979. To those who can read Marathi the excellent source for the various positions is S H Deshpande mentioned earlier.

Yes, Balasaheb Deoras certainly transformed the *Sangh Parivar* from an elitist communal dreamer that probably hankered nostalgically for medieval princely rule into a fascist organisation with a fascist programme. Strategically this also included political alliances and political insertions. As a merged entity in 1977, the political wing of the *Sangh Parivar* tasted power. In the eighties, it was able to capture state governments; and as we all know, it became the national ruler in 1998 though not in the way it wanted to be – as *Shat Pratishat Bhajapa* (one hundred per cent BJP) – without the encumbrance of allies and coalitions – without the need to compromise with political entities that did not adhere to *Hindutva* or were critical of communal formulations.

The transformation was from a communal to a fascist organisation. This did not mean abandonment of the communal agenda but acquisition of a fascist programme and method of working. This meant becoming a mass organisation, however controlled by the aging cadre at Nagpur. The RSS itself remained 'pure' – rigid and regimented - but the other organisations in the 'family' acquired mass, street-smart character. The very concept of Hindu had undergone another change within the *Sangh Parivar*. The Vedic Bramhanical puritanical Hindu religion of the old men had become the street-smart, inclusive, militant *Hindutva* of a wider section of the Hindu community. *Hindutva* is a communal political formulation dealing not with religion per se but with religious identity and the supremacy of that identity. It is more concerned with the identity and the public performances of often pop-religious ceremonies for political ends than with the basic concerns of religion including piety, devotion, and deliverance. The non-Brahmin castes were carefully and consciously cultivated, accommodated, and assimilated to create a pan-Hindu identity for *Hindutva*. The 'purity and pollution' based contemptuous divisive rituals were replaced with easy, non-taxing, demonstrative, externalised religiosity that asserts identity through inclusion and exclusion easily accessible to the pan-Hindu masses.

The *Sangh Parivar* (and not only the BJP) became a very significant central force of Indian politics in the late '80s with the above-mentioned *Rath Yatra*. It had begun this move towards the centre stage in the mid '70s but for a decade or so, the efforts did not bear immediate fruit. It was in the late '80s that the RSS (to be understood here as the core and centre of the spectrum of the 'family' – the *Sangh Parivar*) started to shape the national agenda. The very nature of RSS meant that the

agenda was not narrowly political but strongly social and cultural. The economic aspect in contrast was not distinctive.

03. The Changing RSS

The RSS until this period (the Deoras phase – from the 1970s onwards) was essentially a fringe force. In its purely Bramhanical communal (as virulently anti-Muslim and invoking Hindu interests) incarnation, it was bound to be a fringe entity. It was not the situation of the RSS alone. Other communal organisations too – the *Hindu Maha Sabha* for example, despite Savarkar's involvement and leadership remained a peripheral fringe force even in Maharashtra.

The reasons are not at all hard to locate. The RSS was a fish out of water in the years after independence, and not only because of the stigma of Mahatma Gandhi's murder. *It did not have a real constituency and base that could exert any political weight.* Politics in India was already a mass phenomenon since the early decades of the 20th century – and truly so after the entry of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian social and political life.

The RSS harbours a virulent hatred for Mahatma Gandhi for many 'real' reasons. One of the reasons is that he changed the very character and norm of politics in India. (The other being that he denied the RSS the Hindu constituency as a natural constituency.) This made the politics of the RSS – in theoretical and practical sense – irrelevant for many years. Moreover, he denied or seriously curtailed the mass political and cultural space at all available to the RSS.

The RSS had no mass backing. It had never attempted to garner any mass support. It could not influence the social or political scene with mass activity. Individual maverick elements of the feudal remnants may have financed and backed communal organisations including the RSS but these elements did not themselves exert any social or economic weight. They did not even constitute any pressure group. The petty traders reputedly formed the bulwark of *Bharatiya Jan Sangh* support but by themselves, they had no political significance at all. The capitalist class did not look upon either the JS or the parent RSS as any kind of representatives. The RSS was truly a body representing no one but itself, and appealing to no one outside its own narrow fold. It never had any

conception of mass organisation/ mobilisation/ struggle in the early years – the years prior to the Deoras era.

Its organisational structure also was that of a cadre organisation. The RSS cadre was essentially and fundamentally different from the communist cadre. The communist cadre was of professional revolutionaries who were (and generally were obliged to be) organisers-activists of class/mass organisations. The RSS cadre was of volunteers to a vague notion of a Hindu nation and Hindus as a religious community. The organisation had very little appeal to anyone. The ideology too was revivalist – the revival being essentially of the traditional oppressive, unequal, and unjust hierarchy of the Hindu social order. The RSS probably had some notions of the need of a pan-Hindu organisation but was unable to put that into practice. The revival of the lost glory of the Hindus was the only message it probably communicated. This revival could hold no attraction for the masses from the traditionally oppressed and discriminated castes – already under influence of the non-Brahmin movement. (Moreover, the Congress in general did manage to represent in many parts of the country the spirit and tradition of the non-Brahmin movement.) The RSS was unable even to set up the Muslim as the enemy very effectively. It did participate in numerous riots but these remained localised and basically sporadic occurrences. The riots in Ahmedabad seemed endemic since 1969, but here too they affected only certain areas leaving the rest of the city to function normally.

The limitations of the RSS then were many.

- It held no appeal for the masses and hence could not be a noticeable political player. It did not even have the brute street strength for violence unless specific local conditions were quite ripe.
- It had no real *constituency*. It thus was self-absorbed and did not represent any section of the society. The supporters it had carried no social or political weight.
- It was a *revivalist* organisation that wanted to return to a past that was discredited and loathsome for most popular masses in the country. It had no vision of creating something new. It was literally a *reactionary* organisation that only responded to occurrences with no capacity to set or force agendas. It therefore could not set a goal even for its own followers apart from a vague sense of undoing some historical occurrences of recent or distant past.

- In economic terms, it had no programme – and thus had nothing to offer to the masses. It had no agenda to better the life of any section of the people.
- Its cultural stances were *hollow* and *meaningless*. The very idea of culture that it harboured consisted of some vague ‘good values’ dear to the upper caste middle class, ritualistic observances, and the traditional nearly moribund vision of Hindu society. Since these ‘cultural values’ were never practical or actually practiced the cultural stances of the RSS were also hypocritical and thus at times ludicrous.
- It was a deeply *conservative* organisation. It accepted all objective changes, though it was wary of all change. It had no concept of challenging the status quo in any sphere. It was thus also a highly inactive organisation. The indulgence in physical culture, primitive martial training, ‘intellectual’ indoctrinations, and uniformed drills were sadly *anachronistic* and hence *ridiculous*.
- The inertia was also all too evident during the national independence movement. The RSS had played absolutely no part in it. It did not even support the British – it just remained indifferent to the most significant massive social and political upheaval of the times. Ridicule of Mahatma Gandhi could never be a popular platform particularly then in India. Moreover there was an identification of Nathuram Godse, the murderer of Mahatma Gandhi with RSS (and with V D Savarkar). For many years, the people of India did not overlook or forgive this fact.
- It was highly confused about numerous other occurrences. It did not know whether to espouse science and technology or to reject them as alien developments. Similarly, there was massive confusion over modernity and the changes it brought into the society.
- The RSS was also intellectually *bankrupt*. Not even the staunchest volunteer could have described the founding fathers as thinkers. The second supreme conductor M S Golwalkar, popularly known as *Guruji*, is an intellectual only to the RSS itself. To all others he was at best an ineffective publicist. The RSS hence never posed an explicit ideological challenge to the other thoughts then prevalent. In its cloisters, it could heap obscene vitriol upon Mahatma Gandhi but could not challenge Gandhian thought. The same holds true about

the ideology espoused by Nehru and his colleagues. Needless to say, liberalism, social democracy, or Marxism was way beyond the intellectual capacities of the RSS 'thinkers'. It had no mental wherewithal to either understand or counter Phule or Ambedkar. The intellectual 'ferment' within the RSS ranks – and whatever orbits it commanded – was for example confined to utterly pathetic debates about the desirability of women's entry into the public sphere and the dress they should wear!

