

# FASCISM & COMMUNALISM CONSIDERATIONS

Sandeep Pendse



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CONSIDERATION

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# P r e f a c e

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Mumbai  
November 7, 2006



## *Permanent Peril: An Indian View*

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

The *one* event that symbolically *and* substantially affected the society and polity in India in recent times was the *Rath Yatra* (chariot tour) undertaken by the then president of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) L K Advani in 1990.<sup>1</sup> This tour was part of the campaign to build a Ram temple in place of the Babri Masjid (mosque) in Ayodhya. The temple was of course, above all else a symbol, of Hindu *unity*, Hindu *organisation*, and Hindu *supremacy*. This of course meant that the *Rath Yatra* was a campaign to put the Muslims in their place, to teach them a lesson, to make them pay for the alleged sins of a Muslim ruler who existed 500 years ago and had allegedly destroyed the original temple.

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

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

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

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

The hunt was for a symbol, for a single slogan that would fire pan-Hindu imagination that would divide the country squarely into the strident pro-Hindu and secular camps. The attempted Hindu consolidation had been challenged, perhaps unwittingly, in the only way it could be - through the card of caste divide. The announcement of reservations of seats in government jobs and educational institutions for the Other Backward Castes (OBC) had brought out into the open the caste antipathies and antagonisms within the Hindu community. Special efforts were necessary to overcome this challenge, to bridge the gaps and to forge pan-Hindu unity (however transient) once again. A common quest, a common symbol, a common simple demand, a common direct countrywide action, and a common enemy were urgently necessary. The temple at the birthplace of Ram, *Ram Janmabhoomi*, fit the bill. The *Rath Yatra* by the 'new iron man of India' was to consolidate this unity, this Hindu organisation, and to convert it into a political base as well as into a vote bank<sup>2</sup>.

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

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

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

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

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

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

That came towards the end of 1992.

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

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

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

<sup>5</sup>Incidentally with claims as Hindu as well as Tamil.

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

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

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

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

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

BJP in power at the centre tried to sound reasonable and moderate – more concerned about governance and development than *Hindutva* or *Hindu Rashtra*. It flew numerous kites and tested the mood of the people for its *Hindutva agenda*. It attempted a review of the Constitution, it initiated nuclear weaponisation of India, it fought a mini-war with Pakistan, and it even attempted (twice) a peace process with Pakistan. None of these measures yielded the desired results. There was actually only one option left – of another gory bout of communal violence. That was put into effect with the Gujarat Carnage that began on March 1, 2002.<sup>7</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Appendix 01:**

## Death of a Party Manager

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## The Carnage: Gujarat 2002

Gujarat Carnage 2002 was the shock, if anyone needed a shock to be reminded of the ever-present danger of communalism in its worst forms in India.

The carnage that began on 1st March 2002 – apparently as a reaction to the Godhra killings (discussed later in some detail) – exploded a few fond myths.

One of them was that if the *Hindutva* forces were in power there would be no communal violence. The *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) had itself often boasted that wherever it is in power no communal riots take place. No one had raised the corollary – that the price of communal peace was power to the BJP – an instance of obvious political blackmail. In March 2002 however, the BJP was in power in Gujarat and at the centre. That did not prevent the occurrence of a systematic, government supported, brutal, inhuman carnage in large parts of the state. It was now clear that power did not temper the murderous hordes fired by *Hindutva*. In fact, Gujarat Carnage showed what the *Hindutva* forces in power could achieve.

It also then became clear that the Gujarat Carnage was not another instance of outbreak of communal violence – partially organised but largely spontaneous that had just spiralled out of control. The planned and systematic – hence cold-blooded - nature of the massacre of the Muslims clearly demonstrated that this was a pogrom threatening to become a holocaust if not checked in time.

Gujarat Carnage 2002 also exposed the so-called secular allies of the BJP in power. They were unwilling and unable to influence the centre to act. They, through acts of omission if not commission, condoned the Carnage. They failed to pull out of the government and thereby actually dug their own political grave. Some of them demonstrated their moral and political surrender to forces of communalism by justifying at least obliquely the massacre in Gujarat.

This was not true only of the political allies. Later the media too – including some media professionals who had during the Carnage taken courageous anti-communal stands at quite some risk to themselves – began to refer to the Carnage as post-Godhra violence, or even as the Godhra incident. This became the unfortunate whitewash during the run up to the parliamentary elections of 2004 when they felt that the BJP would return to power and probably on its own. This was crass opportunism to say the least.

A far more insidious effort is also currently in progress to rewrite history and to almost deny the occurrence of any massacre of the Muslims in Gujarat. Thus a scribe writing in a mouthpiece of the *Sangh Parivar* cites some court judgements in Gujarat that have convicted Muslims for killing Hindus during the violence. He obviously does not tell us that the entire judicial process in Gujarat related to the Carnage has been criticised by the Supreme Court. Even recently the Supreme Court has admitted a petition seeking to transfer all such cases outside the state of Gujarat, overruling the objections of the state government. Such whitewashing is not particularly new or original. This is also being attempted regarding the Nazi rule in Germany and the holocaust. The painful fact is that many people get taken in by such blatant lies and cite them as proof that the case against the *Hindutva* lobby is motivated and exaggerated to say the least.<sup>12</sup>

Numerous questions also came up – as real political posers, not just theoretical queries. These need some discussion.

<sup>12</sup>See Arvind Lavkare, *The Myth and Truth of Godhra*, Organiser, May 7, 2006, available at <http://www.organiser.org/dynamic/modules.php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=129&page=17>

[C. eldoc1/0611/24 nov 06 email.1.html]

## 01. The Question of Mass Violence

The problem at one level is very simple.

1. Mobs, incited, misinformed, enraged, or, far more so - frightened – for their own safety – justifiably or otherwise, and rarely in real or imaginary 'kill or die' or 'life and death' situations are capable of great violence. The violence can be mindless, grotesque, excessive, frightening, and sickening. It may make one wonder about the capacity of human beings for perverse destruction and mutilation.

2. Generally, once the fury is over – once life has returned to 'normalcy' – 'sanity' also returns. There is generally remorse and guilt over the occurrence – even disbelief. The involved collective generally keeps this within limits – since beyond a certain quantum it can mean nothing but self-penalisation – in its extreme forms *suicide*. Nevertheless, within survival limits, there is remorse and guilt – a sense of having done wrong, of having harmed another, of having done that without adequate reason. Infliction of bodily harm on another human being – particularly killing another – is not easy. It invariably produces strong feelings of having done something tremendously wrong. The idea of sin strongly relates to killing (apart from 'illegitimate' – and sometimes even 'legitimate' sex). Killing, unlike the latter, provokes spontaneous reaction of a human being and is not a conditioned response. Killing another human being is not natural or innate.

3. Once the 'madness' is over people are ready to accept punishment, to make reparations. They often wish genuinely to heal. (This feeling of course may disappear completely if there is a punitive counter-offensive with matching counter-violence. Then a vicious circle may come into being.) Remorse and readiness to atone – at least to an extent – generally mark the period of return to normalcy.

4. That is perhaps why genocides – in not just the definitional but real sense – as efforts to eliminate 'another' people – are not generally results of mass frenzy and mob violence. From the massacres of the indigenous peoples in settlers' colonies to the holocaust by the Nazis, it was the state – in one form or the other – and a conquering triumphal state at that – which planned and executed the genocide or violence coming close to it.

5. In contrast to this, there have been examples – increasingly common in our situation in the recent past – where the perpetrators of

massacres show no remorse, no guilt. Gujarat is the most recent example. In Gujarat there seems to be a defiant pride in the carnage committed. The justifications run rampant. It is not only a few die-hard fanatic elements, by all reports, who remain firm in justification of the atrocities and massacre but a large number of ordinary citizens of that state that continue to sanction the horror and probably also call for its repeat! Significantly, this occurs even when there is no counter-violence, no reprisal, in Gujarat or anywhere else by the victims of the carnage. According to reports, it seems the violence at the time of the Partition – that claimed over a million lives - also did not lead to much remorse. (In fact, during the days of heightened communal hatred and violence of the recent past, some writings and films – e.g. *Gadar* – valorised the violent attitudes and actions at the time of the Partition. There was, however, one major difference, at the time of Partition. Both communities, on both sides of the border committed violence. Acts of both communities were equally despicable. Not even such slender shred of justification is available in the case of Gujarat carnage 2002.) The Mumbai riots of 1992-93 created a situation of 'no-remorse/ no-guilt' only for a short period. This too was restricted to a small section of the population of the city. The *Shiv Sena* (SS) Supremo and the clownish local chieftains of *Vishva Hindu Parishad* (VHP) – *Bajrang Dal* may continue to insist that the violence was a proud achievement but this does not carry much weight even among their own followers. In a strange way, this is true of the Gujarat violence too. Outside Gujarat – and outside parts of the cow belt - even the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) leaders/activists have had to adopt a tone of apology, (genuine or faked) remorse, and sometimes - even condemnation, regarding the carnage. The *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) itself has done curious but expected flip-flops. This is not at all to state that the remorse of any elements of the *Sangh Parivar* is in anyway genuine but only to highlight the fact that the popular feeling – however unexpressed – has forced these elements to adopt or fake such a public stance.

## 02. Triggers and Explosions

*The question to address then is quite simple. What conditions produce a generalised mental situation that admits no guilt and harbours no remorse at grotesque gratuitous violence perpetrated on hapless victims? What conditions make this situation a perpetual one?*

One should perhaps immediately note some elements bearing in mind that the violence under discussion (in Gujarat in particular) is not individual violence but *mass* violence – or at least violence with explicit, vocal, and active mass support. The situation is also one where there is no desire to return to ‘peace’ or ‘normalcy’, whether actual acts of overt generalised violence actually occur or not. It is generally also a situation when elements (whatever the community they may belong to) opposed to the violence in any manner are ostracised, threatened, and overawed into silence or inaction. The situation was similar in Germany under Nazi rule. The German people in large numbers backed the Nazis and their acts, even if many were not aware of the holocaust. The people were definitely aware of the pogroms, of the arrests, and of the deportations – even if not of the genocide. The war and reverses in the war really shook them up.

Mass violence tantamount to genocide is never ‘spontaneous’. Episodic anger does not lead to such explosion of *sustained* violence. Excuses or triggering points – detonators in a manner – for the explosion and generalisation of the violence may be necessary, e.g. the deaths in compartment S-6 of the Sabarmati Express on 27th February 2002 at Godhra.

These, however, are purely *triggers*. In ‘normal’ circumstances, the killings in Godhra would have certainly provoked some reaction. That should be obvious to anyone – particularly any consistent observer of social occurrences. There would probably have been a general strike (*bandh*) in some towns, some demonstrations; some stray violence – mainly attacks on Muslim establishments, some looting, and some destruction – may be even some isolated killings. The so-called Newtonian reaction in Gujarat went far beyond any such spontaneous expression of disgust, shock, and anger.

The shocking facts about Gujarat are many. Relevant here is the fact that the violent incidents – except some stray stabbings at Vadodara station – were not spontaneous reactions. They took some time to surface, almost a day. *Obviously someone organised these ‘natural Newtonian’ reactions.* The most brutal violence had a clear-cut pattern – *determined* elements collected the mobs and directed them towards *specific* targets; *definite* individuals kept the mobs in continuous frenzy. These too provided only the backdrop to the brutality. The actual horrid acts were committed in all probability by *pre-chosen, pre-determined, pre-prepared, pre-assigned* elements.

Two more factors are unusual. One is the advance planning. The perpetrators it seems were waiting, as it were, for a Godhra to occur. It also seems that *they were certain that it would occur, some day, any day.* They may not have known in advance the exact date, time, and mode of the occurrence; that is all. Second is the complicity of the masses, in various forms of violence. The ordinary bystander-observer may not have wielded the actual weapon that cut open bellies of pregnant women, or beheaded outnumbered and ‘disarmed’ victims, or set fire to the pyres that burnt to death live men, women, and children but, s/he definitely observed with approval even if s/he may not have actually applauded the act. In many cases s/he did just that, and more – goaded the murderers on, formed a protective ring around them, lionised them. S/he also participated in the violence against property far more actively. *The image of a middle class woman coming in a car to loot a shop has become the stigma of shame for most people in the country (except in Gujarat, of course).*

To return to the point – the trigger came (perhaps) without foreknowledge, and forewarning, to be charitable – unexpectedly. Nothing else was left to chance. (One may therefore well wonder whether the trigger was at all left to chance, given the stakes that were involved. It is possible that the trigger too was a part of a careful dastardly plot.) The elements to incite, the lists of targets, the logistics of the weaponry and other equipment of violence, the individuals to perform the actual acts of most brutal violence were already in place and ready. These elements – from the planners to the perpetrators – had committed the acts of violence in their minds and in their imagination *already* and perhaps many times over. The violence was not new to them in imagination and thought; it was familiar and thus usual.

The state machinery too was prepared for the violence and waiting for it. The occurrences did not catch it by surprise. It knew that the massive violent carnage was to occur – one day or the other – even if *individuals* did not know the date. It knew exactly how it was to behave when the violence did occur. It knew it had to persecute the victims and protect the criminal perpetrators. *It had committed treason already.* It had violated the Indian Constitution in its mind and heart before the violence actually broke out. The actual violation of the Constitution and of the designated constitutional duties was a mere formality in March 2002 – continuing into April and May of the year. (One must mention

here various – though in number few and hence rare– exceptions of honourable officers who held that their pledge to the Constitution outweighed their loyalty to the immediate political bosses.)<sup>13</sup>

These were not the only elements of non-spontaneity. Trained killers cannot incite a mass only with their acts. In fact, they run a risk. The mass of bystanders may protest, may actually, and actively oppose them. It may apprehend them – and mete out an instant justice even if the state machinery wants to be ‘neutral’ or inactive. The police force itself – at least individual officers – may ‘lose nerve’ if the mass does not applaud their partiality – and may be forced to act to protect the letter if not the spirit of the law. The violence in Gujarat required a mass complicity and a mass approval even if not a mass participation. This too is not a spontaneous occurrence. If at all spontaneous, and incited only at the moment, the fury does not last too long. It exhausts itself soon – physically and emotionally. In Mumbai in 1993 and in Gujarat in 2002 – particularly in Ahmedabad, it did not. It did not even abate in Gujarat. It continued and went on and on, until the real planners feared national and international reprisals for their actions. (Characteristic of this attitude is the fact that the rioters of Mumbai in 1993 lost their nerve the day the Rapid Action Force and the army were deployed in the city. Aggressive till then they became meek thereafter.)

There was another extremely important concomitant factor. The conflagration refused – steadfastly refused despite desperate efforts – to spread beyond Gujarat. The explosion remained confined to the *laboratory of Hindutva* (read of fascism). It did not produce a chain reaction. Modi and Togadia were self-limiting traditional explosives – Pokharan II had not imbued them with any superlative qualities of perpetual continuous explosions, of setting off a chain reaction. It has now become fashionable amongst a set of academics to claim that the Indian people did not vote for secular polity in 2004. May be they did

<sup>13</sup>Strange off-the-record reports attributed to ‘trustworthy’, ‘honest’ and ‘non-partisan’ officers – often of the intelligence agencies – have done rounds in some circles. These all paint the Godhra killings as a careful non-terrorist pre-meditated and pre-planned conspiracy. They also exonerate the administration in Gujarat from all guilt except some acts of omission. They almost pass off the Gujarat Carnage as a spontaneous reaction of the masses to a heinous conspiratorial act. One must contrast these reports with two public facts. One of them is the testimony of officers from the Gujarat cadre that clearly indicts elements within the government with complicity in the planned violence that became the carnage. Second is the now infamous ‘religious’ census that cried wolf about the increasing population of Muslims in particularly sensitive border districts of the country. This has now been proved to be a gross misinterpretation if not creation of fraudulent data. The alarming fact is that a number of people who receive this confidential information believe it.

not. They certainly voted *against communal violence and vitriol* in 2002 itself by refusing to join in the carnage unleashed in Gujarat. In 2004, they merely confirmed that opinion through the ballot box. (One must also note the reaction of Gujarat to this response – to consider the state as the only true Hindu state and to pit it almost against the Indian republican union.)

### 03. The Specificity of Gujarat

What concerns this *Consideration* is the fact that a vast mass was, and could be, ready to support the violence in Gujarat – in all its nauseating and pervert forms.

It is obvious – and almost does not need to be stated – that this mass mentality did not come into being after the news of the Godhra deaths reached the rest of the state, particularly Ahmedabad. It is obvious that it had been *prepared* earlier. The word *prepared* is precisely what needs discussion in this context. It is obvious once again that (with the help of the power at the command of the government in the state, which the BJP ruled and still does, by itself for quite a few years) the propaganda and organisation machinery of the *Sangh Parivar* had communalised the atmosphere completely. The *Sangh Parivar* had spread venom about the Muslim community and created a hate-cum-fear complex amongst the Hindus. The almost perennial riots in parts of Ahmedabad and some other cities in the state had also kept the communal cauldron on the boil. (Obviously, it goes beyond that – Gujarat seems to clamour for a ‘final solution’! It also wants to be a law unto itself.)

Many scholars and analysts have also cited many specific objective factors to explain the communal violence in Gujarat – encompassing political economy, politics, social structure, culture, and current happenings.

Frankly, these do not suggest much that is uncommonly specific and peculiar to Gujarat.

The major *unique feature* was the BJP government and its totally ruthless and unscrupulous attitude. The rulers in Gujarat probably felt that the country was ripe for a fascist takeover and that the central rulers of the BJP were old men who dithered too much. Most fascist takeovers

(Germany and Italy – to cite the most infamous examples) follow or accompany street actions that threaten and almost dismember democratic institutions and democratic structures of the state. The Gujarat riots, it is conceivable, were to be precursors for such a take over. Had they spread in the same quantum to even a few more states there probably would have been a ‘march on Delhi’ and a dismantling of the democratic republic. The people of India did not allow that to occur. The carnage in Gujarat did not become a national conflagration.<sup>14</sup>

The more important question however is, why and how could the *Sangh Parivar* succeed in Gujarat? The *objective* factors do not adequately explain this. The factors were common to some other states – particularly the neighbouring ones. The communalisation in these states did not acquire the same magnitude and *dimensions*.<sup>15</sup> (Quite simply, sections of the masses may have become communalised and intolerant but did not clamour for or even accept anything approaching a final solution. The specificity of Gujarat is that it was prepared to wipe out, erase, decimate, completely finish a certain community – the Muslims to begin with, the Christians probably already in the line of fire, and then certainly the Dalits.) Moreover, the same *objective* factors could have led to a very different kind of an upsurge – for example a democratic revolt of the dispossessed. Some specificities of social and political history will be essential even to attempt to explain this particular direction taken by Gujarat. These include the absence of a genuine independent (not only in party and political but also in class terms) militant working class movement in the state, the entrenched idea of class collaboration, the

<sup>14</sup>An excellent piece on Gujarat – written almost five years after the carnage is ‘Gujarat as another Country: The Making and Reality of a Fascist Realm’ that appeared in **South Asia Citizens Wire** - pack #2 | October 03-4, 2006 | Dispatch No. 2298 [4] **Himal South Asian** October 2006 (<http://www.sacw.net/>). [C.eldoc1/L70\_/30oct06him1.html] It reports ground realities that echo many of the points made here. The only point probably misunderstood is regarding the use of the saffron flag in the Ganesh immersion processions – this is not a post-Modi development anywhere. The tradition of banners and pennants in religious processions is quite old and the colour in numerous Hindu processions is saffron. This is not to say that the Ganesh festival, among others, is not increasingly communalised – but this is not the correct indicator to suggest the occurrence.

<sup>15</sup>Similar partisan actions of the state governments can now be observed with increasing frequency in other BJP ruled states – Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Karnataka. These include patently partisan attitudes in cases of communal violence, open glorification of the RSS along with a call to government employees to support and join the organization, official falsification of history, rampant communalisation of education including the textbooks, etc. The communal features are found in the administrative actions of even some states not ruled by the BJP, e.g., Maharashtra.

role of the unstable insecure migrant labour, the communal violence nurtured and kept perpetually alive since 1969, the tradition of endemic communal violence in certain areas of Ahmedabad, the assurance that Hindu perpetrators of violence will be protected, the role of the Diaspora – specifically the Gujarati NRI, the political bankruptcy and opportunism of the *Congress*, the peculiar caste politics and its links with communal politics, the slow down of the growth in the state, the mounting economic stagnation, the dismal record on the human development front, the absence of a militant independent Dalit movement, and many other similar factors. Such a nuanced analysis of Gujarat is extremely necessary. That is not, however, the central point of *this particular* writing.

*What concerns this writing is the mindset that prevailed, and by all accounts continues to prevail, in Gujarat.*

The uniqueness of Gujarat lies in three facts.

- The above-mentioned mentality of ‘no remorse/ no guilt’ is widespread – almost generalised.
- It exists despite long drawn out shocking violence that threw the Gujarat economy into disarray, disrupted the social fabric, sought to assault the culture and civilisation, and dehumanised large sections of the population.
- It also has persisted for a long time – it is not a reaction but a settled mentality – a near permanent ideological-psychological make up.

Some features of this mentality are very clear. There is a total hatred for the ‘other’ – principally the Muslims but also the Christians. For the moment, at least overtly, there may be a pan-Hindu sentiment but at the core, the ‘other’ also includes the Dalits. The bases of the hatred are distrust, fear, a sense (imaginary and unfounded) of past historical robberies of the just share of resources, and contempt paradoxically and curiously mixed with envy.

The hatred creates impenetrable barriers between the sections of the society; the barriers are pronounced and vitriolic enough to make any coexistence impossible. (The anger towards mixed marriages – both religious and caste – is example of the barrier.) In fact, the ‘mainstream’ Gujarat society – upper & upper-middle caste, upper-middle & middle class (though also with participation of all other sections with different

intensities depending upon specific factors) Hindu denies the right of any other sections to exist in Gujarat at least as equal human beings and citizens. This 'mainstream' searches for a *final solution* to the 'minority problem' in Gujarat. The parameters of this solution vary from total economic isolation and ruination, ethnic cleansing or ghettoisation, to physical expulsion or elimination.

Is this behaviour or mentality unique to Gujarat? It is not so by any means! Such sentiments exist in many places in the country. A large number of persons, and not all of them members of this or that organisation of the *Sangh Parivar*, harbour such mentality. The uniqueness of Gujarat is that it is *the* prevalent – ruling mentality. It sets the norm in Gujarat and renders all other attitudes illegitimate and abnormal. It is the *core* in Gujarat not the *fringe*; it is the *norm* in Gujarat not the *deviation*. The communal divide in Gujarat has reached heights and depths that in many other places in the country would be insane and unthinkable. That is precisely what takes the happenings and mentality in Gujarat out of the category of merely communal and marks them as fascist.

#### 04. The 'Laboratory' and the 'Experiment'

The 'experiment' is the one in Gujarat – inaugurated by the *Sangh Parivar* that treats Gujarat as the laboratory of *Hindutva* – and by extension of contemporary fascism in India.<sup>16</sup>

There is no need to emphasise the importance of the Gujarat Carnage 2002 for Indian society and polity – if not civilisation. Of course, the Gujarat Carnage was the pinnacle of a series of developments inaugurated much earlier.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup>See for example, the following quote: "There are many villages in Gujarat today that have proudly been cleansed fully of their erstwhile Muslim residents. — Gaily painted boards greet you at the entrance of these villages, in ominous greeting: 'Welcome to this Hindu village in the Hindu Rashtra of Gujarat'." This is Harsh Mander writing 'Hope amidst Fear and Hate' in *Times of India* of 13th September 2005. Many other analysts and commentators have reported similar hoardings in different villages of Gujarat.

There is hardly any need to cite the literature on the situation in Gujarat – whether during the carnage or later. It is voluminous – in print, on CDs and on the net. The issues of **Communalism Combat** (Mumbai) and the website associated with it of Sabrang Communications are perhaps the most comprehensive sources on the carnage and its aftermath – though one must rush to add that these are not the only sources. Extremely important is the **South Asian Citizens Wire** cited earlier.

Another comprehensive source is the CD – **Gujarat Carnage 2002** – Second Edition 2003 – prepared and distributed by Indian National Social Action Forum (INSAF), New Delhi.

The Gujarat Carnage *per se* does not concern this Reflection in the main. The very occurrence of the carnage in Gujarat, and its specificities (brutality, scale, spread, duration, absence of remorse, complicity of government and administration, involvement of the ruling party and/or associated organisations, the continued communal divide in the Gujarat society – to name a few) threatened the civilisation, culture, society, and polity in India.<sup>18</sup>

It also marked a watershed in Indian politics. It became necessary again to ask whether the *Sangh Parivar* presented a fascist threat to the country and whether the Gujarat carnage represented a fascist onslaught. It also became necessary to ask whether the Gujarat carnage was only a reactionary communal outburst or much more – a portent of a fascist assault on the democratic republic. Further questions were bound to follow. Can an occurrence in 2002 be termed fascist? Is the phenomenon not fundamentally different from the classical fascism witnessed in the 1920s to 1940s particularly in Italy and Germany? Moreover, can a right wing violent formation in a developing country be ever termed fascism? Would this mean a dilution of the word fascism itself? The debate was not over words, of course. It was over the analysis and understanding of the entity. It was also not a mere theoretical debate but one that would dictate actual political stances by political and mass organisations, particularly of the democratic and progressive variety – including positions over the alliances they may and the ones they must not build.<sup>19</sup> Curiously, the debate becomes even more relevant after the electoral defeat of BJP in the parliamentary elections of 2004. The question of alliances becomes crucial and somewhat involved when the BJP is in opposition and not in a position to set the agenda of national politics. This writing concerns itself with these very issues – though perhaps in a round about manner.

<sup>17</sup>Revisiting Somnath, the site of the launch of his *Rath Yatra* (chariot tour) of 1990, the now-moderate-now-hard-line ex-President of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) Mr Lal Krishna Advani recently (September 2005) claimed – quite correctly – that the *Rath Yatra* changed the face of politics in India.

<sup>18</sup>**Lessons from Gujarat** (Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Mumbai, 2003) [B.L70.P60] is a useful collection of essays that analyse the specificities of Gujarat as well as the nature of the fascist threat in India.

<sup>19</sup>See for example, Roy Ajit, *Footfalls of Fascism*, in **Fascism & Democracy: The Indian Experience**; Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Mumbai, September 2004 [B.L41.M1]. Roy joins issues in this article with the Communist Parties in India (mainly the CPI-M) regarding their characterisation of the BJP as communal – and not necessarily as fascist. Also see Banaji Jairas, *Political Culture of Fascism* in the same volume.

## 05. Godhra 'incident' and Gujarat Carnage

No words are sufficient to express the disgust and nausea that the Gujarat Carnage brings forth. It may not have produced any such reactions within Gujarat in a major way – but affected every sensitive individual outside the state. Even leaders of the BJP agreed (much later, of course) – increasingly so in public statements – that the Gujarat Carnage turned the tide against the party at least in electoral terms. The defeat of the BJP in the parliamentary elections of 2004 really began in 2002. (This opinion is one of the issues of the differences that have cropped up in the *Sangh Parivar* in the recent past.)

Spokespersons of the *Sangh Parivar*, BJP leaders – and generally commentators sympathetic to the *Sangh Parivar* and BJP, of course, hold the Godhra incident solely responsible for the Gujarat Carnage.

In this incident reportedly 57 passengers – many of them allegedly volunteers of *Hindutva* organisations, *Ram Sevaks* (literally, servants of Lord Ram – the legendary/mythological god king of the Hindus), as they have been described, returning from a political pilgrimage to Ayodhya – the site of the demolished Babri Mosque and the proposed site of the 'great' *Ram Janmabhoomi* (birthplace) Temple - were burned to death in the infamous Coach S-6 of the Sabarmati Express on 27th February 2002 just outside Godhra station in Gujarat. They obviously have to claim that the Godhra incident was the sole cause of the Gujarat Carnage, at least of its onset.

### Immediately we need to make some points.

1. The Godhra killings, despicable and condemnable as they are, remain shrouded in mystery. The explanations put forth by the Government of Gujarat were instantaneous, glib, and not very believable. The government of Gujarat at once advanced theories of pre-planned conspiracy. The conspirators were either hard-core terrorists, or mischievous Muslims from Godhra town. The law and order machinery of Gujarat arrested over a hundred persons under the infamous POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act) and incarcerated them for the killings. The subsequent investigations have not been able to sustain the conspiracy theory. In fact, right now no one knows exactly what happened in and to coach S-6. Investigative agencies and inquiry commissions now seriously dispute the instant theories. Facts – even the partial ones that we now know - seriously

question the entire 'trigger' that apparently provoked the violence. It strongly evokes memories of the Reichstag Fire<sup>20</sup> – of manufactured excuses. The date too – February 27 – matches. (This is not the only suspicious occurrence of that period. The 'attack' on the Parliament House by terrorists just when the draconian POTA met legislative and popular resistance also seems such an action.)<sup>21</sup>

2. The Gujarat Carnage was not accidental or spontaneous. The character of the violence was planned, organised, and instigated. The CM made an infamous statement as the violence took an ugly shape, that it was a Newtonian reaction to the killings in Godhra. ('Every action has an equal and opposite reaction'.) This statement actually provided an instant justification to the perpetrators of the ghastly violence. It also encouraged them to continue the violence.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup>On 27th February 1933, the *Reichstag* (German Parliament House) caught fire. When the police arrived, they found Marinus van der Lubbe on the premises. After being tortured by the Gestapo (the German secret police during the Nazi period – infamous for its brutalities) he confessed to starting the Reichstag Fire. However, he denied that he was part of a Communist conspiracy. Hermann Goering (a prominent Nazi, head of the Storm Troopers or Brown Shirts – the military wing of the Nazi Party – SA; deputy leader and official heir to Hitler since 1938; head of German armed forces during the war; a convicted war criminal in Nuremberg trials who escaped execution by committing suicide) refused to believe him and ordered the arrest of several leaders of the German Communist Party (KPD).

When Hitler heard the news about the fire, he gave orders that all leaders of the German Communist Party should "be hanged that very night." Paul von Hindenburg (then the head of the German state) vetoed this decision but did agree that Hitler should take "dictatorial powers." KPD candidates in the election were arrested and Hermann Goering announced that the Nazi Party planned "to exterminate" German communists.

As well as Marinus van der Lubbe the German police charged four communists with setting fire to the Reichstag. This included Ernst Torgler, the chairperson of the KPD and Georgi Dimitrov of the Comintern.

Marinus van der Lubbe was found guilty of the Reichstag Fire and was executed on 10th January, 1934. Adolf Hitler was furious that the rest of the defendants were acquitted and he decided that in future all treason cases be taken away from the Supreme Court and given to a new People's Court where prisoners be judged by members of the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP). The above information is from <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk>.

<sup>21</sup>Afzal Guru, an accused in the attack on the parliament, was subsequently found guilty of masterminding the attack. He has been sentenced to death by hanging. His family has appealed to the President for clemency. Several organisations as well as individuals have also joined the appeal and asked that the sentence of Afzal Guru be commuted. They have argued against capital punishment, and raised questions about the way the trial was conducted and proper avenues of defence denied to Afzal. The *Hindutva* brigade has launched a counter campaign to malign those who ask for clemency. It has gone further and insisted that Afzal be hanged immediately. In the wake of the controversy, different versions of the attack on the parliament have been proposed. One of them actually alleges that an elite unit of the security forces was responsible for the attack. The varied views can be found in PUCL Digest as well as India thinkers net (<http://www.pucl.org> and [indiathinkersnet@yahoo.com](http://indiathinkersnet@yahoo.com)).

<sup>22</sup>The typical statement, after expressions of great anguish and regret over the violence in Gujarat, always was "if there was no Godhra, there would have been no Gujarat violence". Leaders of the stature of Advani and Vajpayee have made this statement at different times in different but similar words.

- The national leadership of the BJP too indulged in doublespeak and more or less said that the Godhra incident caused the violence. It thus provided a constant though indirect justification for the violence. Repeatedly these leaders said that had there been no Godhra incident there would have been no Gujarat Carnage. Legally and strictly, none of these statements may be incitement or instigation but such statements did create the impression that the leadership did not condemn the occurrences on the ground. The leaders of the VHP of course vocally justified the violence.
3. Members of the ruling party in Gujarat and its associated organisations were directly involved in the violence. Victims, obviously the very few who dared to lodge official complaints, have named even elected representatives belonging to the BJP in First Information Reports that the police have at all registered. There was a brazen participation by identifiable and identified political elements in criminal acts of inhuman violence that they obviously considered legitimate and justified.
  4. The perpetrators of violence drew legitimacy and justification both from a *mentality* and an *ideology*. A complex (yet simplistic) hatred and fear of the Muslims – as the root cause of all evil and all problems that plague particularly Gujarat - was the pillar of the mentality that produced the carnage. The communal elements in the main and the communally mobilised society in general had nurtured the hatred to proportions where a total and permanent exclusion and expulsion of the Muslims from Gujarat life became the only guarantee to safe existence in their imagination. This also became their operative agenda during the Carnage. A mass paranoia was the basis of the violence. The ideology of course was of *Hindutva* – the political programme of construction of an exclusive Hindu nation (and nation-state) that would accommodate and ‘appease’ no minorities, would rejuvenate the entire Hindu community, and would restore the lost glory of the Gujarati Hindu. This mentality and ideology had become pan-Hindu to a large extent, bridging divides of sects, castes, ethnic groupings, and gender.
  5. The state government and administration not only collaborated in the violence but also in the aftermath of violence. It did not come to the aid of the Muslim victims of the carnage. It put obstacles in the path of those who tried to help the victims. The CM himself made disparaging and obscene remarks about displaced Muslim citizens who had to take shelter in the relief camps.<sup>23</sup> He many times

- threatened to close down the relief camps. The police did not properly investigate cases concerning the violence, if at all they registered them in the first place. The *Sangh Parivar* managed to subvert the judicial machinery too to such an extent that the local courts acquitted Hindu accused as a rule. The Supreme Court had to intervene in the matter and proclaim that there was gross distortion of justice in Gujarat. It transferred cases out of the state – to ensure that some modicum of justice would be available to the victims. The CM characteristically criticised the Honourable Chief Justice and made cheap jokes about his surname!
6. The Muslim victims of violence did not even get medical aid in some instances. The discrimination in all institutions and public facilities continues well after the cessation of the violent incidents. It seems an undeclared but definite policy.
  7. The carnage was no madness – no temporary mass insanity. There is no change in the attitude even after three years. The majority community – the Hindus - do not allow the victims to return to their houses, to their localities. This is as prevalent in the villages as in the urban areas. The permission to return where granted is conditional. Some conditions are ‘defensive’ – withdrawal of cases, refusal to name perpetrators of violence or rapists, etc. Some are aggressive. These lay down a code of behaviour and conduct on the Muslims returning to the locality or village. This code in effect annihilates their cultural identity and cripples their economic activities. Efforts it seems are on to prevent any restoration of communal amity and harmony. It seems that the Hindu community sees the carnage as a war it has won and imposes conditions and reparations for ‘armistice’!<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup>The uncouthness of Narendra Modi is almost without parallel. Only Bal Thakeray and Pravin Togadia can match him in pervert public utterances. Modi called the relief camps breeding camps for the Muslims.

<sup>24</sup>Seema Mustafa in her column in *Asian Age* (28th October 2006) sums up the situation. “The BJP-led government consolidated what had begun earlier, but had not been institutionalised and hence was a slow process: the complete marginalisation of Indian Muslims. One Gujarat was more effective than scores of little communal riots, as the violence, the terror, the hatred, the justification, the glorification of the worst kind of crimes against humanity had the impact of a nuclear bomb. The bomb was dropped in Gujarat, but the radioactive rays penetrated the soul of India. Today, Gujarat has become a state within a state, with New Delhi continuing to watch helplessly as the Muslims are further victimised and ghettoised. They have not been able to return to their homes, they have stopped sending their children to school out of fear, they are not given loans and credit facilities by the banks, they have not been allowed to return to their jobs, and secular India with a government in place is watching silently.” Not too long ago, for at least some time, Seema Mustafa was quite soft towards the NDA!

8. A number of people, at least in some pockets (in keeping with the above feature) in Gujarat, seem to consider Gujarat as the only Hindu state in the country. They show impatience with the secular, democratic constitution of the nation.
9. A last point about the Godhra killings themselves. Obviously they were brutal and despicable. They were in some respects an outbreak of communal sentiment. It is noteworthy however that only one compartment – the one that reportedly carried the *Ram Sevaks* who were held responsible for whatever happened at Godhra station – was attacked, if there was such an attack. The passengers of the train in general were not attacked. There was thus specificity to that violence. It did not target travellers on the train only on the basis of their religion. If it was a communal attack it was neither as mindless nor as indiscriminate as the Carnage that followed the incident.

## 06. The 'Experiment' in Gujarat

The Gujarat Carnage was different in every aspect from most other incidents of communal violence in the country. The situation in Gujarat too was different. Gujarat was the declared laboratory of *Hindutva* for the *Sangh Parivar*.

The 'experiment' probably had many dimensions, though the 'scientists' (of the Mengele<sup>25</sup> variety) never exactly explained what were the contours of the oft-hailed Gujarat experiment or pattern. Some results are visible to any observer who can then deduce the elements of the experiment.

- a) The creation of a pan-Hindu identity and pan-Hindu organisation<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> **Josef Mengele** (March 16, 1911–February 7, 1979) was a Nazi German physician who performed experiments that were condemned as murderously sadistic on prisoners in Auschwitz during World War II. He personally selected over 400,000 prisoners to die in gas chambers in Auschwitz. After the war, he escaped Germany and lived covertly abroad until his eventual accidental death in Brazil, which was later confirmed using DNA testing on his remains. (From Wikipedia)

<sup>26</sup> This is a dream of all votaries of *Hindutva* from the earliest times. Savarkar too constantly advocates and strives for a pan Hindu unity and pan Hindu organisation. In fact, his opposition to caste discrimination is based on the premise that caste creates internal fissiparous divisions within the Hindu fold and thus prevents the creation of a pan Hindu identity, vision, and organisation.

- b) The mobilisation of the Other Backward Castes (OBC) and the recruitment of Adivasis and Dalits to the cause of *Hindutva*
- c) A total communalisation of the society – with strong anti-Christian and anti-Muslim sentiments among the majority community
- d) A breakdown of social interaction amongst different communities – interruption of even day-to-day exchanges related to work etc.
- e) Total economic boycott of the minority communities – affecting trade, employment, investment
- f) Geographical demarcation of the communities – virtually creation of ghettos in the cities and ethnic cleansing in the rural and semi-urban areas
- g) Active and planned destruction of all notions, symbols, and practices of plural, composite culture
- h) A clear notice to the minorities that they were secondary residents/ inhabitants – not full citizens – surviving in the state only at the mercy and tolerance of the majority community in general and the *Sangh Parivar* in particular
- i) Creation of contempt for any notions of tolerance and coexistence as also rationality and liberal attitudes towards life
- j) Pressure on the civil society organisations – particularly those defending human & democratic rights, minority rights, and secular principles
- k) Demonisation of the civil society organisations and communal interpretation of their stances and activities (“anti-Hindu financed by foreign Muslim and Christian agencies”)
- l) Physical intimidation of civil society organisations and of other organisations not in agreement with the *Sangh Parivar*, as also of concerned individuals
- m) Invocation of a Hindu Gujarat and a national pride of Gujarat – creation of dreams of a resurgent glorious Gujarat opposed, at least implicitly, to secular India
- n) Glorification of violence – of direct violent action against the 'enemy other'
- o) The notion of a strict control of public culture including valorisation

of authoritarianism and obedience; this includes cultural policing – and attempts to impose (a single variety of) Hindu cultural norms particularly on youth and women

- p) Utilisation of the state machinery for unconstitutional activities – for example, survey of minorities, recording of inter-religious marriages
- q) Subversion of administrative machinery and processes to create a RSS dominated state apparatus essentially to mean an end to 'rule of law' in favour of a perpetual and flexible notion of natural justice – always in favour of the ruling community
- r) Subversion or devaluation of the judicial machinery and processes
- s) Suppression of all dissent – through any means possible – often violence that includes murder of dissidents even within the ruling party
- t) A notion of the all-powerful state – in control of all things – and in perpetual war with the enemies of the society – located outside the society – hence demanding a total obedience and subjugation of the individual in matters particularly political
- u) The responses of the CM to the onset of the carnage of 2002 and its most revolting incidents – the famous statement on 'natural' Newtonian reaction to every action – clearly exhibit the other fascist obsession – with nature in place of reason
- v) Intolerance of the notions of secularism (and perhaps also representative democracy based on universal suffrage) enshrined in the Constitution of India
- w) Projection – perhaps unwitting – of Gujarat as Nation with references to the Hindu Rashtra of Gujarat, pride, and glory of Gujarat etc
- x) The projection of the CM as the one leader – today of Gujarat, tomorrow of the entire nation and projection of all capacities and powers on to him

The BJP is in power in Gujarat for over a decade. It won a massive victory in the assembly elections held after the Carnage of 2002. It did suffer some setbacks in the parliamentary elections of 2004 but did not witness any serious erosion of its support base. The BJP in Gujarat perhaps ties up more organically and smoothly with the RSS than

elsewhere in the country. The modicum of autonomy of the legislative wing is also not present in Gujarat. Gujarat – or the middle class of Gujarat in particular – lionises the CM of Gujarat – held responsible for the Carnage by most observers – often in opposition to the 'compromising' national leadership.<sup>27</sup>

This as has been argued is the dream of the Sangh Parivar for the entire country. It was somehow realised to an extent in Gujarat.

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<sup>27</sup>The actions of the Gujarat CM, Narendra Modi, often seem unbelievable. The National Minorities Commission recently appointed a three person committee to directly examine and investigate the conditions of the victims of Carnage 2002 because the Government of Gujarat did not reply to repeated queries. The eminent members of the committee were Michael Pinto, Dileep Padgaonkar, and Zoya Hassan. They found that there still exist 47 camps for the persons dislocated by the Carnage housing 5703 persons. The conditions in the camps are abominable. Even basic amenities have not been provided to the inmates. – In Ahmedabad one camp is set up next to the garbage dump of the city. The Government of Gujarat has provided only Rs 41 crores in compensation in the past four years against a loss of property of Rs 687 crores – a whopping seven per cent. In addition the inmates are harassed with numerous false cases and sometimes tortured by the police. The Government does not provide even electricity to the people living in the camps. It does not allow others – including NGOs to provide better shelters and amenities. These people are treated as detainees in a concentration camp. The Government of Gujarat even sent back Rs 19 crores that came from the central government for provision of relief to these victims. The nauseating fact is that this man is considered an ideal CM, a model to be emulated, the fountainhead of progress and honour of Gujarat. Not only the *Sangh Parivar*, even other parties including the NCP have praised him on occasions. Once again this indicates the state of mind in Gujarat – where the non Hindu is treated as a sub-human, the way the Nazis treated the Jews. (See Editorial in *Daily Loksatta* – the Marathi newspaper of the Indian Express Group – of October 26, 2006 for these details).

**Appendix 02:**Delhi: 1984, Gujarat: 2002

BJP and the *Sangh Parivar* counter any mention of Gujarat Carnage with strident mention of the killings of Sikhs in 1984, particularly in Delhi, following the assassination of Mrs Indira Gandhi. (They are not the only people who hold this against the *Congress* – many secular democrats also do that.) The massacre of the Sikhs was despicable and beastly. It was also essentially a communal act. The killer mobs victimised an entire community or any non-specific members of that community for an act committed by some specific members of that community. Members of the ruling party (then *Congress*) reportedly participated actively in the massacres. The law and order machinery remained a spectator for at least a couple of days.

The anti Sikh riots of 1984 were however different from the Gujarat Carnage in some important respects. The riots took place while there was a power vacuum. Mrs. Gandhi was dead and a new prime minister was not yet firmly in office. There was some uncertainty and confusion in the government. The riots were not pre-planned. They would not have taken place without the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi. The earlier political activities of some of the Sikh organisations – the separatist movement for Khalistan - had not given rise to any real communal tension between the Sikhs and the Hindus. The atrocities were horrendous but the security forces decisively controlled the situation after the chaos of the first two days. The sins of the *Congress* in connection with the 1984 violence are many. In the first instance was the unfortunate remark by Rajiv Gandhi when he had just taken over as Prime Minister about the earth shaking when a giant tree uproots violently. Moreover, the *Congress* never apologised to the Sikh community for the massacre of and other atrocities on innocent members of the community. (The apology has come in 2005!) It did not express regrets for the violence. It also did not demonstratively remove the leaders reasonably accused of involvement in the violence from positions of power within the government or the organisation, at least immediately. It did not

prosecute and punish the guilty. It did not adequately compensate the victims. The inquiry commissions failed to deliver justice to the victims of the violence. The wounds festered due to a denial of justice. It is however also true that the leaders of the government or the party did not justify the massacre or call for the continuation of the violence. Even when the politicians indulged in violence, the administration did not participate in it. At worst, it was guilty of paralysis and confused inaction for two days. The *Congress* did not term the Sikhs an enemy community – either directly or indirectly. It did not victimise the community as a whole, did not attempt to do so. In spite of a secessionist movement by a section of the Sikh community that even indulged in terrorist violence (against uninvolved, unarmed, non-combatant, non-specific, civilians) the *Congress* did not unleash any overt or covert communal campaign against the Sikh community. The government did allow the security forces to run amok in Punjab and commit gross and gory violations of human rights – mainly wanton killings of mostly innocent young men. This was gross state terrorism at its worst. The government also made efforts at a healing touch subsequently. Official machinery did investigate the human rights violations despite protests of police officials, and punished at least some of the guilty officials. This is by no means enough. It shows however that the state in India, or in Punjab, had not adopted a communal policy. The Sikhs were hurt and alienated by numerous government actions but the government did not in a communal manner hound them or victimise them. Even the *Congress* did not term the Sikh community anti-national or ask it to constantly prove its national loyalty despite the cross border connections of the secessionist terrorists. These features differentiate the 1984 massacres from the Gujarat Carnage 2002. The *Congress* is capable of opportunism including the adoption of a soft attitude towards communal acts and forces. It did not however adopt a communal programme against the Sikh community then or later. Social relations between the two communities or the economic activities of the Sikhs also did not collapse after the violence. There was neither ethnic cleansing nor any ghettoisation.