- Structurally the RSS was a Brahmin organisation, with at best some space for the baniya (trader-moneylender – a usurious miserly cheat in popular perception). It was thus by its very character as an organisation incapable of holding any attraction to the masses.
- Organisationally too the RSS showed a complete lack of imagination triggered by a total failure to read the situation in the country. The votaries of RSS ideology glorified the strategic and tactical sense of numerous warriors and generals (obviously Hindu) of the medieval period. That sense absolutely had not touched the RSS 'ideologues'. They had no conception of the objective necessities and opportunities or of the requirements for a counter-revolution. Arguably, they had no concept of their mission being one of counter-revolution or of a 'revolution from the right'. They actually believed that the khaki clad, wooden staff wielding, mostly middle aged, upper caste male clerks who manned their *shakhas* (limbs or branches, the units of the organisation) could achieve the task of actualisation of the Hindu state!
- The RSS did not create a political front until the fifties – and when it did launch the JS, it had to import a leader from the *Hindu Maha Sabha* to head it! The only other organisation it formed was the *Rashtriya Sevika Samiti* (National Women Volunteers/ Servers Committee) and the reason for that was to accommodate the women supporters who clamoured to serve the organisation and cause in some way. The women obviously had to be cloistered in a separate organisation – to protect them from the men of the RSS – many of whom, particularly the full-timers, were unmarried men with a vow of celibacy; and probably to also protect these celibate 'propagandists' from the women!

Whatever the love and admiration of the founders for Hitler and the Nazi Party – particularly their Aryan stances along with the adoption of the *Swastika* as a symbol – *the RSS was not capable of being a fascist movement or organisation*. It was not even a very effective communal organisation.

The RSS however was not the only communal organisation in India, or the only one with fascist potential or aspirations. The *Hindu Maha Sabha* led by V D Savarkar showed far greater understanding of the necessary attributes of a fascist organisation and movement. It (or at least Savarkar) was in the first place clearly aware of the need of clarity at the level of thought on numerous issues. It also saw *Hindu* in broader pan-Hindu terms. It saw clearly the caste divide as an impediment to the development of Hindu unity and organisation. It welcomed science, technology, and modernity. It had at least a peripheral reformist agenda for the Hindu community. It also was far more clearly militarist. It recognised the need for clarity on the post Independence economic and political structures. It also had some history of active opposition to colonial rule – if not as a mass movement at least through terrorist armed actions. The RSS was characterised by no involvement in anti government actions and thus escaped subsequent repression. Savarkar in contrast carried, at least for certain sections of the society, the romantic halo of active armed opposition to the British and resultant harsh incarcerations. The *Hindu Maha Sabha* failed ever to make a mark due to a host of reasons. It remained confined geographically mostly to Maharashtra – a bastion of the *Congress* led national movement, with history of non-Brahmin movement, the legacy of Mahatma Phule, the Dalit movement led by Dr. Ambedkar, Gandhian activity, social democratic formations, and the working class based communist movement. In this terrain, it faced insurmountable hurdles even in claiming any legitimacy as a radical anti-colonial organisation. The *Hindu Maha Sabha* also was limited in organisational terms by its caste base – mainly a sub-caste of the Maharashtrian Brahman community. *Savarkar's associates and followers did not share or perhaps even understand the sweep and breadth of his fascist aspirations and vision*. Savarkar himself had turned largely inactive after his release from incarceration – that is during the most active, militant, and populous period of the national independence movement. The stigma of Mahatma Gandhi's murder also attached itself to Savarkar. *The masses saw the murder of the Mahatma not only as an obscene affront to all that was human but also as unforgivable dastardly parricide*.

Appendix 03:

Two Phases and Two Facets of Communal Violence

It is necessary to venture here a potentially controversial formulation.

The character and nature of communal violence in independent India changed in the 1980s.

Prior to that period, there was of course some planning and fair amount of incitement but there also was a strong element of local spontaneity to communal violence. Distrust grew in specific areas – for definite reasons - often economic, social, and political – and compacts broke down. Fear and suspicion of the ‘other’ festered and intensified from both sides. The communal organisations entered the fray to vitiate the atmosphere further. They did not allow any compromises or ‘pacts of peace’ to take place. They fanned the flames and prepared the local people for violence. They above all interpreted all conflicts – and many of these were quite ‘secular’ – in communal terms, as impending, actual or potential microscopic wars between religious communities. The communalists in these situations invoked symbols, misconstrued (or even lied about) history, and created vainglorious, twisted analogies. The communal forces also liberally utilised lies, particularly regarding desecrations of holy places or places of worship, sacrilege involving sacred or taboo animals, and sexual assaults on women. Strangely, these excuses remain constant to date. The recent communal violence in Mangalore in Karnataka (October 2006) also was sparked off with rumours of cow slaughter.

In such situations, any minor confrontation too takes on immediate community-level proportions, considering each such violation a predetermined action by the ‘opponent other’ that is part of a ‘grand plan of war’. The number of riots that have broken out over rumours of slaughter of the cow, or of throwing dead pigs in mosques, or over playing musical instruments loudly outside mosques particularly during

prayers, or throwing vermilion powder into mosques or on devout and praying Muslims is legion. Similarly, rumours of kidnapping of a girl or woman – often then coloured as forcible mass abductions, rapes etc. – have sparked off a number of violent incidents during this period.³⁵

The intensity of these incidents of violence varied depending on local conditions, including local competition between vested interests from both communities which could be economic (trade and property) or political or even criminal (‘war over territories’). Some of the Ahmedabad riots (of this period – the ‘70s and ‘80s) seem like gang wars between criminal outfits played out under a religious/communal garb. Almost all known traditional centres of communal violence had intense economic competition at some level or the other between members of the two communities. That is precisely why the location of communal riots during this period was largely medium and small sized towns, often associated with some specific craft or/and trade – think of Malegaon, Moradabad, Bhivandi, for example.

The communal organisations did interfere and intervene in these situations. They did not create these situations, because they could not – though they would have loved to do so. The participants in and perpetrators of the violence too were not necessarily activists or cadres of communal organisations or even very convinced communalists. They spouted usual venom against the ‘other’ in situations of conflict but did not necessarily have any communal agenda or vision. That is precisely why however brutal these incidents of violence they were restricted

³⁵The role of rumours in situations of communal violence needs some detailed study. It is interesting to note that the rumours that spread during the partition related communal riots and those that did the rounds in Mumbai during the 1992-93 communal violence were remarkably similar. Rumours of seaborne attacks by armed ‘foreigners’ (read Muslims), poisoning of water supply, milk, and bread along with totally fabricated tales of atrocities – including desecration of holy places and violation of women were common in both periods. Fears of impending attacks can be easily understood but even the kind of attack imagined was similar. The methods of communication of the rumours have now changed with telephones, including mobile telephones, now playing a role. The speed also may have increased. By all reports however, similar ‘information’, all of it false, was available across the city almost simultaneously. No single agency has however been traced as the source of such instigation through false ‘information’. The reportage of local television channels also needs some monitoring in such periods. It is known that even established non-local channels sometimes exaggerate and sensationalise occurrences. This has great potential to spread panic and cause other harm. Some age-old methods, particularly black board writings at street corners are still in great use in Mumbai despite the availability of technologically advanced methods of communication.

temporally and spatially. That is also, why the JS did not really spread beyond municipalities during this period.³⁶

The riots since the '80s – particularly the ones sparked off by L K Advani's infamous *Rath Yatra* – were entirely different in character.³⁷ They did not remain confined to specific places dictated by specific local causes or occurrences. There was, in fact, no cause or provocation for this violence. These were purely political, motivated orgies of violence with a purpose very different from the incidents in the previous period. The venom and hatred of the incited Hindu masses here was not a response or reaction to any specific immediate occurrence – or even to any experienced 'injury'. The *Sangh Parivar* – as organiser of the *Ram Janmabhoomi* campaign carefully and clearly created this spate of communal violence. The perpetrators now were determined storm troopers acting to a purpose. *The purpose was political*. It was more than mere electoral advantage. The explicit and declared purpose was to rejuvenate the pride of the Hindu and of the nation. The talk was to erase/eliminate the 'stigmas of shame' from the body of the (Hindu) nation. The real purpose was very clear. *It was to alter the national*

³⁶Incidents of communal violence generally have official and independent records. The reports of commissions of inquiry often honestly reveal all details including the organisations or persons responsible for the planning and organisation. The report of the Justice Madan Commission for example about the riots in Bhivandi in 1969 was very clear and forthright on a number of points. The report of Justice Shrikrishna Commission that inquired into the Mumbai violence of 1992-93 made successive state governments very uncomfortable. Apart from the official commissions of inquiry, there usually are independent fact-finding reports. The PUCL has consistently carried out such investigations. Dr Asghar Ali Engineer has investigated and written about numerous incidents of communal violence. Hardly any incident has escaped his notice at least in the past 30 years or so. The documents are available with the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism, Mumbai.