## 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.)<sup>28</sup>

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.

<sup>28</sup>Reprinted 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.<sup>29</sup> It was not

<sup>29</sup>The 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.<sup>30</sup>

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.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup>The 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.

<sup>31</sup>The 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*<sup>32</sup> – 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*

<sup>32</sup>This 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.<sup>33</sup>

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

<sup>33</sup>Predictably 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.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup>There 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.<sup>35</sup>

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

<sup>35</sup>The 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.<sup>36</sup>

The riots since the '80s – particularly the ones sparked off by L K Advani's infamous *Rath Yatra* – were entirely different in character.<sup>37</sup> 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*

<sup>36</sup>Incidents 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.

<sup>37</sup>It 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.<sup>38</sup> 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

<sup>38</sup>Upton 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.<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup>

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

<sup>39</sup>The 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*.

<sup>40</sup>The 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.<sup>41</sup>

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

<sup>41</sup>The 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.<sup>42</sup>

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.<sup>43</sup> 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.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup>Deoras 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.

<sup>43</sup>I 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.

<sup>44</sup>Rajendra 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 entity<sup>45</sup>
- 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

<sup>45</sup>Mussolini'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.<sup>46</sup>

Orcinus (interestingly a blog – but a serious one that has extensive discussions on fascism)<sup>47</sup> 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

<sup>46</sup>Robert 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**.

<sup>47</sup>[http://dneiwert.blogspot.com/2003\\_04\\_13\\_dneiwert\\_archive.html](http://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 dotting 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.

## Understanding Fascism

The characterisation of the fascist traits of the RSS has assumed a familiarity with the nature of fascism. This assumption may not be valid. The term fascism is used quite frequently, but most often in a somewhat loose manner. It conveys an image and a response (of antagonism and disgust) but does not indicate the exact characteristics of fascism. Terms that acquire general currency often lose precision and as a result, they obscure reality and hamper exact understanding.

The problem with the term and concept of fascism is even more complex.<sup>48</sup>

It has been used quite loosely as a political pejorative to indicate any right wing non or anti-democratic forces, organisations or regimes. In such loose usage any dictatorship, without proper characterisation or analysis is termed fascist.

The classical fascist organisations and regimes that came up between the two World Wars also presented a spectrum – differing in many details. The analyses of these fascist organisations and regimes generally situated them in very specific historical material conditions. These analyses were of course extremely important but they did throw up

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<sup>48</sup>“St. Augustine once observed that he knew what time was till he was asked to define it, and fascism has a similarly elusive property. Practically all readers of this article, whatever point they occupy in the political spectrum or circle, know instinctively what fascism is, and can recognize it when they see it. However, many would be hard put to say what it means for them in other than impressionistic terms, possibly resorting to an MOT-type check-list of attributes and associations (leader-cult, violence etc.). If they were all to send their definition to the editor (the basis of a future feature?) it would reveal an extraordinary profusion of conflicting approaches. The ‘Babel effect’, which operates in all areas of human phenomena when efforts are made to pin them down conceptually, has been peculiarly strong when it comes to fascism” (Roger Griffin; *Fascism is more than reaction*; *Searchlight*; Vol 27, No 4; September 1999). Ernesto Laclau (**Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism-Fascism-Populism**; NLB 1977; Verso Edition 1979; London) [B.Q20.L105] quotes an excerpt from Ortega y Gasset (1927): “Fascism has an enigmatic countenance because in it appears the most counterposed contents. It asserts authoritarianism and organizes rebellion. It fights against democracy and, on the other hand, does not believe in the restoration of any past rule. - - - - Whichever way we approach fascism we find that it is simultaneously one thing and the contrary, it is A and not A- - - -”

the possibility that fascism is a phenomenon of the past since those exact historical material conditions no longer obtain nor can come into existence once again.

There is nevertheless resilience to fascist politics and organisation. They keep cropping up – unmistakably very similar to the classical fascist organisations – in different parts of the world.<sup>49</sup>

It therefore becomes necessary to understand with some certitude what fascism is. It becomes essential then to grasp the common features.

This becomes difficult again since classical fascism was not very keen to propose a comprehensive fascist ideology or theory. In fact, fascism had an anti-theory and anti-intellectual stance. It relied heavily on action. This was not self-reflexive practice. In fact, numerous fascist positions, stances, and actions were inconsistent and self-contradictory.<sup>50</sup>

Attempts at defining fascism then fall into two traps. One is of creation of a long drawn out ‘shopping list’ of characteristics, without justified prioritisation of the essential and contingent. The second one is the obverse of this of just using fairly vague criteria.

Yet another difficulty is created by the view that treats fascism as an aberration, a pathological abnormal occurrence. This view does not

<sup>49</sup>Umberto Eco in his essay *Ur-fascism* published in the **New York Review of Books** on June 22, 1995 (available on the net at <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1856> ) makes some very interesting points in this regard. The first, rather obvious one is that one cannot look for exact replicas of the regimes in Italy or Germany from the inter-war period. He insists that no two regimes can ever be exactly the same. To talk of minor differences then is not relevant. He then lists out 14 characteristics of ‘eternal fascism’ and says the presence of a few would mark a movement or regime as fascist. He evokes Wittgenstein’s concept of familial similarity and claims that there may not be exact match in characteristics in two contemporary regimes (or movements) but if they will still be similar in their overall nature if the characteristics belong to the list of 14 essential features. This argument will also question the appropriateness of qualifying titles like neo-fascism or semi-fascism. The addition of the term ‘neo’ to many scholars only indicates the period – post world war and after the dissolution of the classical fascist regimes in Italy and Germany. Eco’s short essay makes some other interesting points as well. He feels that the term fascist, rather than Nazi, became a generic term because the Italian movement/organization/ideology/regime was somewhat loose, non-specific and lacked ideological as well as philosophical rigidity and rigor. German Nazism was far too precise, specific, rigid, and exact to become a generic term. One could almost add that the original image that gave the movement the name – the bundle of sticks, *fascis* – is necessarily loose and uneven.

<sup>50</sup>This view is challenged by some scholars, for example David Barker in his “not to be quoted work in progress” essay titled *The ‘Political Economy of Fascism’: Myth or Reality or Myth and Reality?* (paper presented at the Research Seminar of the Political Economy Research Centre at the University of Sheffield on 10th March 2005 argues that the contradictions may be more apparent than real.

necessarily differentiate between the holocaust and fascism. In fact, it equates the two and pronounces the judgement.

The way out of the conundrum is perhaps to identify the essential and common features of all fascist organisations and movements. This is neither new nor path breaking. Many contemporary analysts of fascism have made these attempts. They have tried to identify the fascist ‘matrix’ or the fascist ‘minimum’ on this basis and to create a picture of ‘generic’ fascism.

With the Indian experience and context of communalism in mind the following characteristics of fascism should be considered essential.

## 01. The Necessity of the ‘other’

Suppression, subjugation, and even elimination of the ‘enemy other’ are not the only or even the defining features of fascism, classical or contemporary – though these often are vital components of fascist agenda and programme.

The ‘enemy other’ is necessary to fascism, classical or contemporary, for many reasons.

The most commonplace is also the most obvious and ‘common-sense’ reason. The constitution of ‘one people/folk’ requires strong identities. Definite inclusion and exclusion create identity. To posit ‘us’ is also to posit ‘the other’. It must be clear who constitutes the ‘one people’ and who can never be a part of the ‘one people/folk’. The other thus posited must be obvious, evident, palpable, and experiential. The ‘otherness’ must be ‘natural’ and ‘common-sense’. It should also be evident, ‘total’, overt, palpable, visible, and external.

These criteria define the ‘other’ – one who is not included in the ‘us’. This is sufficient for identity politics in general. It is necessary but not sufficient for (hard) communal politics, and not at all for classical or contemporary fascist ideology and politics. The ‘other’ in this case also has to be an ‘enemy other’.

(A subtle but vital distinction may exist in this regard between communalism and fascism. It is perhaps adequate for communalism to posit a ‘competitive other’ who is a ‘rival’ but not necessarily an ‘irreconcilable enemy’. The rival is someone to be cautious of, to oppose

– principally within the sphere of civil society, but not necessarily eliminate or even totally hate. There is no justified denial of the right to exist of the rival. The competition over resources and opportunities will be intense but not necessarily always or inevitably violent. The ‘soft’ forms of communalism posit the ‘competitive other’ and champion the rights of the ‘self’ or ‘us’. The rabid forms of communalism with violence as their distinguishing feature are, of course, far closer to fascism in their orientation<sup>51</sup>.)

The constitution of the ‘one people’ in fascism is not content with mere identification. It has some more attributes. The ‘us’ or ‘one people/folk’ in classical and contemporary fascism are also ‘wronged’ people. They have a glorious past but a piteous present. The reason of the misery is the conspiratorial, deliberate, antagonistic action of the ‘enemy other’. Moreover the ‘us’ or ‘one people/folk’ are also the rising emergent people, the people with glorious future, the people who are the absolute rulers of tomorrow. This rising and rule requires not only ‘self-improvement’ but also a rout of the ‘enemy other’ that serves two purposes at one and the same time; rectification of a historical wrong/ injustice and the defeat of a current enemy to ensure forever the security and prosperity of the ‘one people/folk’.

The enemy is necessary to weld together varied sections within the ‘us’ to really wield them as ‘one people/folk’. A common enemy equally threatening to all sections (classes and castes) within the ‘us’ and whose destruction will bring rich spoils to all is necessary to create this unity – however temporary it may be! This is a classic way to reject internal differentiation and to outright deny the legitimacy of class or caste conflict.

The projected nature of the ‘enemy other’ is quite specific. The animosity is natural and total. The conflict is not over *specific issues or particular claims*. The antagonistic opposition is rooted in the very character and nature of the two communities – religious/ ethnic/ linguistic/ national. It is not just some people within the ‘enemy

<sup>51</sup>Such competition is not only on communal lines. The recent reservation moves inspired intense competition, with the upper class students of the more elite institutions launching agitations and even taking very extreme stands. The political parties found it very difficult to oppose the reservations – but the parties of the right did support the agitating students. Self-appointed spokespersons for the anti-reservationists have been quite ridiculous at times. One filmmaker – who also wanted a declaration of war without being sure against who, after the July 2006 explosions in Mumbai local trains – advocated appealing to the President of the USA to intervene in the matter!

community’ who are the problem – but the entire community itself. Thus, the Nazis made no distinction between the good and the bad Jews – the entire race was evil and beyond redemption to the Nazis.<sup>52</sup>

In India occasionally, the communalists attempt to make noises to distinguish between “good and bad Muslims” – also classified in various other ways, viz., patriotic/nationalist vs. pro-Pakistani/anti-nationalist, fundamentalist vs. liberal, fanatics vs. tolerant, etc. Occasions do bring out the true feelings. The usual refrain then is that wherever they are in any sizeable numbers Muslims always cause problems. The criticism often goes much deeper than this. Depending on the kind of public façade necessary for the organisation or the mask/ image of the commentator, either the social or the political concepts of Islam or incompatibility of Islam with the modern world and modern liberal values or the inability of Islam to change come in for criticism. The extreme spokespersons of communal values portray Islam as an evil creed. No compromises with the ‘enemy other’ are then possible. There can only be ‘final solutions’ to the problem!<sup>53</sup>

Enough work has countered the stereotypes propagated over the years. The interesting fact regarding fascist propaganda is that rational, logical, factual repudiation of the prejudices generally has no effect. The crux is not in the facts – but in the very irrationality of the slogans that appeals not to the logical aspect but to the unconscious and unrecognised complexes.<sup>54</sup> There hence exists about the ‘enemy other’

<sup>52</sup>In relation to the Muslims a similar exercise was carried out. From the 1920s, the creation of the Muslim Other involved attacks on Allah, the Prophet, and their sexual life and tastes, as an assertion that it is not merely this or that Muslim, but the essence of Islam, that represents sexual perversion and a threat to all Hindus. Scurrilous comments on the alleged sexual life of the Prophet formed the subject matter of some pamphlets by the Arya Samaj in the early period. The theme recurs in many Hindutva publications.

<sup>53</sup>The *Sangh Parivar* now seeks to deny any right to the Muslims to protest in the country – in however peaceful and democratic a manner. The protests in Vadodara that led to communal violence were essentially peaceful. The dispute in Bhivandi was basically simple though a sudden violent eruption took place. (The violence was brutal and mindless to say the least. Two police constables in mufti were burned to death by participants in a demonstration.) *The Shiv Sena* and the BJP in response repeatedly termed any protests by Muslims as illegitimate. They considered that the Muslims had no democratic rights to express their feelings or to organise protest actions.

<sup>54</sup>Most commentators on fascism have recognised this aspect of fascist propaganda. The fascist leaders themselves recognised that not rational arguments but emotional appeals reinforced through spectacles and rites were important for the propagation of their cause. Violence and the public acceptance or social legitimisation of pervert violence also probably plays a part in the hold of fascist ideology. A revealing piece in this regard is an excerpt from **Mein Kampf** by Adolf Hitler included in William Ebenstein (Ed) **Modern Political Thought: The Great Issues**; Oxford & IBH Publishing Co; New Delhi.

a curious mixture of envy and contempt. Both emotions have, predictably, strong sexual overtones. The grotesque sexual violence during the Gujarat carnage probably owes its inspiration to these overtones.

[Fascist spokespersons and commentators often glorify the intemperate, abusive, indecent, sexually offensive, male chauvinist language of fascist propaganda. They portray this language as the idiom of the people and contrast it with the dense pedantic language of the liberals. Even erudite journalists often praise the uncouth language of Thackeray as being closer to that of the people. They tend to forget that the Thackerays, Modis, and Togadias, as also other lesser figures in their organisations express the most crass and crude sentiments of the mobs. These expressions, usually suppressed in cultured conversations, are not the reflections of class or caste anger; nor do they portray a rebellion against oppression and exploitation. These sentiments are violent, directed against other oppressed sections. They are also sadistic, sexually offensive, demeaning to women. The implicit, perhaps even unwitting, assumption here, of these 'objective commentators' is that the anti-fascists are elite faddists and that anti-fascism is necessarily an alien sentiment. The fascists of course always harp on the alien nature of secularism, democracy, and socialism. A strange but perhaps intended (by the fascists) effect in India and particularly in Mumbai is that Hindu and Marathi self-respect is equated with rude, impolite, uncultured, manner-less, near violent behaviour.]

The 'other' is constituted by anyone and everyone who is not 'us' – that is potentially opposed to 'us' and a threat to 'us'. The 'other' is seen in a peculiar way, even normally – even when not a hate object. It is perhaps necessary to maintain a distinction between non-integration, competition, antagonism, hatred, and conflict. These are certainly not the same. It is also necessary to recognise that different communities – with cultural differences will be distinct from each other and shall maintain these distinctions without fear or aggression in any democratic society. The denial of distinctions, in fact, constitutes a pressure to deny identity – to deny cultural specificity and cultural autonomy. It is a pressure to *integrate* (into the 'mainstream' – read majority) at the cost of self-hood. The recognition of difference, specificity, and distinction is not communal or fascist. These elements enter only when a hierarchy with notions of primacy of the majority enter into the secular – non-cultural spheres.

The fascists however constitute the 'enemy other' somewhat differently. The fascists project all the bad qualities on to the 'other' and reserve all the good for the 'self'. The 'other' then becomes the malevolent, coercive opponent – the 'enemy other'. The stereotypes too then are quite peculiar – they combine both envy and contempt. The 'us' then necessarily project the 'enemy other' as both – strong enough to be a threat and weak enough to be vanquished and crushed. The stereotypes are strongly and predominantly male creations – and deal with an aggressive male interpretation and understanding of sexuality – of both the women and men of the 'enemy other'. This of course does not mean that the women of the fascist group do not actively share or propagate these stereotypes. In Gujarat, they did so, quite aggressively.<sup>55</sup>

Obviously, a fascist organisation cannot simply 'name'/'declare' some entity as the 'other', as the mortal enemy, or conjure it up out of thin air. The constituency must experience the 'enemy other' as such – as a living natural threat and adversary in violent confrontation. The Jews in Europe were no more than convenient soft punching bags for inebriated, weak, frustrated, sadists till the advent of Zionism, the potential actualisation of the dream of the Jewish homeland – the land of 'milk and honey' – of Israel, and the increased influence (real or imaginary) of the Jews on the foreign (obviously military) policies of the emergent – then reluctant – superpower – the United States of America. These features on the background of defeat in the First World War, the – treaty of Versailles, and the deterioration of conditions in Germany built up the search for scapegoats and enemies. The communists were the natural enemies of the Nazis – but for the entire 'us', Jews became the perfect targets. The communists were *ideological* enemies – the Jews '*natural*' ones. The ideological debate often beyond the scope and acumen of the fascist hordes was not necessary to target the Jews. (In fact, at times, international communism itself was termed a Jewish conspiracy or otherwise an identity between the communists and Jews was established.) Committed fascist militias carried out violence against the communists. The fascist demagogues could incite the general mass against the Jews. (This also occurred in other countries in Europe with

<sup>55</sup>A useful reference to this aspect of the Gujarat Carnage is Rege, Sharmila & others; *Gujarat Carnage: Outlining the Gendered Character of Communal Stereotypes, Strategies and Violence*; in **Lessons from Gujarat**; VAK, Mumbai; 2003. [B.L70.P60]

Also see Durham, Martin; **Women and Fascism**; Routledge (UK) 1998 for discussion of stances of fascism towards women as well as of fascist women's organisations.

traditions of anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic pogroms.) In India too, chosen troops of the SS attacked the communists while the propagandists created only a sanction for the violence with the general population – by branding the communists anti-national. This policy now yields almost no returns. Neither the SS nor the *Sangh Parivar* can physically attack the Left in its strongholds – or even in areas where it is not very strong. The general supporters of the fascists and incited masses do not see the purely ideological or political opponents of the fascists as the ‘enemy other’ for and of themselves. A different construction of the ‘enemy other’, even ‘internal’ is necessary.

The Hindu communalists in India made the Muslims hate objects through peculiar use and distortion of history. They portrayed all struggles against tyrannical, unpopular, coercive, imposed rule in religious terms – of Hindu subjects or champions of freedom against Muslim rulers – often against *all* Muslims or against Islam.<sup>56</sup> The ‘nationalist’ or anti-colonial views of the ‘national’ leaders or opinion makers who precede the formulation of clear fascist ideology and the formation of fascist organisations also play an important role in the creating the ‘other’ – the ‘enemy other’. In India, the views of Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak played such a role. Later, less significant leaders who held clear Hindu supremacist views continued to operate in the national movement, even as prominent members of the Congress. The project of the communalists succeeded to a large extent. Muslims became in popular consciousness (obviously in differing degrees) atrocious oppressors and hence enemies.<sup>57</sup> The partition with independence in 1947 renewed the violent sentiments. It was nevertheless difficult to treat the Muslims in India after independence as

<sup>56</sup>This is done not only through explicit political propaganda but also through films – particularly historical ones, theatrical productions, songs, ballads etc. In Mumbai the floats associated with the Janmashami celebrations or the scenes created at the Ganeshotsav pandals clearly reflect this attitude.

<sup>57</sup>It is true that the communalists have misinterpreted, quoted out of context, and even distorted many remarks by Dr B R Ambedkar regarding the Muslims. It is nevertheless true that he did make some remarks that lent themselves to easy distortion of this variety. He holds aggression by Muslims responsible for the decline and virtual expulsion of Buddhism from India in his speech at Nagpur at the time of the mass conversion by Dalits to Buddhism (October 1955). He blames the Muslim aggressors for the destruction of Buddhist places of worship and the persecution of the Buddhists. Such images too become part of the popular consciousness. For *Sangh Parivar* contentions regarding Dr Ambedkar’s positions and their refutation, see Anand Telumbde; **Ambedkar on Muslims**; Vikas Adhyayan Kendra; Mumbai 2003. [B.L61.T2]

threatening dangerous hate objects. They were themselves poor and oppressed. They wielded no power – economic or political. The communal organisations – and views – took many years to creep back into social and political reckoning.<sup>58</sup> There are numerous causes – some incidental and some basic structural – for the *Sangh Parivar* to succeed in its designs (of creating a single hate object par excellence and thereby mobilising communal Hindus).

The hatred for the ‘other’ becomes active principally in situations of disequilibrium in the society. In a stable society, there may be non-integration, even contempt at times – but not hatred leading to action, violent action. A real scarcity of resources and opportunities leads to a fierce competition and may then result in all efforts to grab the share going to the ‘other’. Economic conditions deteriorated rapidly from the mid sixties to the mid seventies. The worst affected was the lower middle class. This is the period in which there is the first surge in communal passions and violence after independence. The ‘natural constituency’ of the *Sangh Parivar* easily accepted the argument that the government frittered away scarce resources on appeasement of a minority – particularly a minority that had already partitioned the country and created an enemy on the border. (A similar hatred against the Dalits – ‘beneficiaries’ of the policy of positive discrimination in the form of reservation of jobs in the government sector and seats in educational institutions also mounted during this period. Atrocities against Dalits increased. Conflicts broke out in the rural areas over land and wages. The victims of the violence were mainly Dalits and Adivasis.)

Since the March 1993 serial bomb explosions in Mumbai – and subsequent other incidents – the hated ‘enemy other’ namely the Muslim has acquired another image – that of a dreaded terrorist. *Sangh Parivar* spokespersons, media, security forces all seem to equate the terrorist with the Muslim. The image has almost become a part of the common social (read Hindu but also Christian) consciousness in the country. The

<sup>58</sup>The first major Hindu-Muslim riot after independence was in 1961 at Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh. Riots became more common after 1969. The *Jan Sangh* – the earlier incarnation of the BJP – became politically significant to some extent only in the anti-Congress swell of 1967 and through the Grand Alliance of various parties of different hues united only in their opposition to the Congress. The *Sangh Parivar* came into serious social and political reckoning in the early ‘70s when Jay Prakash Narayan included the RSS and the *Jan Sangh* in his alliance against the Congress. The merger of *Jan Sangh* into the *Janata Party* in 1977 and the subsequent formation of the BJP in 1980 transformed the political fortunes of the *Sangh Parivar*.

'moderate' statement is "all Muslims are not terrorists but all terrorists are Muslims". It need not even be stated that this is a gross distortion of facts.<sup>59</sup>

In the nineties the situation was again unstable, though in a very different manner. Once again, it was the middle class that was affected the most. The situation this time did not deteriorate but created hopes of rapid advance. The economic changes – globalisation, liberalisation, and privatisation created at least illusions of great prosperity. New occupational opportunities opened up and incomes of some sections increased. Consumer goods were also available as never before. Consumerism became a reality in the country for the first time in independent India. The nature of this economic 'prosperity' was somewhat speculative and insecure with impermanence built into the entire occurrence. This again led to a scramble to monopolise the resources and opportunities – now for incremental revenues.

Some other factors also led to reception for the hate propaganda. The government in its wisdom always pandered to the demonstrative symbolic demands of the Muslim traditional elite and ignored any real development of the Muslim masses.<sup>60</sup> Each of the symbolic demands created resentment and was open to wilful misinterpretation by the communal elements. These essentially were and are the examples of 'appeasement of Muslims' that the communal forces always cite. Two international events also created the background for increased animosity. One was the Saudi-driven petro-dollar financed effort to 'purify' Islam, to root out the local traditions and the 'folk elements'.

<sup>59</sup>It is worthwhile to quote Seema Mustafa cited earlier (*Asian Age* 28/10/2006) once again. "Who is the Indian Muslim? If one takes even a cursory look at the television channels these days, he is a terrorist wanted for every other terror blast in the country. He is in close touch with Pakistan and the ISI and has extended links with Dubai. He is a wife beater. He is a rapist. He is anti-woman. He is uneducated, and over religious. - - - - Who was the India Muslim till just a few years ago? Before 9/11, before the NDA government, before the RSS/BJP doctrine of divisiveness and hate, before the UPA government's continuing obsession with the US and open suspicion of the Muslim, before Gujarat? He was religious, he was uneducated, he was unemployed, but so were the majority of Indians. But he was not a terrorist, he was not a Pakistani employee, he was not anti-national. - - - - He was not seeking identity with Muslims in other countries, he was content to be Indian. He refused to vote for the fundamentalist parties, he always chose the secular alternative."

<sup>60</sup>The report of the committee to inquire into the social and economic conditions of the Muslims headed by Justice Rajinder Sachar is reportedly ready – the first such survey ever undertaken in independent India. The report apparently reveals that the conditions of the Muslims are deplorable in education, employment, economic opportunities, assets, incomes, social status etc. The government reportedly finds it difficult to make the report public – or even officially accept it.

These efforts also attempted to break down exchange (between the communities) and negate the syncretic elements. In a way, they attempted to create a self-sufficient global community of Muslims separated from their local roots – including language and dress patterns. This was also an effort to impose a single fundamentalist (Arab or rather Saudi) conception of Islam on all who wished to embrace the faith. The second development, somewhat later was the attempted politicisation of Islam – in its extreme form as the so-called Jihadi terrorism. Both developments were products of the cold war – of the American effort to create a Muslim bulwark against communism and the Soviet Union. The US carefully nurtured fundamentalism and anti-liberal attitudes – particularly in wake of the Soviet adventure in Afghanistan. The current antipathy of the US towards Muslims arises after the Cold War, and thus the need for Islamic fundamentalism is over – and after it turns against the West itself.

These communal elements could then project the Muslim as part of a global community with financial support, an international political agenda, an international loyalty, and plans to capture 'infidel' lands. They could also convince a large number of Hindus that the Muslims with these characteristics were a threat – an 'enemy other'. The 'enemy other' now also became an adversary worth fighting – strong enough to threaten and yet weak enough (numerically, resource – wise) to be crushed. The orthodox, fundamentalist, opportunist, reactionary leadership of the Muslim masses of course thrives on the isolation of the Muslim masses and on their victimised status. The secular forces too made a mistake in abandoning the representation and leadership of the Muslim masses to Muslim leaders. The exceptions compete with the reactionary Muslim leadership and raise the same issues, the same essentially symbolic demands.

In Gujarat, for example, the plural and syncretic tradition was systematically broken down. The continuous (obviously planned and engineered) violence since 1969 in Ahmedabad played a significant role in the creation of permanent hatred and enmity. Perhaps nowhere else has there been endemic communal violence of the same proportion. This too in all possibility was a part of the 'experiment'. The other sensitive spots see sporadic violence, often long drawn out tension. There is in all probability not a total divide at all times. The endemic

violence in Gujarat created the total and permanent divide.<sup>61</sup> The situation is almost classical – no possible compromise or co-existence with the ‘enemy other’. Many analyses of the Gujarat violence since 1969 missed the mass character of the hatred and readiness for violence. Many of these concentrated on specific issues and concrete circumstances – including the involvement of organised crime and the competition between gangsters. These factors were significant but did not define the ‘experiment’. Rational solutions could not be answers to the ‘communal problem’ in Gujarat – not after the late seventies anyway. The problem was not this or that specific grievance. No concrete measure – even dialogue – could redress the grievance. No compromise was possible because the Hindu masses led by the fascist organisations did not want a compromise. They increasingly wanted obliteration – if not a final solution, at least ghettoisation, and ethnic cleansing. Each episode of violence – actual or potential – fed the next one and hardened the attitudes. One foundation of the ‘experiment’ was perhaps the routine, annual tension and violence around the Jagannath Rath Yatra. The conversion of common traditional festivals into occasions of pogrom against the ‘enemy other’ is a sign of success of fascism, an indicator that it has become a mass phenomenon. Various analysts quite correctly blamed the *Sangh Parivar* for the communalisation and the communal violence in Gujarat. They missed the fact that a large section of the masses had accepted and adopted the now fascist ‘ideology’.<sup>62</sup>

The Gujarat Carnage of 2002 waited in the wings for enactment in these circumstances.

<sup>61</sup>The latest (October 15, 2005) results of the elections to the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation are yet another indicator of the success of the ‘experiment’. The BJP campaign led by Narendra Modi has yielded spectacular results. The BJP has swept the elections winning nearly 80% seats. The BJP has not covered itself in glory in matters of cleanliness (freedom from corruption) or ability to govern and administer. The vote is not for good management or non-corrupt pro-people administration or even efficiency. The BJP campaign too did not make these the campaign issues. The issue was *Hinduva* and anti-Muslim stance. Modi made sure that these were the only points that came on the agenda. The vote then is for Modi’s extreme *Hinduva* – his ‘experiment’ – his fascism.

<sup>62</sup>The so-called radical strategy of the Congress to forge a united front of the marginalised in the Gujarat society – Kshatriya, Harijan, Adivasi, and Muslim (KHAM) – also perhaps backfired. It forced a reactive unity of Brahmin, Baniya and Patel. The easiest commonality among these could only be *Hinduva*. Moreover, the Congress did not articulate KHAM in class terms. The appeal of *Hinduva* could break its ranks.

## 02. Nature, Permanent Conflict, and Violence

The ‘enemy other’ as a target of violence is also necessary for other reasons. The fascist organisation and ideology – definitely classical but also contemporary – is militarist in many senses. It of course appeals to ‘male bravery/ valour’ that includes ruthlessness and capacity (ability and willingness) to commit violence against the ‘enemy’. It also builds organisational structures that attempt to resemble militias – not armies.

The militarism goes beyond the symbolism of the ‘military’ or ‘militia’. It encompasses a mindset of a permanent state of war – or civil conflict. The rationale of existence of a fascist organisation – in any version, any form, and any period – is a state of war/conflict – actual or potential. A fascist state creates a state of war – actual armed conflict between nation states; a fascist organisation creates a state of actual or potential violent civil strife.

A strife – and this is very different from any notions of class conflict at whatever levels of comparison – needs an enemy – a concrete, living, experiential, palpable, ‘real’ enemy. The ‘enemy other’ is thus necessary for the very existence of the fascists – classical and contemporary. There is a need for the fascist to threaten someone all the time and also feel threatened by someone all the time. In the absence of an external war, the war has to be internal – in the style of the Nazi ‘war’ against the Jews even before they could conduct the ‘final solution’.

The war or conflict is a natural state of existence for the fascist. The conflict is an existential situation ordained by nature. The fascists have a peculiar attraction to nature. The attachment is to some particularly authoritarian notions of natural laws. Nature is glorified by the fascist as the arena of conflict – a conflict in which there is no logic, no reason, no justice, no compassion – only an exercise of strength and might along with a manifestation of ruthless determination. (That also is the reason of the fascist attraction for notions of ‘social Darwinism’.) The struggle to finish is attractive to the fascists, but there is no ‘finish’ or end to the conflict. The fascists view conflict in nature as permanent and also desirable. The concept of conflict – an unending conflict – also imparts many notions integral to the fascist worldview.

The doctrine of permanent conflict as a natural (hence divine and ordained?) state of existence leads to eager glorified acceptance – almost as a moral or pious duty or obligation – of war or civil war,

perpetual preparation for war – including militarism and war economies, ‘emergency’ or ‘war’ states with severe curbs on rights and liberties, restrictions upon the civil society, ethic of hatred, valorisation of violence, subjugation and suppression of all ‘others’ (not just ‘the enemy other’), as well as culture of machismo, patriarchy, and institutionalised male domination.

Permanent natural conflict as condition of existence is an intense strife – not only beyond the borders but also within the borders. Predatory attitudes, ‘natural’ (‘food-chain’) hierarchy, survival of the fittest, and the morality of ‘might is right’ are all logical conclusions of this tenet. Obviously, there can then be no notions of tolerance or of equality.

Social Darwinism in fact becomes a ‘scientific principle’ to adhere to and cherish. This view considers the ‘chosen people’ as superior and all other as inferior examples of human existence. Race becomes a biological entity akin to species. The ‘others’ – all except the ‘chosen people’ – are then unworthy of existence. The fascists choose the prime hate object – the ‘enemy other’ – depending on the specific situation.<sup>63</sup> All others too are however on the hit list. Even when tolerated they are not equal. They are not only different but also unfit to survive and exist. The holocaust targeted all ‘others’ – the elimination of gypsies, and of people with mixed blood is well known. This attitude goes beyond other forms of racism.

The other forms of racism may consider racial difference as fundamental and may even consider other races as inferior. They may even build up logic of racial superiority. There may alternately be racial enmity based on (real or imaginary) perception of oppression and thus resistance to oppression/ exploitation. The clash in these cases – though articulated in different ways, in racial terminology – is over very specific issues – over access to and control over resources, balance of economic and political power, opportunities, political and cultural freedom, etc.

These forms too may lead at times to interracial violence, sometimes grotesque and gory. However, they do not create an ideology of racial extermination. It usually manifests at worst as attempts to exile or exclude

<sup>63</sup>In practice, the relationship with the ‘other’ and the sentiments that govern the relationship are not quite simple. There is a curious mixture of envy and contempt. The Nazis ‘built up a case’ against the Jews that portrayed them as usurious moneylenders, cheating traders, speculative financiers, etc. The Nazis condemned the Jews for their hold on the professions and for propagating dangerous ‘anti-national’ ideas – from Marxism to psychoanalysis. In the Indian case, the images are often contradictory.

a particular race from a territory. The Nazis, however, formulated and executed a doctrine of total racial extermination. The victims were not only the Jews though they were the worst affected. The Nazis similarly attempted to eliminate the gypsies as well. Total extermination – the holocaust – is not however a necessary feature of fascism. The effort may be limited to subjugation and creation of an institutionalised secondary status.<sup>64</sup>

The same logic also leads to ‘justified’ attempts to improve the chosen race. There were efforts to eliminate and eradicate undesirable, suspect, or ‘weak’ traits within the ‘chosen people’ themselves – to purify the race, to emphasize and strengthen the ‘chosen’ characteristics, to ‘improve’ the race. This is also an effort to bring about the rejuvenation or strengthening of the race. The Nazis wanted to breed the super kids – the purest Aryan children by choosing parents with the ‘ideal’ Aryan characteristics.<sup>65</sup> It led to selective breeding and attempts to nurture and foster particular characteristics. The idea of eugenics fascinated the Nazis. Genetic Engineering had not developed then and hence they had to depend on state controlled selective breeding. The negative side they practiced with enthusiasm – banning unions, and culling the undesirable traits – by even killing off the people exhibiting those. That was their cure for congenital defects including mental retardation. No other fascist parties or regimes could practice that since they never had comparable absolute power. The others also did not have an ideal racial type to project as the only authentic one (tall, sharp featured, blue eyed, blonde Aryan!)

The improvement is obviously to attain a pure form of the chosen race. The propoganda sometimes evokes a return to a state of purity of the race – a purity and glory once present but now lost. Fascism often

<sup>64</sup>Some other situations also exhibit racial violence leading to actual or attempted genocide. This usually occurs in societies that have not fully entered the capitalist/industrial phase and where – not land (as means of production and capitalist property) is the sole resource and source of survival. These are situations of no or very low surplus and precarious existence. ‘Tribal wars’ often exhibit these features.

<sup>65</sup>Savarkar in India advocated that the Hindus should give up their vegetarian diet and eat all meats including beef. This he opined will lead to stronger Hindus who can be more militant and confront the ‘physically stronger and better built’ Muslims. It is fashionable to consider these attitudes as ‘scientific’, ‘modernist’ and ‘rational’. Obviously, they are nothing of the kind. This view at best makes a fetish out of a common sense (mis)understanding of science. The attitude was by no means scientific though at some level it was ‘radical’ in the sense it dared to go beyond ‘tradition’.

teeters between the past and the future. On the one hand, there is an attachment to an almost imaginary past and on the other an urge to overcome the present. This depends partly on specific histories of the countries, and the particular situations the fascists face. The fascists in Italy glorified the Roman past and drew symbols from it constantly. The militarism and the expansion were to capture lost glory. The occupation of Ethiopia was for Fascism a continuation of the Roman legacy of imperialism and colonialism. To the Nazis on the other hand the conquests were portents of the new Germany – of a Germany of the future. The past fascism seeks to recapture is almost a mythical past, not a living history. Legends may carry tales of it but there are no living memories of that period – no real, living, experiential connection with it. (There may however be real memories of ‘humiliation’ – of the First World War in the case of Germany – of the defeat, reparations, and forced armistice/surrender.) In a strange way, fascism glorifies legend as history and attempts to overcome real recent history!

This also informs the fascist attitude to the present. An aggressive occupation of a place of honour – a place of domination – in the community of nations needs strong, technologically advanced, modern nation. Fascism is hence impatient about modernisation. The modernisation concerns essentially the production facilities, technology, and specifically the military machine. It however also involves the eradication of any institutions or traditions that stand in the way of the modernisation or in the way of the absolute power of the fascist party. The fascist fascination or fetish for science and technology (without scientific attitudes or modern enlightened values) arises from this need to modernise and to acquire industrial/ military capacities. (Those who read modern or scientific approach in Savarkar in India completely miss this point.) The fascist view of science and technology is completely instrumental. Scientific method or rationality does not inform this view in any way.

Permanent conflict and fascination with ‘natural’ laws also treats violence as necessary and desirable. Conflict and war obviously require violence. The fascists do not however embrace violence only as a forced need – as a strategy of survival or even of dominance. There is a fundamental glorification of violence and the capacity to perpetrate

violence.<sup>66</sup> Fascism considers violence not only natural but also eternal. It attributes almost mystical virtues to violence. It relates violence to machismo – with strength of body and character, and with virility. The desire for violence thus goes beyond the need of violence for the war effort. Fascists consider violence as redemptive, an instrument to purge and purify the chosen and to create the new man. One can also interpret Mussolini’s view of the fascist man as the ‘warrior saint’ as essentially a purity driven person seeking fulfilment and realisation through war and violence.

This is not merely a rejection of Ahimsa – or non-violence against any living being preached ages ago by the Mahavira and Buddha and in recent past by Mahatma Gandhi. This is violence directed against other human beings. This is a glorification of killing of human beings. The Hindutva lobby has found fault with Buddha – though no longer publicly – for preaching a doctrine of non-violence. This they believe led to ‘weaknesses of the Indians and paved way for foreign conquests. The same people have been similarly contemptuous of Gandhi’s principle of non-violence. Strangely, the same lobby – when scratched deep enough, Bramhanical – advocates vegetarianism.<sup>67</sup>

Fascism also sets great store by physical culture and the strength of the body. The body thus strengthened and trained is an instrument of violence. The realisation of the capacity of this male body is in violent

<sup>66</sup>In India, of course there is a peculiar paradox. A number of fascists are (or were) perhaps strict vegetarians. A number of the perpetrators of violence in Gujarat perhaps abhor killing of any animals – including insects. They happily endorse and indulge in killing of human beings! Savarkar went the other extreme and criticised the vegetarian habits of Hindus. He felt that made them physically weak and temperamentally non-militant, tolerant or cowardly. He, therefore, advocates eating of all meats that would make Hindu men strong. He also finds fault with Shivaji for his chivalry towards the accidentally captured daughter-in-law of the Muslim governor of Kalyan!

<sup>67</sup>A series of posters plastered all over Mumbai in 1992-93, when the communal lobby felt triumphant after the violent orgies, proclaimed ‘*Shakahar hi Hindutva ki pahachan hai*’ (Vegetarianism is the identity/identification of Hindutva). One should not treat this poster as a stray whimsical publication. The *Hindutva* lobby in that period indulged in a sustained ideological poster campaign. Another poster for example declared that ‘Indian defines citizenship Hindu/ Hindutva defines nationality’. This statement was not a mere slogan or exercise in semantic polemics, though it was a rejoinder to another poster by anti-communal forces that stated ‘Say with pride I am an Indian’ itself a rejoinder to the *Hindutva* poster ‘Say with pride I am a Hindu’. The emphasis on differentiating citizenship from nationality was an ideological effort to redefine nation and nationality – and thereby *place or locate* the ‘other’.

action. The glee that the perpetrators of Gujarat Carnage exhibited in the most perverse acts of violence flows from this mentality. Violence is not only an instrument of punishment meted out to the other but also a mechanism of purification and strengthening of the self – of the fascist person himself. The authoritarian image that fascism has of society and all human institutions obviously requires continuous violence – if not enacted at least ever present as a threat. The violence, moreover, is an attitude as well as an act.

It is almost trite to say that specific social realities promote violent mentality and culture of violence. Stable situations with economic growth and expansion of opportunities and resources are not conducive to violent social upsurges. Intense competition, insecurity, threats to existence or identity, shrinking access to resources and opportunities, perceptions of intense humiliation or loss promote violence. Other factors too, apart from these very general ones, are responsible for cultures of violence. Alienation from creative physical activity in the spheres of productive activity or of culture leads to peculiar glorification of human body and exaltation of physical fitness/ activity. The exaltation of the body operates at various levels. This may take the path of glorification of muscular power and capacities, 'beauty' for exhibition (both of the muscular virile male body and of the feminine, 'seductive' female body), objectification, adornment, flaunting of sexuality, etc. Adventure sports, situations of the extreme, and competition over physical strength and power are some of the ways of expression. The traditional test of the body – of its strength and capacities – is its efficacy in committing acts of violence, against human beings or other animals. War and hunting are the age-old activities associated with bravery, courage, and virility. In the absence of these 'martial opportunities' (and particularly in conditions described above that produce unfocussed anger and resentment) the expression is petty, everyday violence – physical as well as verbal and emotional. This may range from extreme road rage to domestic violence. (Organised crime also becomes an outlet for violence, 'spirit of adventure' and search for thrill.)

Fascism with its glorification of conflict and violence can attract a constituency in such situations. It organises the violent sentiments, gives them a justification, glorifies violent action, 'naturalises' hierarchy and thus victims, and most important creates long-term targets of the violence. The 'enemy other', the 'historical tormentor or oppressor', the traitor, the anti-national all become 'legitimate' targets of the violence.

Dissenters, critics, those who uphold and propagate opposing views, those who sow confusion in fascist ranks through inconvenient questions or statements, those who oppose fascist cultural norms and social behaviours also become enemies to be violently suppressed. The mass violence – including ethnic, religious, caste, linguistic, or political riots become a celebration and a cathartic outlet for mobs mobilised by the fascists. When there is no real fear of reprisal – retaliation by victims or stringent state action – this 'bravery' scales new heights of violent exhibition and lunacy. The Gujarat Carnage 2002 was an eloquent example of all these features.<sup>68</sup>

Women are a special target of the violence and the conflict. Rapes, sexual humiliation, mutilations, and killings are the most obvious and visible examples of the special attack on women. More deep rooted but less obvious mechanisms are also at work. These relate to the fascist view of woman.

The fascists unlike traditional orthodox reactionaries do not oppose the participation of women in public life. They do not oppose education or even specific activities for women. The fundamental status of women is however secondary. Fascism sees them as mothers, providers, homemakers, supporters of the fascist men. (Fascism also sees women as sex objects – desirable in that role. It is not puritanical in that sense. It does not deny sexuality or condemn sexual activity, even indulgence. The fascist understanding of the content of this sexuality is of course a totally different matter.) The fascist also view women as 'precious possessions' of the 'community'. Their 'honour' (read chastity) is the indicator of the capacities, strength, virility, and self-respect or pride of the chosen people. The men must therefore always 'guard' their women. The guarding is of two kinds. First, the men must secure the safety of the women against any attacks on their person by the 'enemy other'. The men then also consider it their obligation to avenge any such real or imaginary attacks. Second, the men must also 'guard' the women against any 'allures' held out by the 'enemy other'. No woman from the 'chosen community' must become involved with a man from any other community, particularly the 'enemy other'. (Reportedly, the **BJP** government in Gujarat has directed the police force to seek information on inter-religious marriages and to attempt to prevent such unions!) The

<sup>68</sup>Gujarat Carnage 2002 was the most serious orgy of such fascist violence. It would be wrong to assume that all fascist threats in contemporary India will take that form. Fascist tendencies can, may, and do exist outside the ranks of the *Sangh Parivar*.

fascist men believe, in accordance with this thinking, that a war or conflict situation endangers 'their possessions' – the women from the community. Strict curbs then become necessary to protect them and to guarantee their safety!<sup>69</sup> Conversely, the women of the 'enemy other' community are legitimate targets of choice to teach the enemy a lesson. The doctrine of violent conflict justifies the violation of enemy women as the final sign of victory and of suppression of the enemy. The rapes (mass and public with violence and mutilation) of 1993 and 2002 (Surat and Ahmedabad respectively) are eloquent manifestations of this mentality.

Social hypocrisy facilitates such behaviour. Technological fetishism without scientific attitudes and veneer of modernity (dress, behaviour, social interactions) without values of enlightenment promote the hypocrisy. The traditional values and institutions are shells empty of all content. New contemporary values and ethics stand rejected as inimical and corrupt. This creates an ethical and moral vacuum. This is not imaginary or restricted to ideas. Social and personal behaviour itself becomes constantly contradictory. In Gujarat, the rootless feeling of the Diaspora and its desperate search for an unsullied traditional culturally perfect homeland add to the pressures. There is desperate effort then to keep the women suave westernised and modern in externalities and repressed traditional beings in essence. At the root of this mentality is an intense fear of women's sexuality, women's creativity, women's autonomy that threatens the machismo and virility with exposure of inadequacy, relative impotence, and futile uselessness. Fascism very strongly depends on this situation and mentality. The mortal fear of openness, debate, liberal attitudes, tolerance, and co-existence stem from the complex of inadequacy. The contours of this fear are different from traditional sexism and male chauvinism. They stem from an inability to deal with cultural modernity while the material aspects of the modern world become indispensable for survival. Needless to say, those sections of the society that feel most vulnerable and insecure in the changing situation become the eager constituency of fascist ideology and worldview.