³⁷It would be incorrect to link all changes with L. K. Advani's *Rath Yatra* of 1990. The changes began somewhat earlier – definitely in the mid 1980s. Some notable features can be enumerated here. The first and foremost is the increased inhuman brutality of the violence. Nellie (Assam) in 1983 and Bhivandi in 1984 were to show features that became common later. From individual stabbings and group clashes/ attacks, the violence moved to mass murders. People in large numbers were trapped and then systematically slaughtered or burnt alive. The second feature was the spread of the violent venom to new areas that had no history of previous communal tensions. The new areas were often very small towns or even large villages. In fact communal violence in this period spread to rural areas for the first time after the partition riots. Moreover, in some places the violence became almost permanent. The third feature was the involvement in the violence of sections that had no direct experience – personal or familial, contemporary or remembered – of communal antagonism and conflict. The fourth notable feature was the wide support from the immediate community that the actual perpetrators of violence received. The last but certainly not the least important feature was that the communal venom had spread across castes and gender. These features show, among other things, that a stable constituency for a fascist programme was now in existence.

agenda of principally politics in the country. Power at the centre was definitely a quest. The power (particularly if only electoral) was not perhaps the sole aim. There was a clear-cut 'agenda' – the purpose for which power at the centre was to be captured. There was a Hindu or narrowly communal component of the agenda – in all probability for public consumption, to be able to fire the imagination of the masses. This consisted of the well-known three items: construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya at the spot where the Babri mosque stood, abrogation of article 370 of the Constitution of India that grants a special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir, and enactment of a Uniform Civil Code. This was not and could never have been a substantive agenda of the RSS. *The real agenda was a restructuring or recreation of the state*. The price of a few thousand Muslim lives for this venture was of course acceptable, even joyously welcome, to the *Sangh Parivar* towards the costs of the project.

The immediate gains from the violence (in 1990 and in 1992/93) were many. A single unifying national issue for mobilisation of Hindus across the country was created. A single symbol and a single action were emphasised. There was an all out assault on the Muslims. Their attitudes, their 'historical sins', the 'privileges' they have 'unjustly grabbed', their 'anti-nationalism' suddenly were made the most important national issues. It is also important to remember in this context that in this period though there was continuous unrest in Kashmir and also militancy there was no 'Muslim terrorism' in the country targeting non-combatants. The terrorism till then had basically come from the Khalistani separatists. Nevertheless, the suspicion, fear, and hatred sown over the years were elevated into prime national issues. The call was more or less for a final struggle – and implicitly for a final solution. The orgy of violence created a communal atmosphere across the country perhaps for the first time after Partition. It also created an aura of the strength and power of the RSS – not in this or that pocket but literally across the length and breadth of India. It proved to opponents and acolytes alike that the RSS was an *all-India* organisation that could create *civil war situations* virtually anywhere in the country – almost wherever and whenever it chose to do so. It also stressed that the RSS was capable of suborning the state machinery, of neutralising the law and order institutions and security forces, and of paralysing the civil society. This it could do, the actions proclaimed, even when the

governmental power was in the hands of the 'pseudo-secular' Congress. The RSS also exhibited an open defiance of the legislative and judicial machinery, institutions, processes, and norms. It demonstrated, that it would allow nothing to stand in the way of the realisation of its dreams – nothing, it actually said, can interfere with matters of 'faith'.

The *Sangh Parivar* also demonstrated that it was capable of a nationwide mobilisation and had the mechanism already installed to turn this in the direction of violence – if need be civil war. It showed that it had grown out of the ritualistic assemblies and prayer meetings to become a dynamic organisation of direct frenzied action. It consolidated its cadre and supporters through this upheaval. It also held out a clear warning to the minorities that they survived in India even physically at the mercy of and upon tolerance by the *Sangh Parivar* – now apparently the sole tribune of the Hindus.

This was indeed a qualitative change. The *Sangh Parivar* now had adopted a clearly fascist agenda. From vague fascist or neo-fascist tendencies, it had moved to a fascist programme.

04. Sangh Parivar and Fascism

The components of this fascist turn are quite clear.

Some qualifications and explanations are in order before further discussion.

It is not the contention of this writing that the Indian state is fascist. It was not so even when the BJP led *National Democratic Alliance* ruled the country.

The statement very simply is that the *Sangh Parivar* has strong fascist/neo-fascist tendencies that closely approximate the classical picture of fascist organisations. It is not the contention again, that the BJP is a fascist party. It is not so, at least in the classical sense, though individuals within it may have fascist tendencies.

A paradoxical situation occurs in Gujarat, though it is but one state in the union and as such subject to the authority of the central government. The ruling party in the state has shown fascist/neo-fascist capabilities in the recent past. The Gujarat Carnage of 2002 was not merely communal or reactionary right wing. The situation showed

definite elements of fascism/neo-fascism. One should also remember that in Gujarat the *Sangh Parivar* (as in some other places) speaks with multiple voices. What the BJP cannot openly say due perhaps to constitutional restrictions a parliamentary party – that too a ruling party – must face, the VHP does. The latter has no restraints even of logic or decency. It probably abhors both – once again classic fascist traits! Gujarat needs careful specific analysis because the danger continues to exist.

There is no special attachment to the term fascist in this writing. There is no harm in restricting the term to denote the phenomena between the two world wars. However, if a political formation (including a regime) shows overwhelming similarities in ideology, actions, organisation, and mentality to the classical fascist formation one should not collapse it into a mere right wing authoritarian entity simply because it occurs *now*. This will amount to a loss of specificity in understanding that particular formation.

Some analysts again restrict their endeavours to understand institutions and organisations of fascist *rule*. The concerns here are the processes that constitute fascist 'minimum' and 'matrix'. This is a more general task. The 'mathematical precision' perhaps applicable to a fascist regime does not operate here. The absence of one condition does not thus negate the fascist character of ideologies, movements, and organisations. It is necessary to maintain this important distinction to understand the nature of particularly the contemporary threat of fascism. It will also be erroneous to believe that fascists cause damage to civilisations, cultures, societies, polities, and people only when they have *absolute* control of the state and have already transformed it into a fascist state. They can do so in the phases before and after the capture of power. The Internet is full of neo-fascist and neo-Nazi sites – some overt and some covert. The number of publications sympathetic to fascist or Nazi ideas is considerable. It is needless to state that fascist ideology, movements, and organisations precede fascist rule. The fascist regime is only the political culmination of fascism as a social phenomenon.

The fascist facets of the *Sangh Parivar* became obvious in the late eighties – with the so-called *Ram Janmabhoomi* 'movement'. These were not cynically opportunistic stances but fundamental alterations in character, though the BJP did use the *Ram Janmabhoomi* issue quite brazenly to derive electoral advantages. (There is some disjunction

between the RSS and the BJP that has become quite apparent over the past few years. This is not only cosmetic. The RSS is an organisation beyond the pale of republican democracy, while the BJP all said and done is at least partly and formally a parliamentary process. These two differing locations have had an inevitable impact on analyses, stances, organisational and public behaviour of the 'ideological' parent and its legislative off-spring. The diversions are not shams, facades, or mere public exhibitions. These are differences that need some discussion at some stage. There have been definite differences over economic policies, over foreign policy, over the 'dilution' of the *Hindutva* agenda, and over the general conduct of the BJP members. Strangely, the RSS has not been very severe in its criticism of the 'cultural changes' within the BJP including the now fairly commonplace corruption.)

A few characteristic changes took place in the *Sangh Parivar* during the Deoras period. The RSS, even in the recent Advani controversy, has maintained that it is an organisation driven by ideology. The ideology always consisted of *Hindu supremacy* and *hatred of the Muslims*. It did not however amount to a worldview. There was no comprehensive thought. The BJP (and the earlier incarnation JS) itself laboured to define its own ideology through this period – it began with something called *Integral Humanism* then graduated to *Gandhian Socialism* (cynical opportunism at its worst – both words were and are anathema to it) and finally to *Cultural Nationalism*. With *Cultural Nationalism and Hindutva*, it acquired elements of an ideology – that are also quite classically fascist.

With both the concepts, it created walls of inclusion and exclusion. *Cultural Nationalism* redefined nationality and above all 'nationalism'. It drove a wedge between citizenship and nationality. A poster in wake of the 90-92 phase of aggressive communal (neo-fascist) posture of the *Sangh Parivar* made the point very succinctly. It said "Indian is citizenship, Hindu is nationality" (*Baratiyata nagarikata hai; Hindutva rashtriyata hai*). The posters were plastered all over the city of Mumbai – including in the local railway trains. This is not a new formulation. Savarkar had already made the distinction between citizenship of Indian state and Hindu nationality/nationalism. It is in a way interesting that after resisting Savarkar (at least implicitly) for decades the *Sangh Parivar* now adopts him as the ideologue!

It was in the same period that the *Sangh Parivar* shifted its criticism from that of 'appeasement of minorities' to 'pseudo-secularism'. This was not a mere change in terminology. It was a change in ideological stance. The attack shifted from a problem in the *implementation* of a policy to the formulation of the policy – to the very way the *Congress* and the *Left* perceive the minorities. This was an attack on the concept of minority rights in particular and of democratic rights in general by the BJP as the spokes-vehicle and by the RSS as the ideological fountainhead (of the *Sangh Parivar*).

The *Sangh Parivar* tried to constitute an alternate total worldview – however unsuccessfully – during this period. The attempts to justify astrology as a science, the emphasis on *Vedic* mathematics, the search for Hindu sciences and of course for a homogeneous Hindu culture are all examples of the efforts to formulate a holistic ideology. It was also a declaration of war on liberalism, democracy, and rationality.

It was an attempt to redefine India. Not only were the characteristics of secularism, socialism and democracy to be jettisoned but the entire concept of a democratic republic was to be challenged. A few drafts for the new constitution of the *Hindu Rashtra* also circulated during this period. The documents were typically deniable. One was apparently drafted and circulated by a Swami Vamadeva (God of the Left – Oh God!), another by some front organisation. There was a strange but not unimaginable commonality in all these drafts. They all devalued the parliament and jettisoned universal suffrage. They all called for a council of sages and teachers, kept the defence forces out of any control of the democratically elected bodies, and transferred real power to Hindu organisations and their religious leaders. The *Dharma Sansad* of the VHP declares itself now the *religious parliament* of India – with no accountability – popular or even religious. It is just a body of so-called sages (*sants*) or holy men – holy by their own declaration and certification of the murderers in VHP. Even in the recent controversy regarding Advani's utterances, the real issue is not the evaluation of Jinnah but the direction of the peace process between Pakistan and India. The claws have now come out – bared by the 'moderate' Vajapayee. The *Sangh Parivar* cannot accept the existence of Pakistan. It still stands by the ideal of *Akhand Bharat* (Undivided India) – that is its goal of expansion – the dream of Greater Hindu Homeland – the drive for its militarist and expansionist core ideology. This is in no way

different in spirit from the dreams of glory of Mussolini's Italy or Hitler's Germany. The borders of *Akhand Bharat*, again, are not necessarily those of pre-partition British India but of some mythical 'Aryavarta' or 'Bharatvarsha' dragged out of some obscure medieval texts, and might as well include Afghanistan and large chunks of central Asia. True the ranting of most RSS *Pracharak*s (propagandists) sound lunatic and ridiculous until one remembers that the Nazis until 1930 and the Fascists until the early twenties were considered ridiculous and laughable in their own lands. Italians ridiculed Mussolini as the 'Pouting Pigeon' and laughed at him till then.³⁸ For too long progressive elements in India too have treated the baggy khaki knickers with elite contempt – and only now have begun to wake up to the menace hidden in the swirling shorts. Almost until Gujarat, they thought they could overcome them with their superior attitudes. The fascist precisely feeds beast on this contempt.

The *Sangh Parivar* gradually acquired the total ideological baggage that it also flaunted as a package. *Hindutva* had created for it an anti-democratic, anti-tolerant, anti-liberal, anti-Left, anti-secular, expansionist, militarist ideology with definitions through *Cultural Nationalism* that were racist and hence identifiably 'pure'. It also provided 'the Hindu' with an imaginary homogeneity of a mass. The ideology was militarist in its approach to Pakistan and Bangladesh, to the 'terrorist', the 'Islamic fundamentalist', and secondarily to the alien Christian, and lastly the subversive Dalit. It was militant – tolerating no dissent, debate, or opposition. It was expansionist in working towards the dream of an *Akhand Bharat*. It was ultra-nationalist in not tolerating any questioning of the goals of the nation state usually identified as the nation. It also looked towards the rebirth or rejuvenation of the nation to rise to the ancient lost glory of an imagined golden past. This new entity was also one that would subject the individual to the idea of the 'nation' and wherein individuals would have no rights that would stand in contrast to those of the nation-state.

The *Sangh Parivar* also added on or brought to the fore a few other organisations as part of the family. The 'new' organisations not only extended the spread of the *Parivar* across geographical regions and

³⁸Upton Sinclair in his novel *Between Two Worlds* (T. Werner Laurie Ltd., London; 1941) part of his *World's End Series* depicts the situation in Europe between 1919 and 1929. In this particular novel, he makes (through the characters) an elaborate joke on the name Benito Mussolini that slightly wrongly spelt would literally mean the Blessed Pouter Pigeon. This novel of Sinclair is very useful to understand the then situation in Europe in non-academic terms.

social sectors but also added new dimensions to the activities – and thus to the ideological thrust. The new organisations were of a very different kind from the Bramhanical RSS. The RSS was a *conservative* organisation – incapable of mounting effective challenges to the status quo. It could not be *radical* organisation, or mount a revolution from the right. The VHP and *Bajrang Dal* gave the *Parivar* that edge – in thought, language, and street actions. They were really beyond the pale of conservative decency and norms. They were also capable of being totally irresponsible, illogical, and irrational. They created a sense of being outside the pale of constitutional and legal norms – of almost being in a state of civil war with the Indian state. Gujarat did not just happen accidentally. The Sangh Parivar created it. The radical organisations of the *Sangh Parivar* played a crucial role in preparing for and then executing the carnage.

The *Sangh Parivar* had also realised that it was limited in terms of geography and in terms of social base. The BJP was to realise the same to its great discomfort later. The *Sangh Parivar* had no real presence in the southern and in the eastern states. It made concerted efforts to enter them.³⁹ It similarly attempted to woo the Adivasis and Dalits through various 'service' organisations. The work amongst the Adivasis brought the *Sangh Parivar* in direct competition and conflict with the Christians. The attacks on the Christians were not in that sense insane, sudden, or unexpected.⁴⁰

The *Sangh Parivar* had always nurtured a sense of community within a community. The members of the RSS always belonged to a special

³⁹The efforts have not ceased after the electoral defeat of 2004. Communal tension continues to rise in the BJP ruled states. In Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh there are occasional outbreaks of communal violence and display of brazenly anti-minority attitude by the state governments. The most telling example is of Karnataka. The BJP managed to split the *Janata Dal (Secular)*. It is now a partner in the state government. The reports about communal violence in the state in October 2006 are shocking. The attitudes of the administration are no different from those exhibited in Gujarat. For details, see the Appeal [C.eldoc1/0704/Appeal_by_KCHForum.html] by Karnataka Komu Souharda Vedike (Karnataka Communal Harmony Forum) of Shimoga in the state of 10th October 2006 (souharda.vedike@gmail.com) which is available also on <http://communalism.blogspot.com/2006>. Also see *Mayhem in Mangalore* [C.eldoc1/0705/Mayhem_In_Mangalore.html] by Yoginder Sikand of October 11, 2006 available in PUCL Digest No 738. Another useful analysis is by V. Lakshminarayana *The Dialectics of Communal Conflict* [C.eldoc1/0610/27oct06email1.html] in *Coastal Karnataka* in PUCL Digest No 739. The happenings in Karnataka are not purely local outbreaks. It is a clear effort to establish a strong base in the state. Similar efforts can also be noticed in Orissa, since the east is also on the agenda of the *Sangh Parivar*.

⁴⁰The Christian missionaries, churches, and church related organizations including varied NGOs had been criticised much earlier for their 'conversion' and 'anti-Hindu' activities. The actual physical conflicts arose whenever the *Sangh Parivar* attempted to organise the Adivasis directly.

community that was not only notional and emotional but a concrete and real entity that provided even material support to the members whenever they needed such support. The newer organisations created camaraderie in violent street actions along with assured legal defence etc.

The RSS perhaps loosened its regimentation in keeping with the times. Such regimentation cannot anyway be a very long-term process – except for a very small group. The new street organisations were much looser in their demands for discipline and behavioural norms. They were not to provide the ideological core in any case but only the street fighter troops. The effort however was more than amassing the street fighters.