<sup>69</sup>Fascists also seek to promote martial traits amongst the women along with a violent mentality. *Durga Vahini* a component of *Sangh Parivar* imparts martial arts, weapons training for 'self-defence', and inculcates a militant violent mindset. This is not a stray example. The *British Union of Fascists* led by Edward Mosley boasted of a large participation of women and of the women black shirts. It also claimed that it stood for equality of men and women and also practiced it! *Fascism exhibited heterogeneous attitudes on some issues even during the classical phase.*

Violence is not only an ideological component of fascist organisations. The ideology justifies and glorifies violence but the necessity of violence is far more practical as well. This is particularly true about fascist or semi-fascist organisations with mass base that espouse and practice direct action as a methodology of all activity. The examples of VHP – *Bajrang Dal* or *Shiv Sena* are eloquent enough in India. These organisations have neither a philosophy nor ideology – at least none that reaches the rank and file members.<sup>70</sup> They operate on the basis of evocative and affective slogans. The slogans are to lead constantly to action, violent action. An imaginary grievance, a feeling of victimisation, a paranoid sense of conspiracy, a hatred of all who profess peace and human values, and an urge to avenge the injury and/or insult drive the active elements of these organisations. These feelings too can only be sustained if there is constant action. In fact, these organisations base themselves on a flurry of action. The continuous cathartic action does not allow thought or introspection. It keeps perpetually intact the walls between 'them' and 'us'. Only action can do so. Any cessation or pause in action may evoke questions, real experiences, an understanding of complexities of life. Direct action, therefore, is necessary for the survival of these organisations. Any activities or programmes by these organisations – particularly when they are in ascendance – are fraught with possibilities of orgiastic violence. This is not violence against the state. This is not long-drawn-out insurrectionary use of violence. This is riotous violence. This violence essentially involves looting, destruction of property, killing or wounding of persons from the 'enemy other' community. The violence has more practical and mundane uses. The looting provides the rank and file apart from cathartic sanguine pleasure, and income. The local level chieftains can run their extortion rackets only on the basis of threats of such periodic riots. The actual outbreak also drowns all internal differences and dissent. It directs all hatred against the 'other'. It also entrenches the leadership, viewed as the warrior chieftains whether they actually exhibit any 'bravery' or not – in the sense incur any personal risks or not.

<sup>70</sup>Savarkar attempted to develop an ideology with a philosophical base leading to a worldview. The RSS itself had to dilute this into some operative principles – of vanity and hatred. That is precisely why *Hindutva* for the *Sangh Parivar* is a confusing concept reducible to *Hindu Rashtra* (Hindu Nation – that actually encompasses a Hindu Nation-State). For offshoots like *Bajrang Dal* and VHP as well as parallel organisations like *Shiv Sena* it is further reduced to xenophobia and calls for bloody Hindu supremacy. This disjunction between the philosophical-ideological core and the operative slogans is no surprise. The street organisations – Storm Troopers – do not need any nuanced thought, even fascist thought. They in fact cannot handle thought at all.

The riots invariably invoke some repression by the state. The state always controls the riots after some time. The re-establishment of law and order always involves use of force by the state – however small or unwilling that may be. If nothing else, it means arrests, the usual rough treatment in police custody, court cases, and threats of conviction with possible severe penalties. The organisations increase their hold over the supporters and particularly the lowest level activists by seemingly defending them against these repressive measures of the state. These may range from providing bails, securing release from custody at the local level, or negotiating withdrawal of cases at a higher level while the organisation (or more correctly the leadership) reaches compromises with the rulers. This is an exhibition of the power of the leadership.<sup>71</sup> These organisations hence also collapse quite rapidly. In fact, they grow only when the state is soft towards them and has at least a tacit understanding of tolerance with the leadership. They can survive neither determined ideological nor physical opposition.<sup>72</sup>

### 03. Capital and fascism

The quest for modernisation also has a dual attitude towards capitalism. On the one hand, there is an impatient haste for capitalist development and industrialisation. On the other hand, there is unease about capitalism – and more importantly the attendant value systems. Fascism resents the values particularly associated with the phase of liberal, competitive, emergent, ascendant capitalism – the principles and values championed by the bourgeois revolutions. Many of these are complete antitheses of fascism. Fascists, it is no surprise, hated the French Revolution and all it represented and championed. Fascism wanted to undo the French Revolution – and what the French Revolution achieved. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity are anathema to the fascists. (It obviously wanted to smash the Bolshevik Revolution too.)

The notions of social contract, democracy, rule of law, binding constitutions, and checks-and-balances, limitations of state power,

<sup>71</sup>Such Storm Trooper organisations rapidly disintegrate if the action is absent, if the organisation shows 'cowardice', if the leaders are not able to extend the patronage and protection, if the repression is determined, or if the 'other' puts up frighteningly determined resistance.

<sup>72</sup>Many analysts have claimed that anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat is a steady source of income through loot or extortion, of socially legitimised physical violence and rape, of social acceptance and recognition of nasty sociopaths, of establishment of petty criminal fiefdoms.

individual rights, and fundamental freedoms irk fascism. Fascism characteristically desires the industrial progress and the riches derived from a capitalist system but it abhors the elements of democracy and individual freedom associated with it (associated, at least in theory, at least at an abstract level). It thus simultaneously clamours for rapid modernisation and attacks modernisation as the destroyer of the soul of the chosen people. In its attack on capitalism then it often utilises populist – even workerist idiom. It at times articulates the real grievances of the excluded in capitalism. At times, it decries disparity, uneven and imbalanced development, increasing misery of certain sections.

In practice, the concrete stances depend on particular situations. In Italy, the fascists wanted rapid industrialisation and capitalist development – the modernisation of Italy. In Germany, the Nazis did want industrial strength but were contemptuous of the capitalists to some extent. They also attempted to win the workers away from the communists by advocating protection of workers' rights (though on some conditions). A fascist regime allows a fairly free hand to capital. The notion of totalitarian strong state in control of every aspect of life however means that the operations are not as free as in a pure market driven economy. The market and capital are always secondary to the fascist state that alone represents the 'will of the nation'. There may be a close alliance between the fascist organisations and capital but the state increasingly united with the fascist party reserves ultimate control.<sup>73</sup>

Classically capital utilised fascism to destroy the might of trade unions, of workers' revolutionary movements (specifically the communist movements), and to exercise total power and control over labour. It was ready to pay the price of some curbs on democratic and civil liberties to avert and abort a revolution. It chose this path when it felt that the state could not deliver these results through a constitutional path. The mandate of the *Shiv Sena* in Mumbai, it is well known, was to destroy the trade unions, particularly those controlled by the communists.

<sup>73</sup>This poses some questions about the character of fascism in the era of globalization and neo-liberalism. In an age of total rule of markets and international capital with strict limits on the roles and functions of the state classical fascist command of the economy seems a difficult proposition. The virtual disappearance of 'national' capital also means that there can be no *natural capitalist* allies of fascism. The capital of today moreover is dependent on the service sector, speculation, volatile operations in the financial markets at a trans-national level, and consumerism. These activities need certain freedom of operation and social milieu. This may make the emergence of a fascist state difficult. These factors do not however deny the existence or strength of a fascist movement/ organisation.

Widespread communal violence in the nineties also played a peculiar role. It created a situation of extreme urgency with cataclysmic possibilities. The priority then (for the progressive elements) was to stop the violence, establish peace, and restore communal harmony. The communal frenzy affected the mass organisations too in many cases. In Mumbai, for example, the 1992-93 violence led to divisions amongst workers on communal lines in some establishments. The overall result was that the trade unions became weaker. The progressive forces concentrated – under force of circumstances – their attention on the single issue of defence of secularism. This also meant dilution – at least in practice – of the resistance to economic changes that were already under way. The rulers pushed through economic reforms in the situation of virtually no effective opposition.<sup>74</sup> The virtual dispersal of the organised working class and a substantial weakening of its organisations occurred in these circumstances.<sup>75</sup> The dispersal of the working class meant the reduction of its social and political significance and weight. This aspect certainly contributes a factor towards the emergence or further strengthening and penetration of fascist forces. Fascism however has another ambiguous relationship with capitalism. This is a little difficult to notice and more so to understand/ explain.

Fascism is emphatically opposed to socialism – to any notions of social ownership of means of production or of workers' control of the economy. It defends individual enterprise and entrepreneurship, private ownership, private profit and accumulation, individual superiority, right of 'the capable' to control economic power.<sup>76</sup> It has no critique of the

<sup>74</sup>Paradoxically this leads to a situation of numerical strengthening of the constituency of fascism.

<sup>75</sup>Strangely enough, a section of the *Sangh Parivar* attempted to defend its traditional constituency of 'national' capital. The *Swadeshi Jagaran Manch* (loosely Native Awakening Forum) – a formation related to the RSS raised voice against the incursion of foreign capital and demanded a 'level playing field' if not privileges for 'national' capital. The capital they defended was largely mercantile, backward industrial. The opposition too was xenophobic – identifying capitalists on an ethnic basis. The Left unfortunately failed to distinguish itself from this position very clearly at least in popular perception. Opposition to the contemporary phase of capitalism collapsed into economic nationalism under the guise of anti-imperialism. A clear Left perspective on the issues is coming to the fore only in 2005. This too is so far defensive – and does not propose an alternative path of development – even within the capitalist framework. It obviously requires further nuanced detailing.

<sup>76</sup>This is quite in keeping with the basic thinking of the fascists. They have contempt for the weak – social and physical. They do not even consider them fit to survive. The power and domination of the stronger is *natural* and *good*! The weak, those who have not seized power and control, those who are oppressed, to the fascists, deserve their status. The fascists would consider any measures to grant them any modicum of participation or any share in decision-making power disastrous and unnatural. The rule of capital too then is natural! The hatred towards migrants and aliens also flows from this position.

basic principles of capitalism. Ideologically it always posits socialism-communism as the enemy. In India too the RSS while it heaps abuses on 'minority appeasers' and 'pseudo-secularists' repeatedly declares that the real and fundamental enemy of Hindutva is the Left. Nevertheless, the fascists at times criticise capital and insist on justice to the working people. There is no notion of the rights of the workers, except in words at times under compulsions of competitive mass parliamentary politics. The fascist pose is that they would obtain the just payments for the workers. Fascism also criticises capital for being wasteful, inefficient, selfish, and myopic. In Italy and in Germany they targeted capital in this manner.

A far more significant critique is the cultural critique of capital. Fascism abhors liberalism and individual freedom. It sees capitalism as the system that promotes both these values. It is hence severe on the decadence of capitalism. The cultural decadence and the openness of the society are condemned and damned. Fascism accepts capitalism as an economic system but hates its political and social attitudes – even the ones that remain on paper. The criticism encompasses the family structures capitalism promotes as well as its attitudes towards relationships between genders – social and personal. In theory, fascism has a quasi-puritanical attitude towards sexuality and sex. (The practice has always been at variance with this theoretical attitude.) It frowns at any but heterosexual marital reproductive sexuality and posits a male-dominated, sexist, patriarchal norm for the society.<sup>77</sup> The very idea of women's sexuality also terrorises the fascists. The sexism borders on misogyny. The condemned decadence of capitalism includes the openness towards all these attitudes.<sup>78</sup>

The relationship between capital and fascism is to say the least complex. An obvious fact is that fascism is a product of modern age – of the age of capital. The economic system of fascism is capitalism. Moreover, it requires mass society and mass politics to come into existence. It is an enemy of open democratic society and polity and yet paradoxically can emerge only in such a society. It can lay any claims to power only in societies that do not restrict such claims and treat all

<sup>77</sup>Fascism persecuted homosexuals though the incidence of homosexuality within the Nazi ranks was not insignificant.

<sup>78</sup>Susan Sontag has very interesting and perceptive views on sexuality and fascism – particularly its relationship with female sexuality. (See Sontag, Susan; *Fascinating Fascism* in **Under the Sign of Saturn**; Vintage, Random House, UK; 1996 – first published in the US in 1980; the particular essay is dated 1974.)

citizens as equal. Fascism – if it seizes power destroys democracy and the republic in spirit if not in letter but arises only in a democratic republic.

The fact that fascism is a product and occurrence of the age of modernity and capital does not mean that fascism is the ideology, politics, and regime of choice for capital in all situations and all phases.<sup>79</sup> The price that the fascist regime exacts from even capital is too high in situations that do not force the regime on to capital for survival. It is a regime and political solution of the last resort – when the very existence of capitalist rule faces a threat – through possibility of a proletarian revolution – or similar social upsurges.<sup>80</sup>

The fascist regime may be exceptional – an extraordinary response to an extraordinary situation by capital – the fascist organisation and ideology is not. Even logic dictates that it has to predate the regime and be ‘in place’ for the opportune moment when it may become necessary. This is not to believe in a conspiracy theory of history – some so called secularists currently impart a supra-historical and supra-natural consciousness to the RSS – as if it knew exactly what would happen when! This view (apart from being alarmist and illogical) is ridiculous. The RSS floundered for decades – and does so again!

Capitalism has changed since the period of classical fascism quite considerably. The change in the past two decades is quite rapid, extensive, and intensive. Technological revolutions have taken place and more loom on the horizon. The technological changes made possible sweeping changes in the organisation of labour process, in organisation of production, in the nature of operations of capital itself.

<sup>79</sup>It has become fashionable partly to consider many regimes – Thatcher, Reagan, and Bush-Blair as fascist. These regimes may have authoritarian traits. They may violate many democratic and human rights. They may seek international domination. They may even be continuously in search of wars. In many other respects, they differ from fascism. In the first instance, they are not mass movements. They do not aim at any radical alteration of the nature of the state and society. They are not closed xenophobic regimes – and certainly cannot model the society on those lines. Not all imperialism is fascism – though the brutalities may seem quite comparable. A section of opinion in the USA too has held the Bush regime to be adventurist/fascist without truly arguing the point.

<sup>80</sup> Some recent work tends to show that fascism was actively promoted by at least a section of capitalists – in both Italy and Germany – see for example **Radical Perspectives on the Rise of Fascism in Germany, 1919-1945** (ED: Michael N Dobkowski & Isidor Wallimann), Cornerstone Publications, Kharagpur, India, December 2003. There is no need to dispute these facts. Even in India, reportedly specific business houses financed the murder of the Mahatma, most violence (anti-communist in particular) of the *Shiv Sena*, violent actions of the VHP and *Bajrang Dal* (here the NRI capital was more though not exclusively involved).

Dead labour now dominates living labour and the necessity of labour changes completely. In the age of global capital the extent and intensity of the technological and social changes is uneven and heterogeneous. Nevertheless, no corner of the world remains immune to the changes.

The socio-political changes brought about by these technical-economic changes are of tremendous significance. The emphasis of the operations of capital has changed from manufacture to finance, from production to services, from producer to consumer. Technically the world today has the capacity to fulfil the needs of the entire population and simultaneously to free human kind from all manners of drudgery. The socio-political impacts are, however, quite different. The working class gets demobilised and devalued. Capital no longer needs workers in ever-larger numbers. In fact, the need for workers declines across economies and countries. Temporarily the white-collar workers dominate the scene. Ultimately, they too face demobilisation and unemployment. The organisations, social weight, political significance of the working class also decline as a result. Apparently, capital has at last overcome the threat of working class revolution. The social and ideological significance of this development is tremendous. The social compact between capital and labour dissolves and there is a marginalisation of the working class. Socialist thought seems to lose its material base. All worldviews that champion egalitarianism and social responsibility face an eclipse. The aggressive new middle class acting as the most ardent mouthpiece of capital wishes to oust the toilers from the society totally. It advocates policies that could result in further impoverishment and greater deprivation of the toilers – with no social responsibility for the amelioration of the conditions. In a certain sense, capital declares this population as surplus to the ‘civil society’ and can only hope for its extinction.

Obviously, the basic contradictions of capitalism do not disappear. Only the nature of their manifestation has changed. Global capitalism of course continues to face the problems of fierce competition, economic cannibalism, and insecurity inherent to speculative operations. These are not the only problems. The exclusion of vast numbers – majorities in most countries - from secure economic/livelihood activities and their subsequent destitution itself creates a massive problem. Such a mass may feel despondent and helpless today but is unlikely to be permanently quiescent. Its discontent poses greater threats than even organised revolutions. The discontent is unfocussed, unclear, and

without a definite enemy. This discontent is likely to take one of the two paths.

It may erupt in unfocussed and chaotic bouts of public violence without any definite agenda. These eruptions of rage are already quite common and occur in varied places for varied reasons – some quite quixotic. They take various forms – from anti-state or anti-capital violence to caste and communal violence. Sometimes the frenzy is against any and everything – there have been incidents of mob attacks on hospitals because of deaths of some patients. Such violence may create ‘law and order’ problems or disturb peace and normal life in specific areas for some time but does not really challenge the system in any fundamental manner. Sometimes the violent outbreaks seem ‘choreographed’. A sudden bout of mass violence occurs even over some very specific, local grievance. The administration until then indifferent to the plight of the people then seems to suddenly wake up and redress the issue. It almost seems that the only way to attract serious attention of the officialdom and evoke action is to have controlled violent incidents. These incidents, however, disrupt normal activities often fundamental to the operations of capital.

The second path is of more sustained ideologically motivated mass phenomena. In the past couple of decades, these have strong fascist character. The activities range from aggressive public celebrations and rituals to acts of violence. The two closely relate to each other. The VHP and *Bajrang Dal* routinely but demonstratively organise trident distribution ceremonies that resemble initiation rituals of some nefarious cult. These precisely are the hordes that perpetrated the Gujarat Carnage. These gangs have attacked any number of places of worship – Muslim and Christian. They have also killed priests and raped nuns. The idea is not perhaps to ‘achieve’ anything but to create a general atmosphere of instability and continuous conflict.

These activities also create some conflict of interest with capital – particularly in the contemporary phase. The orgies of rioting and violence may serve as safety valves to let off steam and to keep the discontent, resentment, and anger unfocussed. The riots actually keep the more aggressive elements in some check – with ‘legitimate’ avenues of violence, looting, even rape. However, the disruption of civil life and communications has numerous ‘undesirable’ effects. Critical supplies may be affected, commerce interrupted, and stock markets may become volatile. These are lifelines of contemporary capitalism. It needs peace

and order with illusions of continuous prosperity as well as indulgences in consumerism to survive and expand. This vision is obviously neither homogenous nor uniform. Some capitalists support the fascist organisations and finance them. Panic sales – reportedly by Gujarati NRI investors – caused the sudden swings in the share markets after the defeat of the BJP in the parliamentary elections of 2004. There is some speculation that the action may not have been very innocent. [The ex-defence minister and ‘socialist’ militant did appeal to all and sundry at that stage to subvert the constitution and prevent any *Congress* government particularly one headed by Mrs Sonia Gandhi to take the reins. He appealed also to the chiefs of defence staff to act (through a military coup?) to ensure that no such government became possible]. The leaders of big business have not favoured such violence. Their stances are obviously opportunist. Nevertheless, there is a general (at least mild) opposition to totalitarian and authoritarian regimes since they affect the markets adversely.

Even at a basic level, the fascist stance towards capital is and has been somewhat contradictory even during the classical period. This was particularly evident in Italy. The fascists under Mussolini actually talked of a third path of development – neither socialist nor capitalist. The state (obviously merged with the Fascist Party) was to lead the development. It was to ensure production-productivity-efficiency-profitability and just wages as well as production necessary to the nation and the society. The economics of the fascist state was to be of this ‘third path’ that would allow private ownership but presumably not unrestrained private control of economic operations. The war situation in practice did lead to continued private corporate profiteering but the state dictated the operations of the corporations.

It is obvious that at different periods different sections of capital – actually groups of capitalists – collaborate with fascism. The reasons are varied. Some may do so out of individual ideological conviction while others as political expediency. In Germany and Italy, in the period of classical fascism, the fear of capital was of a proletarian revolution. Numerous analysts insist that this drove capital either to create the fascist movement or to support it. The former contention is highly inadequate at best. Fascist thought – even organisations – predate the First World War. This is not to deny at all that certain objective conditions increase the attraction of and support for fascism. In some situations, particular sections of capital would consider fascism an attractive alternative to

democracy – especially when it commands a sizeable mass following. The period after the First World War in both Italy and Germany – with the spectre of the Bolshevik Revolution and the continued existence of the Bolshevik regime; economic deterioration, political instability, inability of the traditional parties of capital to command legitimacy or even to properly govern the country, the increased strength of the trade unions, the militancy of the working class, advance of the communist parties must have created tremendous insecurity and fear for capital as well as for significant sections of the middle class. Instability and inability to govern in such situations will be the key issues. It may not however be correct to imagine that fascism is the constant choice or strategy of capital – forever waiting to actualise itself. Obviously, detailed empirical study of the exact sections of capital that backed the fascists is necessary to make definite analytical statements.<sup>81</sup> It would be interesting to analyse for example whether all sections of capital supported fascism equally even within that period. In other words the differences – if any – within the capitalist class on the issue of fascism would indicate the nuances of the relationship between fascism and capital. It would also be instructive to examine the ‘popular’ concept that only monopoly or big capital supports fascism – principally for imperialist reasons. It would be further useful to examine whether fascism has any relationship with the conflict of interests and visions within the capitalist class.

Questions have been raised about the existence of a political economy of fascism. Many fascist readers of the classical period denied any material roots of culture and history. They did not think it was important to have a well worked out economic doctrine. A recent study claims that though the fascist state in Germany tried to be in control of economy and directed production, particularly during the war years, owners and controllers of enterprises did have certain autonomy and took numerous decisions themselves.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, the economic doctrine of fascism remains flexible and vague. It championed the cause

<sup>81</sup>There are numerous analyses of fascism that discuss the economic conditions of its rise as well as the role of capital. The exact nature of the factions of capital that supported fascism – and the reasons of this support – is not however easily available. Dobkowski and Walliman (already mentioned) is one such source. Beetham, David (Ed); **Marxists in face of Fascism: Writings by Marxists on Fascism from the inter-war period**; Manchester University Press, 1983 brings together various analyses by Marxists writers during the period of the rise of fascism.

<sup>82</sup>See the paper by Christoph Buccheim and Jonas Scherner of University of Mannheim, Germany; ‘The Role of Private Property in the Nazi Economy: The Case of Industry’ 2005. Also see the ‘The Political Economy’ of Fascism: Myth or Reality: or Myth and Reality’ (Work in Progress) by David Baker; University of Warwick, UK.. This is a paper presented at a seminar of Political Economy Research Centre, University of Sheffield; March 2005.

of ‘national’ capitalists and petty capitalists and placed the working of enterprises in great restraint. At times, the fascists advocated a near total isolation from world economic systems and called for economic autarky in the new nation to be born. The traditional middle class actively supported the fascists. It was probably taken up with the dream of autarky. The fascist regimes did not however implement this programme of self-sufficient economic isolation from the world capitalist system or markets.

The fascists spoke often of a third path of economic development and organisation – one that was neither capitalist nor communist. The essence of the third path was corporatism. Corporatism placed the economic command and direction in the hands of the fascist state but actual ownership and control of specific enterprises in the hands of capital. The state and capital were joined by state appointed bodies of workers in managing economic activity and enterprises. This partnership of state, capital, and labour is to constitute the third way or third path. Similar ‘partnership’ institutions are expected to exist in all spheres of economic activity. In Italy and Germany, the state also created institutions for welfare and entertainment of the workers that at least for some time did provide some actual (fringe) benefits to the workers in the fields of health, education, holidays, etc. The state pronounces the economic requirements of the nation, sets goals, and prices. The capitalists then take over the micro-management of the activity/enterprise to achieve the goals. The workers actually execute the work. The fascists actually believed that this was a just and efficient system for the nation. The goal in some ways was also self-sufficient isolation from the world economy and markets. There was thus an emphasis on economic autarky. The system seemed ideally suited for the period when the fascist states faced isolation in the international community or economic boycott or sanctions and later war economics with all activity directed towards the war effort.

In the contemporary era, the situation seems quite different from the ‘popular’ concept. The evidence in India also perhaps would lead to

<sup>83</sup>There is obviously certain opportunism in the support business houses extend to political formations. Often the donations are spread across the spectrum. The relative quantities would actually be interesting to study. This data is not available. Once upon a time business enterprises – as individual firms – could officially donate sums of money to political parties. These donations were then reflected in the annual reports of the companies. The donations are now unofficial and hence unknown. The task of uncovering support would have to rely on indirect evidence and sift through voluminous documentation. The donations – due to the omnibus opportunist nature mentioned above – were never very reliable indicators.

startlingly different conclusions.<sup>83</sup> A provocative hypothesis would be that fascism draws support only from certain sections of capital. This section is generally not involved in manufacture of general goods for general consumers but relies heavily on state patronage and is likely to gain the most in a period of militarisation. It perhaps thus is also the section that requires active and massive state patronage to survive and to dominate the economy. Further, it perhaps is a section that is unable to hold its own in a free competition (however manipulated by the markets), particularly of an international nature. It perhaps also is capital that is technologically and organisationally at least somewhat 'backward' and requires general inefficiency of the economic system. The Gujarat carnage evoked active responsive support neither from national capital located in Gujarat nor from Gujarati owned or controlled capital with national operations but from middle-level local capital that in some ways was quite moribund. Its economic practices too were fairly questionable and backward. The Gujarat example also shows that the fear was not of a working class revolution but of a general destabilising upsurge by lumpenised sections of the society. In the Indian case – extending in all probability to areas beyond Gujarat – another important factor is that fascism as an ideology and as an organisational alternative occupied spaces left vacant by the retreat of the working class – as a social entity, as a political force, as an organised force. The advance of communalism coincides with the advance of an ideology of assault on the working class. The dreams of post-industrial development fuel the rabidly anti-people ideology of the middle class that also wanted to lay sole claims to most resources – natural and human created.

The simple point again, is that the relationship between contemporary capitalism and contemporary fascism is complex and not at all linear or simple.

Many analysts currently relate the rising right wing authoritarianism in many countries – including India – to operations and policies of global capitalism. It is true that the 'globalisation' of Indian economy created the conditions that led to the rise of the *Sangh Parivar*. The destruction of survival/sustenance/subsistence economies, further marginalisation of the deprived sections of the populations, intensification of urban and rural poverty, erosion of workers' rights and organisations, curtailment of democratic rights – particularly those related to class struggles are common features in many 'developing' countries.

## Appendix 05:

### Global Capital and fascism

The advanced capitalist countries insist on the existence of formal democracy but not on the protection of substantive democracy. The interest very clearly is in market democracy. The democratic façade – in a very formal sense - is necessary to promote consumerism and consumerist culture. An authoritarian repressive regime may be very useful for reordering the economy or to change balance of social forces but it does not promote market booms – in capital, services, or consumer goods markets. A modicum of civil liberties is essential for these operations.

It is also true that authoritarian right wing movements based on ethnic or national chauvinism have arisen in many countries after the end of the cold war or rather after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In many countries, such forces have captured power.

The exact relationship between global capitalism and contemporary fascism needs to be analysed in some detail. That would require comparative studies of many countries, not attempted here. Some general features, however, need at least brief notice.

Today, fascist programmes – though transiently – seem to take root in developing countries that attempt to catch up with the global economy. The economic programme is non-revolutionary of fast growth and rapid 'development' – of creation of a corporatist culture, of suppression of class struggle, of a new enslavement of the working class. Typically these are countries with a large agricultural sector, relatively low development of industry (but with some industrial base), a vast pool of labour power (domination of living as against past/dead labour), low accumulation, a problem of poverty and unemployment, no assured foreign markets, an assertive national capital in a hurry to integrate with global economy while insisting on a due share to itself. This requires an unchallenged rule of capital to push through a number of policies that increase the misery and deprivation of the toiling masses. Invocation of

*national interest* and *national security* then create consent for coercion. Extreme nationalism – often based on xenophobia, frequently directed against specific ‘other’ becomes the ideology of these movements or regimes. In the absence of an internal ‘other’, obsessive concerns over national security play a similar role. Sometimes, the two may exist in combination.

These are definitely right wing authoritarian tendencies. They cannot however be classified as fascist. A number of these regimes have no mass backing. They are not ‘popular’ regimes. A number of them rely heavily on the support of the armed forces if they are not military dictatorships themselves. The national capital in many of these countries is quite weak. It is weak in economic terms as well as in its social and political weight. Hence, the regime itself represents the vision of the capitalist class almost vicariously. This vision thus represented has a heavy dose of the interests of global capital. Democratic institutions and processes in these countries may not face active destruction but far more so experience impediments in development and functioning. There is no active revolution from the right – armed or otherwise – in these countries.

The economic crisis in some of these countries is not a crisis of capitalism but brought on by inadequate transition to capitalism. The agenda of these regimes is not so much of reordering and reallocation of capital as of rapid accumulation.

These satellites of neo-imperialism hence can be termed reactionary, anti-democratic, right wing, authoritarian but not necessarily fascist or neo-fascist.

The Indian situation is markedly different. The *Sangh Parivar* as already discussed adequately shows distinct fascist tendencies in its organisation, programmes, ideology, and methods of operation. The failure of the fascists in India was their inability to launch a revolution from the right. The *Sangh Parivar* failed in this task because it could not overcome the traditional and modern divisions in the Indian society and create adequate social basis for such a transformation.

The policies pursued by the various authoritarian regimes in various countries are perfectly in keeping with the ideology of global capital. The various prescriptions of IMF and World Bank for example do demand withdrawal of the state from social welfare and social security

functions, curtailment of labour rights and unchecked play for market forces.

It is however difficult to link neo-liberalism as an ideology with fascism. There are in fact distinct contradictions in the neo-liberal ideological core and fascist formulations.

Neo-liberalism privileges processes over structures and considers market as the supreme process in society. The pursuit of markets also leads to trade unrelated to production – converting even unsubstantial or notional items into commodities – e.g. the trade in option over options. Neo-liberalism also denies the existence of or need of any normative utopia. In fact, the only structure that it puts up with – in practice if not in theory – is the nation and nation state, even an ethno-centric nation state. (This could be an area leading to softness and tolerance of fascism, in practice if not theory.)

Fascism on the other hand is obsessed with structures. It has strong dreams of a nation – its revival, resurgence, and domination of others. It also is emphatic about physical production.

The neo-fascists and the strategists of global capitalism agree totally on the violent and brutal suppression of people’s resistance and movements, particularly any class based revolutionary movements. The two however will differ substantively and with acrimony on the relationship between the party-state and the markets. Neo-liberalism views the market as the only force capable of ordering the society and stands firmly for no controls and impediments in the market processes. Fascism even as neo-fascism will demand total subjugation of the market to the party-state.

On this background, it is interesting to note that electoral reverses have thrown the BJP in particular and *Sangh Parivar* in general in an ideological and organisational chaos. Loss of power – and this was limited, governmental power – has led to unprecedented confusion and disorder in the ranks of the organisations. This was not expected. Obviously, the electoral defeat of the BJP led front in the national parliamentary elections and then in some of the state assembly elections does not mean the defeat of the *Sangh Parivar* or of its ideology even in its narrow communal incarnation. The danger presented by the RSS and its offshoots exists as a serious threat to the Indian republic, to

democracy, and to secularism. At present, however, despite all bravado, the *Sangh Parivar* seems a confused organisation. The delay in the realisation of dreams of total power and perhaps a realisation of the failure of the social project – of a neo-fascist *Hindu Rashtra* - has created the confusion. The BJP has even proved itself to be an ineffective opposition party. It never was a very effective mass political force except during the *Ram Janmabhoomi* campaign. Its tactics to stall the parliament all through on one pretext or the other have nullified its own role as a parliamentary opposition. This becomes a serious drawback when it is incapable of launching a mass movement anyway. This again is perhaps a neo-fascist, fascist trait. The fascists can only live on success. Reverses and defeats throw them into disarray. The core will of course survive and hold fast to the ideology but as a force, the *Parivar* itself may have to live on the periphery of the political sphere. In the recent past, the *Sangh Parivar* has indulged more in internal fights and squabbles than in any effective assault upon its ideological enemies – the *Left* and the Congress. For a fascist outfit this is not mere internal ideological or organisational struggle. The lack of homogeneity, coherence, and discipline disheartens its own supporters and social base. The iron single willed non-discordant image is one of the attractions that a fascist outfit holds out. If and when that begins to evaporate, the organisation may get into serious trouble.

Further, the change of regimes has made no difference to global capital. International capital has not flown out of the country following the electoral defeat of BJP nor has the inflow of foreign investments dried up. The investment indicators suggest that the regime did not matter very much to global capital. In fact, the Gujarat carnage had more impact. It did shake confidence and slow down the inflow. That state in particular did suffer and was unable to attract substantive new investment. Strenuous efforts by the state government and the passage of time may have changed the situation to some extent but it is certainly not the prime destination for capital. This would only strengthen the observation that fascism is not necessarily the regime of choice for global capitalism in developing countries.

The relationship between operations of global capital and fascism may also be very complex. Simplistic analyses may not reveal the true picture at all.

## 04. Nation and Nationalism

The fascists claim a monopoly over nationalism and patriotism. The assertion of nationalism is coupled with the accusation that no one else is nationalist enough. In fact, the fascists treat all other socio-political forces as anti-national traitors, at least to some degree. This nationalism or ultra-nationalism of the fascists forces a detailed and careful discussion of the concepts of nation, nationality, and nationalism. Particularly when fascism is strong enough to mount an ideological challenge, the understanding of these concepts often gets distorted at a popular level. The 'other' is always a suspect – and the nationalist fervour often fuels communalism (in the Indian situation) or racial violence (where that is an issue). More seriously, it can generate competitive ultra-nationalism in the social and political arena.<sup>84</sup>

Nationalism is a sensitive issue in most countries, as is nationality. It perhaps acquires more aggressive and strident articulation in countries that were till recently colonies. Their current status as developing countries adds to the complexity of the issue. The incomplete process of decolonisation combined with the invasion of the world markets produces a 'nationalist' defence reaction. This actually serves the backward indigenous ('national') capital but finds a popular mass cord – politically and culturally. The nationalist sentiments are not however features only of these countries. Despite increasing regional economic cooperation, nationalism is a strong force even in the developed industrialised capitalist countries.

A people sharing common territory, eco-system (or subsystem), language, culture, political economy (including production systems and markets), social system, and belief systems constitute a nationality. (At a pristine level, the territory will be demarcated by high mountains,

<sup>84</sup>Every 'other' is always projected as a community with dubious nationalism. The fascists always claim that only they – as the core authentic and legitimate community in the 'nation' as also an ideological organization – are nationalists without any question or qualification. All others are suspect at best and proven anti-nationals at worst. The communists are condemned because they espouse proletarian internationalism. The Muslims are suspect in India because of two reasons. The simple one is that all Indian Muslims are suspected of love and loyalty for Pakistan – interpreted as their true country. (The 'inconvenient' examples are cited as exceptions and held up as 'models' that all Muslims should emulate. "If all Muslims were like 'XYZ' we shall not have anything against them" is a common refrain of the *Sangh Parivar* as well as the SS.) More importantly, it is claimed that Islam does not believe in a nation and hence no Muslim can be a nationalist. All Muslims by this definition consider themselves only as members of a world Muslim/Islamic community. Obviously, this view claims that no Muslim can be a nationalist unless s/he abandons Islam.

impenetrable forests, or large water bodies that cannot be easily crossed). Such an entity will be essentially self-sufficient and thus closed. At a 'pure' level, such a group will be homogenous in terms of language and ethnic backgrounds and the differentiation will be only in terms of economic and hence social status. It is equally obvious that perhaps barring some relatively isolated groups (generally referred to as tribal or indigenous communities or in India as Adivasis) such pure nationalities or national communities do not exist anywhere. Such uniform, homogeneous national communities are then imaginary, fictional, mythical, and mystical. There is almost no historical evidence of their existence in such a form. The fascists evoke the myth of precisely such an imagined nationality or nation treating it as real, historical existent entity. The fascists define the 'us' and 'the other' – particularly the 'enemy other' – based on this mythical or imaginary nationality. *Fascism is not always associated with racism or with communalism but it is always associated with a fanatic attachment to this mythical nation. In fact, the fascist attachment is to the mythical nation as against the historical or real nation.* This also imparts to fascism the characteristic regressive retrograde element. Fascism does not necessarily seek to restore a pre-capitalist economic or social order. It does not necessarily wish to return to medieval traditions or ritual practices. *Fascism does seek to restore or rejuvenate the mythical nation and nationality.* This mythical nation by its very character, to the fascists, is a natural entity. As far as the nation is a natural entity – it is also not a concrete historical occurrence. Mussolini, in fact, averred that the nation was a myth that the fascists invented and used (Naples Speech mentioned earlier). Italy as a nation – not as an extension of Rome but as a modern nation state – came into being only in the nineteenth century. Germany too emerged as a nation state only in 1870. The Italian Fascists and German Nazis nevertheless spoke of the Italian and German nations as if they were eternally in existence. The RSS speaks of India (or *Bharatvarsha*) with sub-continental boundaries (and more too) as if it existed thus as a nation for millennia.<sup>85</sup> The German nation visualised by the fascists was free of the territorial and political boundaries of the period. All 'pure' German people were part of the German nation – wherever they resided. The German claim to various lands in other nations was based on the contention that 'pure' Germans resided in these lands. The unification of the German people – the 'pure' ones of course – was considered a legitimate aim. At the same time, the 'non-pure' residents of the German nation were considered

alien intruders who had no right to be there. This is quite clearly a racial definition of nation and nationality. Common gene pool or blood, culture, traditions, customs, and history are the characteristics and criteria of this nationality. This peculiar ultra-nationalism provided the justification of Nazi aggressions, wars, and crimes against humanity. Fascist Italy saw itself as the continuation and extension of the Roman Empire. It then claimed 'legitimate' rights to colonise any countries it desired. The 'conquest' of Ethiopia was the resumption of the imperial campaigns of the Roman Empire. Not only the Fascists but also a large number of ordinary Italian citizens saw the conquest as their due and a proud achievement.

The RSS and the *Sangh Parivar* have always refused to accept existing India as the nation of their dreams. They always talk of an *Akhand Bharat* (complete, undivided, or indivisible *Bharat*). In the narrow and immediate sense, this entity is to overcome and undo the partition of the country that occurred in 1947.<sup>86</sup> The cancellation of the partition means to them only the destruction of Pakistan and Bangladesh as separate nation states and annexation or assimilation of their territory. The territory is coveted but the people of these countries – the Muslim population – are not welcome, definitely not as full or equal citizens. The plans for these people are never spelt out but are not difficult to guess. In this *Akhand Bharat*, the Muslims will be second-class subjugated citizens or be driven out as stateless people. The dream of *Akhand Bharat* does not rest here. It creates a mythical geography of 'original' *Bharat* or the land of the *Aryan Hindus* – that includes territories from other neighbouring countries including Afghanistan.

The strange case is that of the Zionists. The movement gained

<sup>85</sup>There is enough historical evidence to indicate that the sub-continent did not consider itself a nation or nationality at all. There were in the first instance ethno-linguistic and cultural differences. Secondly, even the geographic distinctions mattered. A beloved concept of the *Sangh Parivar* is *Hindustan as the land of the Hindus* – despite the 'alien' origins of the sobriquet. Not all Indians felt they belonged to *Hindustan*. A letter of the Peshawa (quoted in a well documented and researched Marathi novel ***Chambalechya Palikade*** on the life of Mahadji Shinde [Scindia]) in late 18th century asks of Mahadji Shinde why he had not yet invaded *Hindustan* that year to collect tribute. The implication obviously being that the base of the Peshawa rule was *Deccan and Hindustan* was not his country.

<sup>86</sup>Kumar Ketkar, the editor of ***Loksatta*** – the Marathi sister publication of *The India Express* writing on the Partition on August 12, 2006 points out an obvious but interesting fact. The Partition he argues was of British administered India – and not of any pre-existing nation. The sentiment of Indian nationalism too was built during the period of British rule – through the Independence Movement. He also argues that world history shows that neither race nor religion become the sole basis of nation states in the modern world.

strength and sympathy from most quarters of the world in face of the pogroms unleashed against them in some countries of Europe. The quest for a homeland for a people without a nation began and became significant due to the atrocities they faced continuously. The inhumanity of the 'final solution' and the holocaust lent justification to the quest. Quite strangely, the victims of the Nazi holocaust also harboured dreams of a mythical nation – that was not a historical memory but scriptural descriptions separated by two millennia. The political solution worked out by the international community did not satisfy the Zionists. The Zionists lay claim to varied territories based on what are essentially mythology and mythical conceptions of the homeland of the Jews. It is true that not all Jews, and not all Israelis, support the policy of the state of Israel. A significant number are opposed to the arrogant adventurist belligerence of the Israeli state. Nevertheless, a significant number of Israelis in words and action support almost the same kind of state as the one that perpetrated the holocaust upon them. Israel remains a militarist state with a state-of-war economy and a permanent state-of-war social system. It remains a proud sub-imperialist power whose sole aim seems to be waging a war against the Arab neighbours. It too perpetrates atrocities akin to genocide against weaker, poorer, and often helpless elements. It too utilises the same logic of holding an entire people and an entire community responsible for the acts of some elements. It too metes out inhuman punishment to essentially unarmed non-combatant civilians because they are soft targets. In addition, it has the dubious distinction of being the only movement actually to realise the dream of the rebirth of a mythical nation, including the rejuvenation of a dead language. The geo-politics and political economy of the region allows it to utilise astutely its client state status and continue to perpetrate this state of affairs. In their military arrogance, the leaders of Israel – perhaps the current worst enemies of the common people of Jewish origin – do not realise that this permanent-state-of-war state and society cannot ever be a permanent situation.<sup>87</sup> In a strange way, the rulers of Israel have totally internalised the fascist thought process and created perhaps the most successful fascist regime that even Hitler would envy.

The real (as opposed to mythical) nation is, of course, a historical entity. It arises only at a certain juncture of social and economic development. The nation state is historically a modern phenomenon of the capitalist age. The medieval state had no real logic except military conquest. The borders were flexible and ever changing. The basis was

the military might of the ruler. The common subjects too had no real reason to feel any sense of belonging to a particular kingdom. The attachment (often defensive) may have been to an immediate region or group. Linguistic, ethnic, and religious identities could create bonds – particularly in face of 'alien' aggressions or rule. The functions of the state were also far different from the ones of a modern nation state. The immediate overlord would matter in such a case – but not the remote king or emperor. The notional belonging to a kingdom did not affect the day-to-day lives of the common people – peasants or artisans. In such situations nationalism as understood now does not really exist at a popular level. The rulers at times carried out some public benefit works and provided some relief in times of calamities. These were not duties or obligations – though good rulers were supposed to be paternalistic to the subjects and to provide a modicum of justice. There could be no nationalism in such circumstances – the belonging was either accidental or forced. The feeling of membership was to a nationality defined in ethno-linguistic terms and that too perhaps in the immediate neighbourhood. Strangely, the nation the fascists dream of is a version of this medieval nation – and not the modern territorial nation state.

The discussion on nation and nationalism is important for many reasons. The chief amongst these is the importance fascism lays to nationalism. If there is one ideological element in fascism that is conveyed to and embraced by the rank and file, it is nationalism.<sup>88</sup> Major analysts of fascism like Roger Griffin and Mark Neocleous emphasise that nationalism is a distinguishing feature of fascism. Griffin includes it in his definition of generic fascism, fascist minimum, and fascist matrix.<sup>89</sup> Griffin and Neocleous are somewhat cautious and often use the term ultra-nationalism. Jairas Banaji squarely poses nationalism as the core of fascism<sup>90</sup> and opposes it to democracy.

<sup>87</sup>The brutal suppression of the Palestinian people probably gave rise to the phenomenon of international terrorism – another proud 'achievement' of the state of Israel.

<sup>88</sup>It is perhaps essential to add immediately that the nationalism of the fascists is exclusivist, ethnocentric, chauvinist, xenophobic, expansionist, militarist, and jingoist.

<sup>89</sup>Griffin in his article in the msn Encarta encyclopaedia makes this point quite clearly. The point is discussed in greater detail in *The Palingenic Core of Generic Fascist Ideology*; a Chapter published in Alessandro Campi (ed.), *Che cos'è il fascismo? Interpretazioni e prospettive di ricerche*, Ideazione editrice, Roma, 2003, pp. 97-122. In fact most of his writings bring out two aspects of fascism – that it is a revolution and that its core is palingenic nationalism. Mark Neocleous in his book **Fascism** (Concepts in Social Sciences – Series); Open University Press; Buckingham, U.K.: 1997 titles a chapter 'First I Became a Nationalist' using a quote from Hitler's **Mein Kampf**.

<sup>90</sup>Jairas Banaji, *Political Culture of fascism*; quoted earlier.

The stigma attached to the ultra-nationalism of the fascists often reflects upon nationalism per se. This sometimes creates some confusion about the understanding of imperialism – and in the present circumstances about hegemonic corporate globalisation. The anti-imperialist struggle historically has based itself on nationalism. Imperialist exploitation and oppression is based not only on economic (market) operations of (trans-national) corporations but also on the political and often military actions of the nation state of the home country – USA and UK in the main today. It is now well known that conglomerates of trans-national corporations operating through the American and British (and some other European) states virtually dictate international treaties and conventions.<sup>91</sup> The reasons for the imperialist wars in West Asia also are linked to the economics of oil. Here the economic interests of the corporations are actualised by nation states acting in the name of national interests and national security. In fact, the interests of a set of corporations are interpreted as the interests of the nation.<sup>92</sup> The imperial nation states obviously subjugate other nations. The conflict then necessarily takes the form of *national struggles*. These can neither be wished away nor condemned because the form they take is 'national'. Proletarian internationalism is not even a strong ideology today. No real anti-imperialist struggles do or can take place as international struggles. In such a situation, nationalism becomes also a defensive position. It is true that all nationalism can slip into national chauvinism. The crux however is not the form of nationalism but the content of the nationalism. To consider all nationalism as fascist or proto-fascist may not be valid.

Human beings are social beings. The social nature is neither hypothetical nor imaginary. It is a concrete reality seen in actual relations of human beings. A person feels ease and comfort in interactions with other people who speak the same language, inhabit the same familiar (not notional but actually frequently traversed) territory, share similar cultural practices, food habits, and styles of living. This ease creates a sense of identification with and attachment to this immediate concrete and real society and the area it inhabits. This is a concrete sensuous bond that facilitates easy interactions of both contradiction and cooperation. This bond may constitute a community.

<sup>91</sup> See the instances cited by C T Kurien in **Global Capitalism and the Indian Economy**; Orient Longman, Delhi; 1994. B.FaK2

<sup>92</sup> The slogan "what is good for General Motors is good for America" immediately comes to mind.

This community is not necessarily held to be superior to all others, eternal, and virtuous. It is seen in human terms, with strengths and limitations, with good and bad points, with achievements and failures. It is seen as humanly contradictory. No natural rights to subjugate others are ascribed to such a community. It may only be jealously defensive about the resources critical for its existence and life practices.