The effort was to extend the organisation/s to all sections of the Hindu society and to create a pan-Hindu unity, perhaps for the first time in the history of the *Sangh Parivar*. The ally from Maharashtra, *Shiv Sena*, had already shown that it was possible to create such a unity. Of course, not all Hindus would gather under the saffron flag but *Hindus from all sections* could so come together. The SS had also proved that it was possible to extend the communal mobilisation into the rural areas – at least up to the level of the smallest towns. The *Sangh Parivar* learnt this lesson from the SS and used various organisations to translate it into practice.

There were three prongs to the trident – incidentally the symbol of the *Bajrang Dal*.

The *Ram Janmabhoomi* ‘movement’ and the call to demolish the Babri Mosque (to remove the mark/stigma of shame/ignominy – *kalank ka tika* - in the words of some leaders of the *Sangh Parivar*) provided for the common Hindus – particularly the urban and rural working classes – a common, simple identification, goal, and an action that was *at once concrete and symbolic*. Anyone with half a mind would have realised that it would not make any real difference to the life of the participating masses. It however became an extremely emotive, historic-cultural, symbolic issue. This campaign could create mass frenzy. It also identified and isolated the enemy quite clearly – the Muslims. The common Indian Muslim despite the propaganda was not earlier a perceived threat. The Muslims were too weak and too poor to arouse sustained widespread hatred and violent anger. The *Ram Janmabhoomi* campaign with its twisted if not fabricated reading of history invoked the actions of invading or alien rulers who were strong and had crushed the

armies of the local kings and chieftains efficiently. The campaign highlighted their real and imagined atrocities. It also projected the current Muslim population as their descendents and supporters (*Babar ki aulad* – progeny of Babar – became a common description for Muslims and all defenders of democratic rights, particularly minority rights). It now held them responsible for the real and imaginary horrors committed centuries ago. This identification of the entire Muslim community residing in India with the Muslim rulers of the medieval period, and particularly their so-called atrocities against the Hindus was a turning point for the *Sangh Parivar*. (The propaganda against Muslim rule was not new. The venom against the Muslims was also not new. The new factor was the demand that the Muslims of today – and that too those residing in India – make reparations for these real or imaginary historical wrongs. They were asked simply to give up their Muslim identity and paradoxically accept a secondary and subjugated status in permanence.) The campaign was never to merely build a Ram Temple in Ayodhya. It was a campaign to clearly identify and provide a concrete, present, existing enemy to the communally mobilised masses. With that act, it established the basics of a pan-Hindu unity.

The ideology of Cultural Nationalism mainly attracted the middle class. This too had many forms. It effected an identification of nationality and nationalism with Hindu. The nationalism and patriotism of the Hindu was taken for granted – a ‘given’. The other communities were at best aliens allowed to reside in the country but forever suspect as far as their nationalism and patriotism was concerned since they lacked the essential ingredient of nationality – Hindu religion and hence membership of the Hindu community. With the main holy places of the ‘others’ – meaning Muslims and Christians – located outside India – their loyalties too were supposed to lie outside the country. (Interestingly this is another ‘adoption’ from Savarkar who had defined Hindu as a person with India as the fatherland and holy land – {*pitrubhoomi and punyabhoomi*}.) The same ideology also fraudulently portrays the Muslims and the Christians as members of ‘other’ global communities – as if these communities are operational realities. Nationality now found an ethnic, religious, and geographic basis.

This cultural nationalism also invoked again fairly fraudulently a new national pride – with descriptions of great achievements in the past – with invocations of Vedic mathematics, science, and of course,

astrology and philosophy. At least a token and tokenist religiosity became suddenly respectable amongst the middle classes. Popular festivals – perhaps with ancient non-Hindu or even non-religious roots – first came out of the sphere of fables, folklore, and mass faith. Then they entered the ambit of organised religion. Later, almost inevitably they became communalised often in a militant manner. Various *Parivar* related bodies revived numerous observances fading into obscurity. Many cultural practices first became religious observances and rituals and then acquired a communal content. ‘Alien cultural invasions’ were resisted, sometimes violently, and instead Hindu celebrations were promoted. This was also an effort at creation of spectacles – so essential to the fascist agenda. The middle class – particularly the lower middle class – was thus cemented to the extent possible into a communalised force. If nothing else, it would then at least become the vote bank of the political wing – the BJP. Cultural Nationalism also became the ‘ideological’ tool to attack secularism, socialism, and democracy.⁴¹

The vision of India as a holy land – a land of purity of culture – a land of actually superior potentials that would one day rise again to its ancient grandeur and recapture the lost glory also fired the imagination of the Non – Resident Indians (NRI). This section provided important international lobbies and huge funding for the *Sangh Parivar* in its new avatar.

The holiness of the land and its cultural purity were, however, not in conflict with modernity, science, and technology – at least of a peculiar variety as far as the *Sangh Parivar* was concerned. The RSS of an earlier period was distinctly uneasy with modernity, with science, and with technology. It was not sure of utilising these forces for its own advantage and advancement. The ‘transformed’ *Sangh Parivar* had almost vulgar notions of modernity. It wanted all the advantages and comforts of modernity – though the full time propagandists and leaders made a great virtue of simple almost austere lifestyles. The opposition was not to modernity or science but to the ideology that modernism and scientific advance bring with them. The opposition was to scientific attitudes, scientific inquiries, and scientific methodologies. The RSS wanted mobile phones and *sati* together. It wanted computerised horoscopes

⁴¹The public celebration of the Ganesh festival is discussed by Raminder Kaur; **Performative Politics and the Cultures of Hinduism: Public Uses of Religion in Western India**. Also see Sachin Garud; *Ganapatiche Mithak ani Sarvajanic Ganeshotsav*; (Marathi), **Parivartanacha Vatsaru**; Pune; October 2006.

and astrology as the new ‘science’. It wanted nuclear weapons but wanted them as *Hindu bombs*. It wanted the glitter of modern lifestyles without democracy, liberalism, notions of equality. In this too the *Sangh Parivar* exhibited a fascist attitude. It actually converted science and technology into some kind of supra-social entities. There was also a naïve belief in the powers of science and technology to accord at least regional economic and military supremacy to India. This attitude is not scientific but scientist. A technological fetishism also dominated the policies of the BJP in power.

Varied communal civil society actions including creation of RSS dominated schools and other institutes of learning, media campaigns, subversion of state apparatuses, etc ably supported these prongs of the trident.

The RSS insists that it is a cultural and ideological organisation with no direct political ambitions and activities. Its interest in politics, according to its spokespersons, is to ensure national interests. In practice, this only means that RSS under its own banner keeps a distance from direct political activity but engages in it through other members of the *Sangh Parivar*. The BJP is very clearly its political electoral front. There may however be something more sinister in the way RSS views itself and functions. It is not indifferent to the government and its functioning but sees itself as beyond and above mere governmental power. It perhaps sees itself as the alternate *state* – in the classical fascist sense. Whenever the BJP has any share of power, handpicked RSS personnel penetrate the organs of the *state*. This is a long drawn out and insidious process. The RSS may not have been successful in all its plans but the designs are clear enough. It is obviously not satisfied with mere governmental power. It wishes to change the basic character of the Indian state. *Hindu Rashtra based on Cultural Nationalism* is the programme to alter radically the secular democratic republic. The draft constitutions – deniable though they are as official documents – for the ‘new’ nation prepared by individuals within the RSS or other organisations of the *Sangh Parivar* are clear indications towards this goal and aim. The VHP had openly stated some years ago that its religious council of holy men – the *Dharma Sansad* (literally the Religious Parliament) would draft a new constitution for a new India that would facilitate the birth of a new nation. The drafts in circulation of course do away with representative democracy based on universal suffrage. They

further firmly bring all organs of the state under the control of RSS. The drafts to an extent propose a fusion between the state and the RSS. There is also typical militarism in the constitution of RSS dreams. The armed forces get special powers and play an active role in society and polity.

The BJP was not alone in power. It was only the leading member of an alliance that comprised of numerous parties with varied ideological stances and disparate mass bases. It could not have implemented any of these designs. It nevertheless did attempt a *review* of the Constitution. This was also a move to test the waters. It tried to gauge what the reaction of the allies, of other political forces, of the people of the country would be to any alteration of the Constitution. The exercise turned out to be quite futile because it was clear that no tampering with the basic principles would be acceptable to anyone.