Nationalism as fascist ideology (or versions resembling it) is quite different from such a concrete, real, sensuous, practical bond. It is an ideology about an entity that is not concretely experienced but notionally constructed. It also ascribes to the nation qualities that are imaginary and unreal. This nation is also held to be eternal and inviolable. No changes with regard to this nation are ever allowed in the ideology of nationalism. This imagined nation is also highly competitive and ever attempting to prove its superiority over others – in the last instance militarily. This nation and nationalism is also projected as a pure entity ultimately in ethnic terms. The individual in such a nation is also subordinate to the nation. Such nationalism rarely attaches itself to the modern nation state – which is the creation of conscious thought based on common interests and convenience that are always subject to alteration. It invariably attaches itself to an ethno-centric notion of the nation that is beyond reason, dispute, and negotiated creation.

What therefore is necessary is to understand the nature of fascist nationalism – including its dreams of palingenesis.<sup>93</sup>

One needs to hardly state that the modern nation state – even in the age of globalisation – has an economic and political logic of existence. Membership of the nation is at least in theory voluntary for a region or a group. (In many cases, right to cessation or self-determination may be a part of the constitution.) The modern nation state is also – at least in the ideal form – a democratic republic. Most nation states also proclaim equality of citizens before the law. There is no discrimination in law based on birth among citizens. Gender, ethnicity, caste, religion, language thus are not criteria for any differentiation amongst citizens of

<sup>93</sup> The best discussion on palingenesis is by Roger Griffin. See his '*The palingenetic core of generic fascist ideology*' in Alessandro Campi (ed) **Che cose il fascismo? Interpretazioni e prospettive di ricerca**; Ideazione editrice; Rome, 2003 or '*Revolution from the Right: Fascism*' in David Parker (ed) **Revolutions and the Revolutionary Tradition in the West 1560-1991**; Routledge; London, 2000. It must be added that Griffin does not describe the fascist nation as 'mythical' nation anywhere; nor does he contrast it with the real, historical nation.

a nation – in at least the formal organised public spheres. The discrimination actually takes place in the sphere of civil society. The modern nation state – barring some affirmative action designed to remove traditional discrimination – does not differentiate between citizens on this basis. (The civil society often continues to do so, particularly in the realm of economic opportunities.) The modern nation state (and national society) is thus often heterogeneous and pluralist. The national culture too is syncretic. All people, communities, and groups staying within the national territorial boundaries become equal citizens of the nation state, and share common nationality defined by the commonalities within that territory. This is a complex relationship where different ethnic, religious, or linguistic groups inhabit the same territory and subscribe to the same nation. The different identities are maintained – often jealously. Equal claims are however made on the material and cultural resources of the nation – including full belonging. The nation state may often be federal in character (in principle or practice or both). In such a case, there is clear devolution of powers (of administrative decision-making) to the states or provinces that constitute the federation. The extent of autonomy may differ in different nation states but broadly, the only areas reserved for the central or federal government are currency, defence, and foreign policy. Other areas either are the preserves of the states / provinces or are jointly administered by the federal and provincial governments. The relationship is complex because the membership of the nation state is in principal and historically voluntary and is dependent on an equal (proportional) distribution of resources and equal (proportional) access to opportunities. The material and cultural claims on the nation of the various groups are equal. The nationalism associated with this nation is not a divine right – it is historical: evolved based on a process of creation of the nation ('nation building') or of an anti-imperialist or anti-colonial struggle. The nationality is neither racial nor religious. It is territorial and material.<sup>94</sup> In so far as nation states and nationalisms exist – territorial nationalism too has an element of politics of identity. It is not necessarily expansionist or militarist by definition or innate characteristic. (Though it can certainly become that in certain conditions – when there is competition with other nation states over resources, markets, spheres of influence {specifically economic influence} and sometimes territory.) In

other words, this is not a racial or religious nationalism but basically an economic nationalism. In so far as it is an economic nationalism, it is open to different interpretations and disputes based on class positions and conflicts.<sup>95</sup>

The fascists sing paeans to a territory but interpret it usually in a non-human way. The territory is described in its natural elements (mountains, rivers, etc.) and in a holy or divine manner. It is almost the sacred land for them. The sacred territory is not the actual historically constituted modern nation but a holy ancestral land of mystical powers.<sup>96</sup> The fatherland for the Nazis was a mystical and holy land to which the 'pure' German had divine and inviolable rights – and more importantly, no other people had any such rights or claims. Savarkar in India also sees the land – Bharatvarsha – as the holy land (*punya-bhoomi*) and in contrast to the popular usage till then as the 'fatherland'. He is perhaps the only one not to describe it as the *motherland* but as the *fatherland*. The latter word is quite uncommon in most Indian languages (*matru-bhoomi* vs *pitru-*

<sup>94</sup>Talcot Parsons in his "Some Sociological Aspects of the Fascist Movements" published in **Social Forces**, Vol XXI; December 1942 and appearing as a lengthy excerpt in William Ebenstein (Ed) **Modern Political Thought: The Great Issues**; Oxford & IBH Publishing Co., New Delhi; 1970/ 1974 argues that nationalism is a modern phenomenon and constitutes a rationalizing element (as opposed to the traditionalising one) in society. The modern (capitalist) nation and nation state to him are rational constructions that represent a historical advance.

<sup>95</sup>For a discussion of the characteristics of the modern nation state and its evolution (but not necessarily the views stated above) see E. J. Hobsbawm; **Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality**; Cambridge University Press, UK: second edition 1992, reprint 2000 [B.Q15.H61]. Also see John Holloway & Sol Picciotto; **State and Capital: A Marxist.H Debate**; Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd., London. UK; 1978, reprint 1980. See particularly in this volume Claudia von Braunmuhl; *On the Analysis of the Bourgeois Nation State within the World Market Context*.

<sup>96</sup>This characteristic they share with the communities or people who are not yet largely a part of the capitalist process or of modernity. Such communities define the land as holy, sacred, and inviolable – an object of worship. The territory is then seen as the place of ancestors, residence of holy spirits, of departed souls. The process in this case is quite clear. These communities relate not to patches of land as bourgeois property but to a territory that embraces an entire eco-system that is critical for their survival, that is based not on even agricultural surplus but a system of sustenance. The explanation in these communities does not develop on the basis of the material understanding and hence acquires the 'spiritual' explanations. A lifestyle and social organisation strongly controlled by traditional roles and conventions without scientific investigations into conditions of existence is unlikely to utilise material, secular, scientific, rational ideological explanations. The necessity of the mountain or the river then makes them *holy* and *sacred*. The fascist interpretation is in this sense a throwback to the primitive understanding but for far different purposes.

*bhoomi*).<sup>97</sup> The fascists are contemptuous of territorial nationalism. The objection is not to the territory; in fact, they want more of it. The contempt is about the 'others' who also inhabit it and moreover demand rights as equal citizens. The Nazis very clearly declared all non-'pure' Germans (non-Aryans) as unworthy of any claims or rights in their Aryan nation. They sought to at first subjugate and disenfranchise them and ultimately to actually eliminate and eradicate them. Struggling to define Hindu, Savarkar ultimately settles on racial definition. He talks of history, tradition, and culture, religious belief, sense of belonging, etc. but finally arrives at 'blood' as the defining characteristic. He is prepared to accommodate the non-Hindu as some kind of a citizen in the new nation – but as a secondary citizen. He wishes to exclude those who do not emerge from the Hindu stock from certain spheres – the critical areas that affect the functioning of the federal state and government – the spheres of security forces, foreign policy, and perhaps major economic policies. The second head of the RSS, M. S. Golwalkar (popularly known as 'Guruji' in the *Sangh Parivar* circles) ridicules the idea of territorial nationalism in even stronger terms. In his writings, he expresses a fear that such territorial definition of nationalism will grant equal rights to the stones and rocks as well as animals within the geographical border of the nation.<sup>98</sup> The nationalism of the fascists is based on origin – essentially race. It is defined in India by the *Sangh Parivar* as Cultural Nationalism.

The dream of the fascist is the rebirth of the mythical nation of the pure people and the divine right of this nation to dominate, subjugate, and rule over all 'others'. The attitude towards the mythical nation is similar as the one towards the 'us'. The nation was once great – the

<sup>97</sup>Is this a mere different use of the word – or does it actually connote that the legacy and hence racial purity and nationalism is determined by the sperm not the womb? Savarkar perhaps does not explain the reasons of the change of terminology. It could also be based on the concept of 'ancestors' always used as forefathers – never with any reference to mothers.

<sup>98</sup>Savarkar was a prolific writer and all his works are available to the reader. The most significant work for some of the thoughts is *Hindutva*; Nagpur; 1923. Two short books by M. S. Golwalkar are significant, viz. **We or Our Nationhood Defined** and **Bunch of Thoughts**. S. H. Deshpande a pro-Hindutva scholar in his excellent review of *Hindutva* thought in **Savarkar te Bha.Ja.Pa.: Hindutva-Vicharacha Chikitsak Alekh** (Marathi); Rajhans; Pune; May 1992 provides the essence of the arguments of all significant Hindutva thinkers. Golwalkar's remark appears in his **Bunch of Thoughts** – available in Marathi as **Vichardhan** (cited earlier)

greatest in the world; its contribution to civilisation was incalculable; through various reasons it has now fallen upon bad times; it is now time that the nation was restored to its rightful glory and place in history. The reasons cited for the current unsatisfactory state of affairs are both internal and external. The nation became mentally and spiritually weak as it embraced dangerous, debilitating ideologies like tolerance, non-violence, liberalism, etc. (In India Buddhism is squarely blamed for these 'non-valiant' 'non-virile' ideas.) It lost its élan and its will to play its rightful role. External aggressions or alien intruders then sapped the strength of the nation even more. Hence, the nation needs to be reborn, renewed, rejuvenated. In the rebirth of the nation will be the renewal of the chosen people. The path is hard and demands sacrifice. Determination that weeds out the unwanted and polluting elements from within the chosen people and rebuilds the nation is necessary. A strong and decisive organisation and leadership alone can fulfil this task.

Italian Fascism mostly did not have an explicit strand of racial superiority or racial hatred (except for a brief period under the pressures of Nazi Germany). It did however believe strongly in the 'divine' and 'historical' right of Italy (as the continuation of the Roman Empire) to rule over other nations, to colonise and control other nations and people. The Cultural Nationalism of *Sangh Parivar* is clearly linked to *Hindutva* and to the superiority of the Hindu along with the natural right of the Hindu to dominate at least within a geographical area.

It is necessary to differentiate this nationalism and dream of resurgence of the mythical nation from national liberation and anti-imperialism, which are essentially defensive and not directed en masse against other nationalities. It is however also necessary to recognise that all nationalism as identity politics can lead to chauvinism and hence potentially to expansionism and dreams of national superiority with domination of other nations and nationalities. The current 'war on terror' has clearly acquired imperialist character with almost racial and religious justifications. The Muslim – though termed Islamic Jihadi Fundamentalist - is a suspect and a target. The ire is directed against the Arabs but not confined to them. The 'war on terror' it hardly needs to be said is fought in the name of democracy, freedom, progress, modernity, and above all national security!

## 05. Masses and Fascism

The various characteristics of fascism (and specifically the discussion above on relationship with capital, the necessity of the 'other', the permanence of conflict and violence, and the formulations on nation and nationalism) must not obscure one major feature of fascism. This feature is the mass character of fascism. Fascism differs from a number of other right wing, retrograde, reactionary organisational efforts by virtue of being a sustained mass movement. The classical fascist movements in Italy and Germany clearly showed this mass character. The fascist movements also did that in some other countries like Spain, France, and Britain.<sup>99</sup> In the Indian situation, one must remember that the SS was and remains even today - in the somewhat weakened condition - a mass party. The RSS - as argued earlier - acquired a truly fascist character only when it floated various fronts as mass organisations.<sup>100</sup>

Numerous questions of course arise. What kinds of people follow the fascists? What motivates them? What kind of attraction does fascism hold for these groups? Does the fascist constituency as a group gain anything from the fascist movement? What does it hope to gain

<sup>99</sup>This does not of course mean that the fascists commanded the loyalty or support of the majority of the population. In Italy, the opposition remained intact though for quite some years the Fascists perhaps did attract the support of a large section of the population. The same is true of the Nazi support in Germany. In Germany, terror and brutal physical elimination of all opposition and dissent perhaps played a significant role in the quietude of the majority. However, Hitler and the Nazis did enjoy popular support at different periods. Moreover, nationalism acquires very different characteristics in periods of actual war -in victory or in defeat. Even conscientious objection is put to rest at least temporarily where the popular interests and the interests of the nation state merge or appear to do so, at least temporarily. In Spain, there was a vigorous opposition to the fascist organisation and regime that could be crushed only with military action with the aid of other fascist nations. In Portugal, the fascists perhaps never enjoyed majority support but managed to neutralise the majority into acquiescence. In Britain and France, they were loud but never enjoyed the support of even a significant section.

<sup>100</sup>One other distinction must immediately be made. The fascists mobilise the masses through various means and multiple front organisations floated for the purpose. The fascist core organisation remains a cadre organisation. Its nature is not that of a mass organisation. The membership is selective. The members are highly indoctrinated and motivated persons dedicated and committed to specific duties and tasks assigned by the leadership. This core organisation is often paramilitary and is highly regimented. It is also a centralist organisation controlled by a central council that is not elected even by the dedicated cadre members. The rise of a member through the ranks is analogous to promotions and advancement in a military force/ establishment. This was true of the classical fascist parties and is true for the RSS as well. The other organisational structure, apart from an army, that the fascist core organisation resembles is a religious order.

anyway? How are the masses organised and mobilised? How much of a say do the masses have in policy formulation, organisational structure, strategy, and tactics of the fascist organisations? What is the view of the fascist leaders of the masses? What do the masses understand of the ideology and programme of the fascist organisation?

Adequate and comprehensive answers for these questions will be extremely difficult to attempt in a brief essay like the present writing. The task is even more difficult given the existing significant literature on the subject.<sup>101</sup> Banaji (mentioned earlier) is critical of the *Third International* for not recognising the mass character of fascism adequately. However, Dave Renton sites numerous fairly early debates within the *Third International* that do not ignore the mass character of fascism. The problems of the official positions of the *Third International* (particularly during the so-called 'third period' - essentially post 1928) may be somewhat different. They may stem not from a failure of analysis but from the compulsive necessity to 'theoretically' and 'analytically' justify the varied changes in the foreign policy of the USSR<sup>102</sup> as also the (partial and transient) tendency to look at *all* right wing phenomena as a *conspiracy* of monopoly capital and particularly the governments of the western capitalist nations. These debates, crucial as they are, interest

<sup>101</sup>Griffin (**Fascism**; OUP, 1995) [B.Q14.G3] and Neocleous (**Fascism**; Open University Press, Buckingham, UK, 1997), already mentioned, discuss the mass character of fascism though they do not necessarily tackle all the questions listed here. Some classical works from the official tradition of the communist movement include Rajani Palme Dutt; **Fascism and Social Revolution** [B.Q14.D2]; Martin Lawrence, London, 1934; E Ercoli (Palmiro Togliatti); **The Social Basis of Fascism in Italy**; The Communist International 21; London, 1926. A classical work remains Leon Trotsky; **Fascism: What it is and how to fight it** [B.Q14.T2]; 1931; now available in Marx-Engels Internet Archives, 1993. Apart from this Dave Renton; *Towards A Marxist Theory of Fascism*; University of Sheffield; 2006 in <http://www.tripod.luycos.co.uk> is a useful summary of various Marxist views on the subject. D K Renton, *The Political Economy of fascism* [C.eldoc1/0704/political-economy-of-fascism.html] at <http://www.dkrenton.co.uk>, date unknown, is also a useful reading. Nicos Poulantzas as well as Ernst Laclau provide very useful information but do not directly address these questions. David Beetham (Ed), **Marxists in the face of Fascism: Writings by Marxists on Fascism from the Inter-War Period**; Manchester University Press, Great Britain, 1983 carries excerpts from the writings of various Marxist thinkers and leaders that do show an awareness of the mass character of fascism. These writers include Antonio Gramsci, Palmiro Togliatti, Clara Zetkin, Ernst Thalman, Georgi Dimitrov, August Thalheimer, Leon Trotsky, Ignazio Silone, among others. As the *Introduction* states the purpose of the book is to present the rich variety of Marxist analyses of fascism, particularly before 1928. The same volume also carries excerpts from numerous documents from the *Comintern* and some communist parties from Europe.

and make sense to the historians and theoreticians engaged in deep analysis of the period and the phenomenon, far more than to general readers.

The background in Italy and Germany was the disaster of the First World War. The countries had suffered in the war and gained nothing. Germany in fact was crushed by the defeat and the reparations. The military forces were demobilised. In a situation of extreme economic hardship, national humiliation, and general unrest, there was a mass of soldiers suddenly rendered unemployed. The dismantling of wartime industry also led to unemployment. The demobilised soldiers were peasants and workers pulled into the military forces, away from their original occupations. The professional career soldiers – and particularly the higher officer corps – probably remained in service as some kind of defence force, however disarmed. The draftees were the ones who were thrown into the streets. The nucleus of the organisation that was to become the Fascist Party came from groups of these demobilised soldiers in Italy. In Germany too, the situation was similar.

The War, the reverses in the War, and large number of demobilised soldiers are perhaps only specific factors. The general features may be more important.

First and foremost is the sudden, explosive creation of a huge mass of unemployed people. These people had lost all occupation. *Not only were they unemployed but they had also lost all hope of being gainfully*

<sup>102</sup>No comprehensive study of fascism can avoid examination of the foreign policies of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. It will similarly have to deal with the positions taken by other significant world powers towards these countries, including the Soviet Union. It also will have to study the analyses and positions of the *Comintern* about fascism and fascist powers. The scope of this particular writing does not permit that long discussion. Even coming to India, the theoretical and practical stances of the varied political forces then active towards fascism will need examination in a larger work. Here these are examined only in relation to the communal forces/ organizations/ thinkers. Thus, this writing does not examine the positions of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. This is also in a way quite convenient since it avoids a debate – bound to be very acrimonious – that is not very relevant or germane today! (There are many views regarding the position of Bose. It is claimed that his alliance with Germany and Japan was very tactical – not to say opportunist. It is also claimed that he asked members of the INA fighting with the Nazi troops not to fight on the eastern front but only on the western one. It is claimed that those Indian (INA) soldiers who followed his instructions and refused to fight against the USSR were court marshalled and shot by the Nazis. It is also claimed that towards the end of his life he wished to change his position and align with the USSR. A critical biography of Bose is of course not the aim here – but that should involve an examination of his ideological positions and not just the alliances he made. There is no doubt, that he had a mass orientation – but many fascists too had a populist even workerist turn of phrase!

*employed in any worthwhile occupation in the foreseeable future.* They had thus lost all moorings and hopes. In a sense, they had become lumpenised. Such explosive unemployment is not only the result of the end of a major total war. Generalised crisis with industrial shutdowns and collapses can create massive retrenchment. This may occur in all manufacturing industry or in a sector of paramount importance in a nation or region – particularly in terms of employment. This can also occur in periods when industry undergoes reorganisation. This may be due to sudden and massive technological changes that render a large number of workers across all establishments surplus. It could also occur in instances of deindustrialisation. The loss of hope is also generational. Not only are people rendered unemployed but the next generation too has no hope of gaining any employment. This creates a mass of unemployed, near hopeless, angry, desperate young men (and often women). The fascists draw their youth support from this mass. The unemployment is not limited to the industrial urban sector. Gainful employment in agriculture and related occupations too may decline in such periods.

In Italy and Germany, the economy was sliding out of control. There were no signs of recovery. Life at a day-to-day level had become extremely arduous. Inflation and price rise were forcing the already scarce essential commodities totally out of reach of the common people. Survival was an uphill struggle. There seemed to be no relief in sight. *There was no hope for the common person<sup>103</sup> and no one held out any.* In fact, the established leadership of the nation showed scant concern for the common person. (Hitler harped on this situation in his speeches before assumption of power and also soon after taking over the reigns of Germany.)<sup>104</sup>

<sup>103</sup>The 'common person' here is the retrenched or blocked out worker, the peasant without own land, agricultural labourer who had no employment, and the petty bourgeoisie who saw his/her occupation doomed to extinction! To the classical petty bourgeoisie must be added the white-collar worker experiencing exactly the same pressures.

<sup>104</sup>The documentary film **Hitler: A Career** referred to elsewhere in the section has many such snatches of Hitler's speeches at various mass rallies. He refers often to the inflation that had eroded all savings and purchasing power of the common Germans. The film also shows that one Nazi promise was of stability, of an end to political chaos and near anarchy that had characterised the years after the First World War in Germany.

In Italy and Germany, the known organisations of the workers and other exploited sections were essentially forced into defensive tactics despite many militant, sometimes even insurrectionary, struggles.<sup>105 106</sup>

In similar situations, the cashiered workers and ousted peasants may actually resent the existing trades unions. They may see the trades unions as powerless and unable to protect employment leave alone create new jobs, despite the revolutionary rhetoric. They may see the unions as essentially powerless to force any changes in policy at the economic or political level. Further, they may see the unions as narrowly partisan, only catering to the few who continue to retain jobs. In this light, they may be seen as only protecting the privileges of the already 'privileged' (with employment). They may also be seen as adversaries who do not allow the unemployed to get jobs or at least some benefits. The absence or failure of revolutionary struggles of the working class heightens this resentment.

In Italy and Germany, the rulers faced a crisis of legitimacy. They had failed to prevent the war and worse the deleterious impacts of the war. (In Germany, there was also a deep national humiliation after the defeat and the treaty of Versailles.) The post-war governments were seen as weak and unable to manage the crisis. They did not provide a stable government. They took no decisive measures to resolve the problems faced by the country. They were even unable to repress resolutely the challenge posed by the communists and other revolutionary forces.

<sup>105</sup>A serious examination is also necessary to gauge whether the communists and revolutionary socialists have an adequate understanding, even today, of such situations and can forge adequate strategies and tactics to deal with them. Workers' struggles are 'glorious' but unsuccessful in periods of recession when capital cannot or does not make any concessions. The defeats of 'glorious' struggles – and one must also think of the textile workers' strike of 1982 in Mumbai in this context – make good poetry but lead to fascist entrenchment. In a certain sense, the defeat of the workers' struggles in '82 despite (or because of) the extreme militancy led to the communal violence of 1984. This in Mumbai and Maharashtra paved the way for the new lease of life for the fascist politics of the SS actually orchestrated by the RSS. In periods of expansion and 'economic prosperity' the workers seem to gain without any 'glorious' struggles. In these periods with astute leadership, the working class organizations could actually make significant advances, which the media cannot, and for a revolutionary should not, recognise.

<sup>106</sup>Is this also a period of possible revolutionary upsurge? That is a question that crops up repeatedly – see for example most of Trotsky's writings. Hindsight may prompt us to say today that these may be upsurges doomed to failure since principally the working class – and not just its party – fails to exercise social leadership and provide a viable vision and path out of the crisis. Actually, this may prompt a very different debate. The working classes, despite the fond and romantic beliefs of the revolutionaries, only attempt to live not change the world or make a revolution. Revolutionaries have often stated that fascism is the choice of last resort for the capitalist. May be they should add that revolution is the choice of last resort for the working class.