The tragedy of the *Sangh Parivar* was that the mass frenzy was short lived. The mass support too never really became a majority support. The limit of the electoral support garnered by the BJP is one indication of this limitation. The success of the strategy was the creation of a new image of Hindu and at least a partial creation of a pan-Hindu identification.

05. Conditions of Transformation

There is a certain tendency to attribute supra historic near cosmic consciousness to the RSS. Some analysts actually believe that the RSS had all the plans ready and knew exactly when to unfold them. They almost impart to it a foreknowledge spreading over decades. Such speculations belong in the realm of occult fiction. Common sense and objective empirical observations suggest that it was able to plant personnel in state organs and in the media only once it got close to power first in 1977 and then in 1998. This does not deny the fact that some individuals in various positions would have been sympathetic to the cause of Hindu communalism in general and to the RSS in particular during all periods. They were generally not very effective.

The RSS just with its own plans and wishes could not create a pan-Hindu consolidation or a nationwide communal frenzy. It could do so only in certain conditions.

The Internal Emergency of 1975-77 is notorious for its excesses, for its alleged attempts to suppress democratic and fundamental rights. Very

few analysts discuss the economic agenda of the Emergency in any details. The changes that the Indian economy underwent rapidly and brazenly after 1991 actually have their roots in the period of the Emergency. In the nineteen-eighties these tendencies became even more pronounced. The character of the economy and the nature of changes during the different periods were of course quite different. The tone and basis for the 'dramatic' changes of the nineties was however set during the period of the emergency. There were important differences – the Gandhi (Indira and Rajiv) periods would not yield political command of the economy to the markets, or total freedom of play to foreign capital – not enough to dictate policies.

The mostly organised, urban, industrial worker did stage a kind of revolt after the emergency and tried to roll back the measures. These efforts were marked for their militancy and their rejection of norms imposed during the emergency. They did not however necessarily understand or challenge the economic logic inaugurated during the period of the emergency. The 'upsurge' thus was quite short-lived. In fact, the workers, and far more significantly and disastrously their leadership, did not understand the changes that were taking place. The overall result has been a massive demobilisation of the working class. This is economic, political, and socio-cultural. The result is a dispersal of the working class as it existed till then, decline of the working class movement, erosion of its unions, massive reduction if not total eclipse of its social weight, and the disappearance of working class cultural ethos and values.

This occurred in a period (the 1990s) when the offensive of capital was extremely strong. It was a period when the old social mechanisms of support and sustenance also collapsed for both organised and unorganised workers.

There then was a mass of unemployed and underemployed population with no hopes, no support, and a state that had abandoned them. *This potentially is an explosive situation when the numbers are high – whether or not the 'truly enlightened revolutionaries' lead such masses.*

The middle class too in this situation had undergone a change. In the first instance, there was a massive expansion in numbers along with new aspirations and demands. The new economic policy package despite

the initial promises could not fulfil these aspirations and demands. Soon it did not even hold out a realistic hope of doing so. Further, this was not the old intelligentsia with sense or illusions of any social responsibility but an upstart group with no social consciousness. It was contemptuous of the workers (and afraid of falling back in their strata) and envious of the sections that it thought were better off but did not deserve to be in that position. There was a further twist to the tale. These sections did not relate to or depend upon the real economy but to and upon the money economy – including the ephemeral activities of the service sector. The so-called services too developed in non-essential and often parasitic spheres of activities. These sections were hence themselves extremely insecure. This induced a speculative mentality that culturally relied upon promises or imaginary memories of glory; embraced symbolic, external, ritualistic observances; sought convenient enemies; and indulged in speculative activities in real economic life and in superstitious beliefs in its cultural life. Its actual or potential segment located in distant lands also bolstered this section. The Diasporas, unsure of themselves, rootless, often socially disadvantaged adopted – of course not homogeneously or uniformly – tele-nationalism and tele-communalism as their ideologies of preference. It is perhaps needless to say that this section (this middle class) is a potential recruiting ground – at least as far as electoral, financial, and ideological support is concerned – of neo-fascist forces. This section was not available in such numbers to the *Sangh Parivar* before this period.

Capital and the capitalist class too changed during this period. It acquired a new strength and confidence. It also acquired a different vision. This vision – later celebrated as the new global vision – was brutal. It broke the social compact when it acquired the strength to do so. Its vision and policy – very consciously – decided to push out of all considerations the sections that were not actually or potentially part of the market. Until then such sections existed without assistance or without any active efforts at development, but managed to survive mostly through their own efforts in the subsistence/survival sectors of the economy. This was a marked feature of the rural economy but was not exclusively limited to the rural areas. The number of people who thus eked out an existence largely outside the play of the markets and capital – outside the so-called mainstream of economy and development was very large and comprised the majority of the population of India. The

new developments of the economy aggressively engaged with these sections and attempted to snatch away the meagre resources they possessed or accessed. The relative withdrawal of the state from the social security and welfare programmes as well as the alterations in activity (labour process) even in agriculture forced these changes. The changes in the economy are often – particularly in popular parlance – attributed to almost conspiratorial impositions by the World Bank and the IMF. It is true that the IMF conditions for the loan in 1991 spelt out the framework of the 'new economic policy'. It is equally true however, that Indian capital enthusiastically welcomed the structural adjustment programme and continued it even when the conditions of IMF did not apply. In fact, the SAP matched the vision of capital and became the economic reforms or the new economic policy package.

The overall result was the creation of a large mass – almost on the verge of starvation – with no security, no guarantees of future, but also without any target for its anger and dissatisfaction. This was a mass with the power of vote but without any stable or real representatives.

The political process too was going out of the reach of the masses during this period. The relative devaluation of the representative legislative bodies and the strengthening of the bureaucratic and judicial machinery warmed the hearts of the middle classes but did nothing to increase the representation of the masses.

In the formal political arena, there was the decline of the populist national political parties. The Congress itself attempted to play the Hindu card – abandoning its claim as the sole *national and nationally effective* defender of the minorities. It not only lost the confidence of its mass base of minorities and Dalits but also lost credibility as an effective political and governance instrument. The social democratic parties incredibly lost as a result of sharing power at the centre in 1977! They fragmented and dissipated. The remnants either joined the fascists as proud allies or became regional formations. The communists – mainly the *CPI (M)* were anyway confined mainly to two states – Kerala and West Bengal. In these states, they confronted the *Sangh Parivar* on the streets. Whatever the ideological and political wisdom of their anti-fascist struggle, they denied a foothold to the *Sangh Parivar* (absolutely in West Bengal and at least seriously in Kerala). Their influence did not however extend beyond these two states in any major way.

The invocation of a pan Hindu identity could succeed in this situation of rapidly changing economic conditions that worsened for the vast majority but brought unexpected and unprecedented benefits to some, and in a situation of political flux characterised above all by the decline and loss of credibility of the *Congress*. It is perhaps not accidental that the relative decline of the Hindutva forces accompanied a revival – however weak – of the *Congress* at a national level.

06. Fascist Traits of RSS

This 'experiment' in Gujarat raises the question immediately whether the laboratory was of communalism or fascism, and further can any distinction be made between these two at all.

Communalism in Indian experience is associated with extreme reactionary positions, virulence towards the minorities, and often (particularly after 1990) grotesque violence unleashed against the minorities.

Hindu consolidation, Hindu organisation, Hindu mobilisation go far beyond mere identity politics in India. These elements become the recruiting grounds, the clarion call, and the orchestrating principles for fascism itself.

It may seem academic in such a situation to attempt to distinguish between communalism and fascism. Nevertheless, it is necessary to do so even as the opposition to communalism remains sharp, strident, and intense. The necessity once again is political. The contours of the struggle against fascism are different from the struggle against communal positions. All communal positions need not be of the *Hindu Maha Sabha* or RSS brand – they may sound modernist, rational, and tolerant only insisting on the primacy of the Hindus in 'the only homeland the Hindus have'. They may not interpret Hindu in terms of religious belonging, observance, practice, or belief but only in ethno-geographic terms with an almost negative criterion for the religious identity – not belonging formally to any other religion, particularly organised religion! This position, termed for the sake of convenience 'soft-communalism', is at times difficult to recognise and often easy to accommodate/ tolerate. The second point to emphasise is that the RSS goes beyond even the strong communal position. It always drew inspiration from and admired fascism – as it actually existed in Europe between the two World Wars. It was not even an 'enemy of enemy is a friend' stance inspired purely or even principally by an opposition to the colonial rule, even if narrowly

interpreted as British or Christian rule! It was an ideological affinity and attraction for fascism. The RSS as earlier argued was not an effective fascist organisation, despite this admiration. It became so only after 1973 – during the Deoras period.⁴²

It is necessary to be able to distinguish between a fascist state, fascist regime, and fascist organisation. To term RSS fascist is not to posit even the possibility of a fascist regime or fascist state in India. It is merely to identify the essential fascist formulations in its ideology, fascist elements in its agenda/programme, and fascist positions in its world-view. It is also necessary to exercise caution in use of terms like semi-fascist or neo-fascist. These terms are unnecessary if they only denote that, the organisation under discussion (RSS here) differs in some essentials from the classical fascist parties of Europe. The 'classical' fascist parties too differed from each other in many respects – the fascist party of Italy was different from the Nazi party in Germany. Both were quite different from the political organisations in Spain or Portugal or even from fascist parties in other 'advanced' European nations, including Britain and France. If these terms are to mean that, the organisation under discussion (RSS here) is something *other* than fascist then they can be dangerous. Moreover, they will make any sense only if the user demonstrates that the character of these parties is different from a 'classical' fascist organisation – and thereby that these organisations may mimic fascism but are not essentially fascist.⁴³ A further contention of such positions is that contemporary capitalism has numerous other methods at its service to exercise hegemony and to overcome any crises it may face and hence does not need the fascist solution. If this were truly so then even semi-fascism or neo-fascism becomes unnecessary and irrelevant. The further contention that minor problems still lead to a necessity for organisations that mimic fascism but do not aspire towards a totalitarian state will need far more argument than assertions.⁴⁴

⁴²Deoras delivered a public lecture in Pune on 8th May 1974 in which he criticised the caste system and particularly untouchability as the factor responsible for disunity of Hindu society and as a factor that facilitated mass conversions. Vora (2005) holds this speech as the announcement of the new phase of RSS.

⁴³I do not agree with either of these contentions. The aim of this writing is not to be polemical hence, I shall settle on the term 'contemporary fascism'. This also implies that this writing does not treat economic conditions or programmes as the sole criteria to determine fascism. It in fact considers that different economic conditions (differing at least in specific details) can give rise to a fascist organisation. The economic programmes of fascist regimes will obviously differ depending on the specific situations they face.

⁴⁴Rajendra Vora has argued the case for neo-fascism most consistently. His three articles on the subject are all in Marathi. They appear in (Jan-Mar) 1993, (Apr-May) 2002, in **Samaj Prabodhan Patrika** and (15th October) 2005 in **Sadhana**.

The RSS has some very definite fascist characteristics.

- Racist or part-racist ideology that considers Hindus ethnically ('culturally') homogenous
- Ideology of racial supremacy with the Hindus considered ethnically, culturally, religiously, and historically superior to the non-Hindus
- A translation of this into a political ideology of the necessity and advisability of Hindu primacy and Hindu rule
- A racist conception of the nation that replaces a geographical nationality with cultural nationality / nationalism
- A redefinition of the concepts of nation, nationality, nationalism, patriotism on ethno-religious basis
- A glorification of the nation as natural, spiritual, supra-historical entity⁴⁵
- Strangely an abstract, imaginary, or mythical concept of a nation that is truly ahistorical and independent of the people residing in or constituting that nation – the imaginary Hindu in this case
- Subsidiary or secondary status of the individual in face of the nation, in practice in face of the State – and in operational terms in face of the Executive, leading to a virtual dissolution of the concepts of individual freedoms and liberties, individual rights – human and democratic, rule of law, independence of judiciary and independence of judicial review of Executive actions
- Devaluation of the Republic, and of democracy including in practice trampling of democratic institutions, norms, customs
- Glorification of war with nationalism as a militarist and expansionist entity
- A faith in social Darwinism with hearty acceptance of the principle of might is right, of social hierarchy based even on birth and descent, of hierarchy in opportunities, rights, access

⁴⁵Mussolini's remarks in the Naples Speech of 1922 – days before the March on Rome – would be totally acceptable to the RSS and even Savarkar. Mussolini said, "For us, the nation is not just territory; but something spiritual. ----- A nation is great when it translates into reality the force of its spirit." Speeches and writings of Sangh Parivar leaders – as also the writings of Savarkar – often echo the same sentiments. Excerpts from the speech by Mussolini can be found in Griffin, Roger (Ed) Fascism (Oxford Readers) OUP, 1995.

- Elitism that dismisses concepts of equality, liberty, and fraternity
- A naïve glorification of nature and 'natural law' as the determining and logical principles of social determination (and social engineering)
- Belief in the corporatist state with strict limitations of workers' rights, control over their organisations of the state or the ruling organisation
- State (or ruling organisation) control over all civil society and other organisations
- Creation of a xenophobic, jingoistic, militarist society along with a constant demonisation of the alien
- Glorification of tradition, traditional values, efforts for a cultural status quo or regression
- Intolerance of dissent and opposition, suppression of opponents
- A curious mixture of direct action and central control and directive
- Utilisation of direct action as indicator of faith and sentiment of the nation in opposition to constitutional, legal, democratic norms, institutions, and practices
- Mockery of all cultured, civilised, rational, logical, tolerant attitudes and behaviour
- Glorification of violence and violent force, belief in almost mystical qualities of violence as instrument of purification, of character building, of resurgence of nation
- Systematic use of aggressive violent public symbols and rituals
- Control over cultural expressions, practices, traditions, institutions
- Historical nostalgia with distortion of history itself
- Hanker for the rebirth of the nation to recapture lost glory and to recreate the golden age
- Belief in the inevitability and desirability of conflict and war
- Glorification of the male human body as the instrument of this conflict
- A technological fetishism that includes worship of advanced

technology, particularly military technology without accepting scientific attitudes

- Degradation of woman while extolling the traditional values and roles as helping wives and dutiful mothers along with glorification of patriarchal family – based aggressive organisational and social practices

Not much in this is new or half-hearted/ half-way. These are features of any fascist core or matrix! These elements as ideals have been present in the RSS right since its inception.

Paxton's identification of the five stages or phases of fascism also help us to understand the fascist nature of RSS. This is particularly true also about the actions of the *Sangh Parivar* in the BJP ruled states.⁴⁶

Orcinus (interestingly a blog – but a serious one that has extensive discussions on fascism)⁴⁷ also makes two additional interesting points that are very relevant here. One, (referring to Griffin) that one must identify fascism not by its plumage and clothes but by its essence. Second, it identifies some important ways the fascists think and feel. It says:

Feelings propel fascism more than thought does. We might call them mobilizing passions, since they function in fascist movements to recruit followers and in fascist regimes to "weld" the fascist "tribe" to its leader. The following mobilizing passions are present in fascisms, though they may sometimes be articulated only implicitly:

1. The primacy of the group, toward which one has duties superior to every right, whether universal or individual
2. The belief that one's group is a victim, a sentiment which justifies any action against the group's enemies, internal as well as external

⁴⁶Robert Paxton in *The Anatomy of Fascism* enumerates these stages. (Paxton, Robert O; "The Five Stages of Fascism"; *The Journal of Modern History*; March 1998.) In a review of the book, Ashley James Thomas (<http://postgrad.portal.com.au/index.html>) says the following: "The form his book takes is to examine the life of a fascist regime through what he identifies as the Five Stages of fascism.

1. the **creation** of movements; -- the closest he comes to the philosophical underpinnings of the ideas
2. their **rooting** in the political system; discussion of various fascist movements, e.g. Colonel la Rocque's Croix de Feu, Leon Degrelle's Rexism, and Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascist
3. their **seizure of power**; about how fascists manoeuvre themselves into power
4. the **exercise of power**; about the methods of repression and violence that the fascist leaders employ
5. and, finally, the long duration, during which the fascist regime chooses either **radicalisation or entropy**.

⁴⁷http://dneiwert.blogspot.com/2003_04_13_dneiwert_archive.html

3. Dread of the group's decadence under the corrosive effect of individualistic and cosmopolitan liberalism

4. Closer integration of the community within a brotherhood (*fascio*) whose unity and purity are forged by common conviction, if possible, or by exclusionary violence if necessary

5. An enhanced sense of identity and belonging, in which the grandeur of the group reinforces individual self-esteem

6. Authority of natural leaders (always male) throughout society, culminating in a national chieftain who alone is capable of incarnating the group's destiny

7. The beauty of violence and of will, when they are devoted to the group's success in a Darwinian struggle

The apparent sophistication of differentiating contemporary fascism from classical one to the point of denying the fascist character of the contemporary forces like the *Sangh Parivar* at times seem to concentrate on the *plumage* rather than the essential character of fascism. Moreover, they also seem to take the fascist regime as the only model of fascism ignoring the fascist organisation and movement.

It is therefore necessary to look at some specific elements of the fascist movement and ideology that shape them.

It is necessary to make here a point that is somewhat tangential to the central concern and argument of this writing.

Appendix 04:

Secularism – Particularly Indian

Equating communalism with violence and preoccupation with violent Hindu communalism – however inevitable in the given conditions of continuous violent oppression of the Muslim people in different parts of the country since 1961 – has led to a slightly stilted definition of secularism in India, particularly in practice. The significance of the year 1961 is obvious. The first major incident of communal violence after Independence took place in 1961 in Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh. This violence also took the form that was to become a familiar and constant pattern later, that of a pogrom against the Muslims.

(Very interestingly in the wake of the latest ‘terrorist’ outrages in Mumbai on 11th July 2006 that consisted of 7 powerful bomb blasts within 30 minutes in local trains of the city leaving over 200 dead and almost 800 injured some very perceptive comments have been made. The veteran journalist commentator Mr Pushpesh Pant on July 12, 2006 in a television comment said that the country and the communities had been redivided by the elements that demolished the Babri Masjid on 6th December 1992; Olga Tellis in *The Asian Age* of the next day makes the same statement perhaps even more forcefully.)

It is true that the exact European/American meaning of secularism – separation of church and state as well as absence of state (denominational) religion – did not have precise relevance in India given the ‘unorganised’, loosely institutional, non-proselytising nature of Hindu religion. Theocracy is not even practical in this atmosphere and has no precedents in history. The ancient and medieval (Hindu) state only vaguely bowed to ‘holy men’ – more the gurus of the Kings than anything else. It never took any dictates from any religious *institutions*. There was no single supreme central religious authority to issue such dictates given the essentially diverse nature of Hindu religion.

The danger in India always was of majoritarian tendency – of *Hindu supremacy* even and perhaps principally by default. The communal

danger in India was of political organisation based on religious identity to claim primacy for the majority community – in practice the elite within the community – in every field.

The notion of equal privileges and equal state patronage to all religions – the much-flaunted *Sarva Dharma Samabhava* – was unlikely to address this issue. It was in fact designed to perpetuate the organisation and the interference of religion in social and political life, since now a community could demand a share of state patronage and largesse only on the basis of its organisation and on the basis of exclusive representation (i.e. some individuals or bodies or institutions claiming to be the sole spokespersons and leaders of the entire community or sizeable identifiable sections and sects within it). This precisely might have increased the tendency towards organisation based on religious identity as also the interference of such organisations directly in social and indirectly in political life. In the case of the Hindu community, given its internal structural divisions and the factors already mentioned regarding its nature, caste organisations played and continue to play this role.

One must mention here Mahatma Gandhi and his views on this issue at least briefly. It is obviously true that Gandhi was a deeply religious person. It is also true that Gandhi was *personally* openly a Hindu. His views did not however engender the concept of *Sarva Dharma Samabhava*. In fact, Mahatma Gandhi completely bypasses the issue of secularism. He perhaps does not see the need for any such external (*not* only in the sense of European or Western but as a *political* concept imposed on the society) notion to tackle the problem of religious divide. To Mahatma Gandhi deep religiosity itself is a guarantee of tolerance. This is not based on any notions of the essentially pluralist or tolerant character of Hindu society. It involves the notion – and practice – of religion and religiosity itself. Mahatma Gandhi believed that a deeply devout religious person – by the very virtue of that religiosity – whatever the formal religion of the person, - would not only tolerate but also actually revere all other religions. That this belief is not a political solution to the socio-political problem of communalism is obvious. Mahatma Gandhi had not, however, in this formulation considered the institutional and structural aspects of religion, but viewed it as faith and

devotion. Mahatma Gandhi often happily borrowed concepts from other religions when necessary. For example, the Christian concept that the poor, oppressed and the meek are closer to god and shall inherit the earth obviously inspired the formulation of the concept of the Dalits as god's people (*Hari-jan*). Mahatma Gandhi was also keen to point out that the Ram he worshipped was not the historical/mythological figure – the son of King Dashrath (*Dashrathnandan*), but a spiritual concept.

The 'failure' in India – as claimed by some scholars - was not of the 'western' idea of secularism, but of the peculiar interpretation of that idea. This interpretation had come up in face of entrenched religious interests and proclivities here. The state in India did not remain resolutely separate and distant from religion. It only tried to remain 'neutral' in the sense of not playing favourites and actually doting on all religions. This policy was always likely to be a disaster. It legitimised the organisation of religious groups and their hold on own communities. It also created a continuous atmosphere for 'cultural' demands that were often economic and political in substance. It also by default favoured the Hindu community – granting implicitly the claim of Hindu primacy based on sheer numbers.

The correct interpretation of secularism in India would have been a total separation of material and religious/'spiritual' life, with an insistence that religion in any form not interfere with material life of any section of the people. Such a concept would then have necessarily confined religion and particularly religious organisations to the purely personal and religious sphere.

(Second thoughts: Was any other formulation possible in a country with over 70% rural-agricultural population? Is secularism in the sense defined above – that rules out religion from all political and social spheres – possible without collective production and a strong civil society that ultimately is at least predominantly urban? For the rural masses, the *form* of virtually any and all ideological formulations particularly in the early parts of the last century was religious discourse. The idea of separation of material/temporal and religious/spiritual life would perhaps have been quite alien to them. They understood tolerance and respect but not necessarily integration or secularisation. Secularism except in a narrow sense

of the separation of state and particular denomination/church needs modern institutions, modern productive practices, and modern values. In a situation of inadequately capitalised or even commercialised agriculture with a traditional labour process and relationships at least in form traditional, extra-economic rather than contractual, the idea of separation and autonomies of material and spiritual life may not have been either understood or embraced. In the absence of these material objective factors, was it at all possible to go beyond *sarva dharma samabhava*? Dr Ambedkar acutely aware of this problem sought to include all the solutions in the Constitution and in a situation of a weak civil society sought to impart the powers to the state to set social directions. Today, perhaps, one needs to ask the question whether the merely political measures of constitutional provisions can at all address these questions. One should also hasten to add that Dr Ambedkar did not have a mere 'constitutional' solution in mind but envisaged civil society measures as well – including perhaps Buddhism. Religion it is obvious to all – and particularly religious identity – continues to play an important role in the social and personal lives of most people in the country. The reasons for this state of affairs are many. In one way, it is a cultural response to the homogenising culture of capitalism that in India arrives in peculiar forms. Another reason is the absence of a firm modern secular identity and of course organisations that leave a vacuum in social life.)

The state has actually adopted a 'hands off' policy towards religions and religious institutions, abdicating and abandoning a major responsibility of the modern secular state – that of regulating actions by religious institutions, organisations etc. carried out in the name of religion - in the interest of public good and in conformity with the secular laws of the republic. (This would for example have entailed banning the forcible collection of tithes by the Bohra High Priest among other things, and decisive say for the secular nominees of the state in the administration and management of non-religious establishments operated by religious bodies including educational and health-care institutions.)

This would not be an imposition of atheism on any individual. Even individuals within the government would hold and practice their religions and faiths as long as their constitutional actions were not

coloured by religion. Further, they would not make religious observances a part of their public or official behaviour. Such secularism would not interfere with religious belief leave alone faith of an individual. It would, however, separate the 'spiritual' and the 'material' spheres of life and further keep the social and political arenas immune from any interference in the name of faith or religion.

The secularists in India (and therefore at least to some extent the notion of secularism in practice) suffer from one more serious drawback. They are reactive and thus limit themselves to anti-communalism. They fail to project secularism as a desirable total alternative, a total vision, and a practice capable of serving the interests of the masses. They fail to present it as a positive vision. In practice, therefore they compete on the terrain of the communal forces, sometimes joining irrelevant debates. It is necessary to expose distortions of history and to correct them. It is not necessary to dissipate energy in examining actions of medieval rulers and appear as defenders of all their actions. Whether or not Babar – an invading warlord – demolished a temple five hundred years ago is an irrelevant debate. The point to assert is the irrelevance of that action for life today. Even more important will be the assertion that present day Muslims in India share no responsibility for that action even if it did take place.