Governance was in shambles with no firmness in policies. National security and integrity were perceived to be under threat.

These conditions produced an angry mass – losing its class moorings and associations – in a desperate situation. The anger was also unfocused and unclear. It had no exact target. It was in fact in search of an enemy, a scapegoat.<sup>107</sup>

These are peculiar conditions. There are angry masses on the streets disappointed with the political rulers and the economic masters. The

<sup>107</sup>This becomes a particularly congenial development for the fascists since fascism as an ideology and philosophy – in so far as it has these features – celebrates enmity and enemy. **Carl Schmitt** wrote an essay 'The Concept of the Political' in 1927 (*Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, Vol 58). He later expanded it into a book which became one of the most widely read and quoted political texts in Germany during the Nazi period. Schmitt considered one of the most brilliant political scientists of Germany of that period had a peculiar political career travelling from proximity to Communists in 1919 through Social Democrat, Democrat, Catholic Centrist, German Nationalist, and finally to Nazis. He treats the distinction between friend and enemy as the basic political characteristic. "The specifically political distinction, to which political acts and motivations may be traced back, is the distinction of friend and enemy. It corresponds, in politics, to the relatively independent distinctions in other fields: Good and Evil in morals; Beautiful and Ugly in esthetics; etc. The distinction is independent, i.e., it cannot be deduced from any of these other distinctions, singly or combined. --- The distinction between friend and enemy can subsist, in theory and practice, without applying, at the same time, moral, esthetic, economic, or other distinctions. The political enemy need not be morally evil nor esthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor, and it may, in fact be advantageous to do business with him. He is the other, the stranger, and his nature is sufficiently defined if he is, in an intense way, existentially different and strange; in case of conflict, he constitutes the negation of one's own kind of existence, and must therefore be repulsed or fought - - - - what is morally bad, esthetically ugly, or economically harmful, need not be the enemy: - - - - The enemy is, thus, not the competitor or opponent in general. Nor is he the private opponent whom one hates. "Enemy" is only a collectivity of men who eventually, i.e., as a real possibility, will fight against a similar collectivity of people. Enemy is only the public enemy, because everything that relates to such a collectivity, especially a whole nation, becomes public. - - - - The terms "friend", "enemy" and "struggle" obtain their real significance from their relation to the real possibility of physical killing." The text is quoted in William Ebenstein, **Modern Political Thought: The Great Issues**, Second Edition, Indian Edition 1970; Second Indian Reprint 1974; Oxford and IBH Publishing Co. Schmitt is of course not the only person to make such assertions. Mussolini himself makes assertions in a similar vein about war and conquest. "Above all, Fascism - - - - believes neither in the possibility nor the utility of perpetual peace. It thus repudiates the doctrine of Pacifism – born of a renunciation of the struggle and act of cowardice in the face of sacrifice. War alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it. All other trials are substitutes, which never really put men into the position where they have to make the great decision – the alternative of life or death. - - - - This anti-pacifist spirit is carried by Fascism even into the life of the individual: - - - - For Fascism, the growth of empire, that is to say the expansion of the nation, is an essential manifestation of vitality, and its opposite a sign of decadence. Peoples which are rising, or rising again after a period of decadence, are always imperialist; any renunciation is a sign of decay and death." (Benito Mussolini, **The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism**; 1932; English Translation 1933; The Hogarth Press. Excerpt also included in Ebenstein mentioned above.)

working class organisations are either defeated, or weak or seen as incapable of solving the problems. Capital too needs a reorganisation at both economic and social levels. It needs to step up 'investment' – increase accumulation and deny rights of labour – of both the 'standing' and the 'reserve' 'army' of labour. (The 'reserve' army in these conditions far outweighs the 'standing' army of labour.) It needs hence to curtail the possibilities of any uprisings by the proletariat or be able to crush it with impunity if it does occur. The mass of the people – thinking out of the class box – and that does occur when the class organisations become moribund – look for a scapegoat – a convenient 'enemy other' – and support protectionist measures, made all the stronger by a paranoid victim complex. There is also a real or imagined threat to identities and self-esteem in such a situation.

The cashiered workers and the ousted peasants provide the numbers and the street fighters to the fascists. The petty bourgeoisie – lower middle classes – white-collar workers, petty traders, petty entrepreneurs, and sometimes professionals – form the ideologically convinced core.<sup>108</sup> This section also experienced the effects of the crisis. It had no ideological or emotional links with the trade unions or with the revolutionary organisations. In fact, they were deeply suspicious of and antagonistic to the communists and revolutionary socialists. They were nationalists with a fear of the foreigner. They also were troubled the most by the instability and the turmoil that the situation produced. Their ordered conformist lives were most endangered by the fluid and near chaotic situation. One can almost argue that these sections crave repressive stability and prefer it to the chaos of freedom of choices. Their notions of national culture were most disturbed by the rapidly changing situation. They held the uncultured 'hordes' of workers and peasants in contempt and at the same time blamed the 'decadent' capitalists for their attitudes and actions. Towards the upper classes, they had a peculiar mixture of envy and contemptuous resentment. By their class position and their situation, they could identify with the ultra-nationalism, cultural conservatism, xenophobia, and rigid orderliness of the fascists. They craved the restoration of the golden age, and a national rebirth in which they would enjoy their rightful place. They craved their privilege of petty tyranny that democracy had dismantled.

<sup>108</sup> In India, in the case of the RSS, the former are part of the various front organisations while the latter form the core RSS cadre! Here, needless to say, they are predominantly upper caste too. – And of course, all are male though efforts are now made to recruit women through various fronts!

This was the mass (of the demobilised workers, displaced peasants, and frightened petty bourgeoisie) that embraced the fascist cause or supported it. This mass lacked any independent organisations. It had no history of exercise of social weight or political influence. The Left did not recognise this unorganised mass as a distinct stratum of social and political significance. It did not realise that it could be wielded into a powerful and dangerous instrument. The fascists lionised this mass, appealed to it, valorised it, mobilised it. They turned it against the left and against democracy. They gave it a concrete enemy, a dream, and a vision of a future. This mass backed the fascist almost because they alone recognised it as a significant human and social stratum.

There is one more peculiarity of the mass organisation of the fascists. In the initial period, the Fascists in Italy and to some extent the Nazis in Germany drew support from trade union sources too. Particularly the Fascists had a background of syndicalism. It influenced at least the initial somewhat fumbling ideological formulations of the Fascists. It also provided the workerist or populist tone of the early days of Fascism. Soon the trade unions were rendered powerless. They did not remain organisations of class struggle but became instruments of class collaboration to effect national renewal, revival and to achieve national glory. They became elements of the Corporatist reconstruction of the society in which the State (in effect the Fascist party) was to direct, the capitalist to manage and the worker to carry out the tasks for the new state and society. Rights of the workers were to be no longer the concerns of the workers but of the Fascist party and state – in the Germany of the Nazis.<sup>109</sup>

The fascists barring the brief initial period organised (or rather mobilised) the masses – who they courted – on non-class lines. In fact, there was a conscious and deliberate effort to oppose and bypass the class organisations. There were student associations, youth

<sup>109</sup>The references to these origins and characteristics of fascism are numerous. Any list is bound to leave out some source that someone else may consider critical. A simple way is to refer the reader to the various encyclopedia entries found quite easily on the net. MSN Encarta, Wikipedia, itiscali, Brainy Encyclopedia, Google, Keywords, Columbia Encyclopedia, The Free Dictionary are some of the easier sites that list characteristics and brief history of fascism. There are of course many more books that go into detailed discussions of the organisation, the constituency, and the origins of fascism.

associations, neighbourhood associations, women's associations, leisure associations, nationalist clubs, and other myriad organisations. There was a careful penetration of daily life and of 'civil society'. There were efforts to organise life at the home level and to indoctrinate the very young. There were, however, no class organisations. This is no surprise since a class analysis of the society is not acceptable to fascism.<sup>110</sup>

Interestingly the fascist forces/ organisations in India share this characteristic. The *Bharatiya Majdoor Sangh* (BMS) is the official trade union related to the *Sangh Parivar* and the BJP. It is generally not considered a militant or significant trade union though it does at times join united actions of the organised workers.<sup>111</sup> The *Sangh Parivar* or BJP do not even claim significant workers' support (as workers).<sup>112</sup> The SS has myriad trade union organisations broadly under the umbrella of the *Bharatiya Kamgar Sena* (BKS) {Indian Workers' Army} known more for inter-union violence, strikebreaking, and extortion than genuine working class actions. There is a plethora of other organisations of both the *Sangh Parivar* and the SS. The notable one amongst them is the white collar workers' organisation of the SS – the *Sthaniya Lokadhikar Samiti* (Local People's Rights Committee) – which is not a trade union but enterprise based organisation to influence the recruitment policy and attempt to ensure some justice to the local people – a 'sons of the soil' stand. The other active mass organisations are the student wings of both outfits. The militancy of the *Sangh Parivar* comes through the overtly communal organisation the *Bajrang Dal* while that of the SS comes from the parent organisation – the *Shiv Sena* – itself. Both, the *Sangh Parivar* and the SS, intervene and operate at the level of day-to-day life and penetrate the civil society in various ways through programmes that seem far removed from politics or ideology. The *Sangh Parivar* is predictably more organised in these efforts and has a network of

<sup>110</sup>Mussolini, in the text quoted earlier, quite clearly denounces notions of equality of human beings. Approvingly quoting Renan, described as 'one of the inspired pre-Fascists' he says that democracy and egalitarianism are against the plan of nature. He also states that (Fascism) "affirms the immutable, beneficial, and fruitful inequality of mankind".

<sup>111</sup>In fact, the *Sangh Parivar* might have considered the trade union involvement as an afterthought – actually copying the Left.

<sup>112</sup>The BJP website <http://www.bjp.org> provides the links to the web information on the RSS and through it to the list of the organisations within the *Sangh Parivar* as well as some information on these organisations. Incidentally, *Sangh Parivar* is not a pejorative sobriquet coined by opponents but a phrase the RSS uses quite proudly to describe its galaxy.

organisations active in fields of education (founding and running schools and other educational institutions with partially independent curricula and readings), health, culture, etc.

It is of course essential to note that fascism, classical and contemporary is by design massbased. It is also necessary to note the exact nature of the mass character. The masses are brought together into varied associations at different levels. These associations are potential nuclei of fascist actions. There are however no self-reliant, self-active, independent, democratic organisations of the masses – not at all on a class basis. The mass character comes from a political need to gather numbers and from an ideological position of populism. Populism may come up with slogans apparently close to the aspirations of the masses and strike anti-establishment postures but is essentially a movement to renegotiate the balance of forces within the factions of the ruling class/ ruling bloc.<sup>113</sup>

The mention of mass character can however also be misleading. The fascists are able to attract masses and draw mass support. This does not mean that the character of fascist organisations is mass democratic.<sup>114</sup> In fact, the fascist organisations perhaps fall into two categories: the core political organisation and the mass fronts. The core political entity is a stable organisation. It is well knit with a proper structure and a chain of command. As already noted it has a paramilitary structure (or one of a religious order). Its membership is carefully chosen, well indoctrinated for a long time – often since childhood. This organisation consists of regimented obedient reliable cadre. The fronts work with broad masses to achieve one of three effects. One is to create a silent or vocal – but not necessarily very active - support for fascist agenda, organisations, and action. Second is to create a base in the civil society and to win over a large number to the general cause of fascism or to at least render them neutral. Third is to have on call street tough elements for violent actions. The activities of the mass fronts may be sporadic and symbolic. The 'mass' is not necessarily organised, except in a very loose manner. It is

<sup>113</sup>A discussion on populism is clearly outside the scope of this writing. See Ernesto Laclau; **Politics & Ideology in Marxist Theory** [B.Q20.L105]; London, 1977 as also **On Populist Reason**; London, 2005 for in depth discussion of populism. Also see Gino Germani; **Authoritarianism, Fascism and National Populism**; Transaction Books, New Jersey; 1978. Also see *Populism as Core of Fascism*; Political Research Associates; Public Eye Organisation at <http://www.publiceye.org>.

<sup>114</sup>Mussolini in his **Doctrine**, as well as Hitler in **Mein Kampf** [B.Z03.H1] are actually dismissive and contemptuous of the masses. They treat the masses as primitive hordes incapable of any thinking powers. They do not thus believe that masses deserve democracy. Both, in fact, fear that democracy would lead to chaos and disaster.

mobilised when necessary. (Again, it should be clear that these characters are present when the fascists are not in power. If and when the regime and the state turn fascist, the street fighters too may be regimented and organised on paramilitary lines into more or less stable permanent organisations. In fact, the elements from the street fighters who refuse to accept the new reins may be eliminated if inconvenient.) The core cadre determines (or rather communicates) the timing of the violent upsurges, identifies the exact targets, decides the level and extent of the violence, and provides the material wherewithal and sometimes the tactical plans for the actions to the street troops. By itself, it may be incapable of perpetrating the actions, though sometimes it may participate in these or at least seem to lead them. The apparent participation and leadership is essential to ensure that the street troops with their questionable commitment do not get swayed away from the violent actions by any other agencies. There are of course material incentives for the violence – the lure of loot, of rape, of blood letting, of varied ‘socially legitimised perversions’. Reports indicate that this was a clear pattern in the anti-Muslim violence in Mumbai in January 1993 as well as in the Gujarat Carnage of 2002.<sup>115</sup>

A rising fascist organisation – or one that wishes to gain strength – adopts a dual policy. The approach and address to the masses may be apparently quite contrary to the core beliefs of the organisation. The fascists identify the grievances of the target audience and loudly articulate the same. They also make generous promises to redress the grievances through direct action. The problems lie with the analysis of the causes and the identification of the enemies. These are invariably dishonest and fraudulent. In fact, the blame is laid on the ‘enemy other’ (for capturing more than a justifiable or legitimate share of the ‘national’ resources, wherein justifiable and legitimate are never defined nor rationally defended; the ‘other’ is blamed for laying any claim to them and for challenging the primacy and exclusive privilege of the ‘national folk’). They also blame the government of the day for appeasement of the ‘other’ or for a soft misplaced liberal policy. Often ire is directed against the democratic process and institutions. The fascists popularly cite an international or foreign conspiracy against the ‘national people’. They advocate a strong state, determined remedial measures, limitations of ‘illegitimate’ rights, and military preparedness with ruthlessness of will to

<sup>115</sup>The now famed book by Suketu Mehta; **Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found** [B.J06.M2]; Vintage 2005; has interesting details of the violence in 1993 in Mumbai along with rather informal interviews with some of the perpetrators of the violence. The descriptions need not be considered accurate in all details but provide some introduction to the killers and rioters. Various reports on the Gujarat Carnage 2002 are available at <http://www.onlinevolunteers.org>.

defend the rights of the ‘national people’. Clearly, they attempt to create a mass support based on simple, often simplistic solutions. Such agenda in some situations finds mass support principally because it is simplistic. It is difficult to understand an invisible and abstract system and to struggle to change it. It is simple street toughie logic to identify an immediate, concrete, visible, and somewhat weaker enemy who can be physically attacked in direct violent street actions. The fascists do not leave the matter at this level of redress of immediate grievances. It is also elevated into a national duty and a nationalist necessity. The promise is not only of slightly higher incomes and more commodities but also of national glory, pride as a people and nationality and of domination of all ‘others’, within and without the national boundaries, ‘competitive’ or ‘enemy’. It is a dream also linked to peculiar interpretations of history, to rejuvenation or rebirth of the nation and the ‘national people’, to recapturing the golden age. The fascists in fact often ridicule obsession with individual material interests. Apparent paradoxes and contradictions in their own statements never faze or embarrass the fascists. Therefore, promising a better life here and now once the ‘enemy other’ is vanquished, the fascists also call for great sacrifices for the sake of national glory. In their obsessive praise of martyrdom and eternal fame through acts of suicidal (and homicidal) valour, the fascists resemble the religious fanatics calling for a religious war to attain glory

<sup>116</sup>This is not something that just *happens* in fascist movements more or less accidentally. The propaganda and the manipulation of the masses is deliberate and conscious. No one spells it out as clearly as Adolf Hitler does, in his **Mein Kampf** (1925-27) [B.Z03.H1]; available easily on the net. An Indian print published by Embassy Books, Mumbai, 2005 is also readily available – almost at most street corners these days. Hitler says, “Like the woman, whose psychic state is determined less by grounds of abstract reason than by an indefinable emotional longing for a force which will complement her nature, and who, consequently, would rather bow to a strong man than dominate a weakling, likewise the masses love a commander more than a petitioner and feel inwardly more satisfied by a doctrine, tolerating no other beside itself, than by the granting of liberalistic freedom with which, as a rule, they can do little, and are prone to feel that they have been abandoned. - - - - All they see is the ruthless force and brutality of its calculated manifestations, to which they always submit in the end.” Further he states, “All propaganda must be popular and its intellectual level must be adjusted to the most limited intelligence among those it is addressed to. Consequently, the greater the mass it is intended to reach, the lower its purely intellectual level will have to be. - - - - Once we understand how necessary it is for propaganda to be adjusted to the broad mass, the following rule results: It is a mistake to make propaganda many-sided, like scientific instruction, for instance.” Hitler, of course, quite cynically talks of telling a lie, a big lie, to the masses, in order to corrupt them and to turn them to the desired (in this case Nazi) side. Goebbels later might have come up with quotable quotes but the basis for propagating lies clearly originates with Hitler himself. Mussolini in his **Doctrine** does not hold any higher opinion of the common people and the masses. Mussolini too insists on race and nation. He also extols reawakening of a race/people/nation that had forgotten its historic role and glory for even centuries. He also sees that the reawakened people will express their glory through a rule over others – through imperial conquests. It is also interesting to note that Hitler’s conception of man-woman relationship is overtly sado-masochistic.

and salvation in the afterlife. It should also be stated that the nationality and nationhood for the fascists is mythical and ethno-centric, even if the common ethnicity has to be invented or imagined.<sup>116</sup>

The promises of populist reforms, of course, pose problems. The fascists are not capable of delivering any of the promised benefits. The fascists cannot deliver the goods to the dispossessed masses they mobilise in their quest for capture of power, because they do not create a people oriented or people-centric economic system, even if the people are to be narrowly defined in terms of the mythical nationality.<sup>117</sup> Some writers have commented that the non-fulfilment of the populist promises sometimes caused problems within the fascist organisations with certain sections insisting that the people's interests be protected with priority. Differences of opinion, particularly over policy matters, are however not tolerated in any fascist organisations. 'Dissidence' is never tolerated. Even trusted activists are consulted at best on local tactics.

The attraction that the fascists hold out for the masses and their technique of mobilisation should be subjects of deeper study than the ones that exist till now. Such studies are necessary not only to understand

<sup>117</sup>In other words, the fascists do not attack private property. Their economic model is nationalist – directed at ultimately building up the *national war machine*. To achieve even this they need heavy industrialisation and a military-industrial complex. This often demands a change from the earlier economic organisation but of a different kind than the pro-people one that they had promised. The new system needs to enhance – to almost demonic proportions – extraction of surplus value, relative if not absolute; speed up and intensify accumulation to effect heavy investments in war-oriented industries as well as military research and development. None of this can be effected with pro-people economic policies. It is immediately necessary to add two qualifications. One is that employment may actually rise in some cases, with the virtual forced military-industrialisation, particularly given the fact that the corporatist state allows for no independent labour rights. Hitler launched a major project of building highways – the autobahns – as soon as he came to power. Five million people were then unemployed in Germany. The dream at one level that he held out was a totalitarian welfare state. This has also been described as despotism with a human face. Mussolini with his characteristic turn of phrase (in **Doctrine**) describes Fascism as “an organised, centralised, and authoritarian democracy”. (He probably means Republic rather than Democracy in this instance.) Work and bread were combined in the Nazi promise with national honour – an honour even at the cost of peace. The German people felt that the Nazi project overcame unemployment, chaos, and humiliation. The project was also of reconstruction, of creating a national community. An excellent film based on documentary film material from the period brings home the various characteristics of Nazi Germany with telling effect. (**Hitler: A Career** by Joachim C Fest and Christian Herrendoerfer; produced by Interart Filmbeteiligungs-Und Produktions GMBH, Munich; available in India since 2006.) The second is that in specific historical and geo-political situations a fascist state may be able to make economic advances – particularly as a convenient regional sub-imperialist power. In such a case benefits in terms of employment opportunities, social welfare, increased incomes, etc. may be delivered by the state to the mobilised people. The reference here obviously is to Israel – a position that many other nation states may actually covet (while they condemn Israel in words, e.g., Saudi Arabia).

the historical occurrences but also to face contemporary reality. This particular aspect is also somewhat perplexing because as in other facets fascism exhibits some apparent paradoxes and contradictions in the mass activity. It is trite to say that fascists are not democrats. The anti-democratic attitude goes somewhat beyond the processes of formal political democracy. The fascists believe that the masses need to be constantly led and guided. They do not believe in any popular wisdom. Yet classically they exhibit a dependence on masses.<sup>118</sup> This paradoxical relationship with the masses has other aspects too. There is contempt at one level for the masses – for the people in general. The fascist leadership showed a strange elitism though it was not of elite or aristocratic extraction. In India, the RSS, till it changed its track nestled in its Brahmin superiority complex and exhibited ill-concealed contempt for the other castes. On the other hand, there is a dependence on the masses – particularly by the top leaders - that mimics populist reliance on the masses.<sup>119</sup>

The mass appeal is based on simple notions. Hatred of the other, dreams of glory, and promises of rejuvenation of the chosen nation/ race/ people are the elements that are conveyed to the masses. The mobilisation is not based on any complex ideological appeals. It is an active appeal. The fascists rely on ruthless, brutal, violent street actions to attract and to terrorise the population. The fascist message is also carried by the rituals and spectacles of fascist conclaves. The large banners, the celebrations, the disciplined regimented militia like rallies,

<sup>118</sup>There are two interesting illustrations of this dependence on masses. Bertolt Brecht in **Schweyk in the Second World War** (Brecht, Bertolt; **Collected Plays Vol 7**; Methuen; - plays written in the US between 1942-48) has a character that resembles Hitler. It is a peripheral character that constantly asks the followers to tell him that they love him. In **Escape from Freedom**, Fromm quotes Goebbels to the effect that all self-doubts and vacillations disappear when one is with masses (Erich Fromm, **Escape from Freedom**, Rinehart, New York; 1941; the work is also titled **Fear of Freedom** in the British edition of 1942). Fromm also suggested that the fascists feel powerless and drained when not surrounded by applauding crowds. In the Indian context, too it has been said that leaders like Savarkar and Thackeray did not stand isolation in jails very well, though it is claimed that Savarkar was not broken by the physical hardships of rigorous imprisonment in the infamous cellular jail in the Andamans. The film mentioned in the earlier note also makes the point that Hitler had tireless energy only to address mass rallies – not for routine work. The earlier quotations from Hitler and Mussolini quite eloquently express their low regard – actually contempt – for the masses.

<sup>119</sup>Thackeray overcomes any and every challenge – even imaginary – to his absolute and uncontested leadership, or even any questioning of his integrity – by threatening to resign and retire from politics. He then always appeals to the **Shiv Sainiks** (rank and file 'members' of the **Shiv Sena**) who characteristically gather in huge hordes at his residence and press him to stay on and eliminate the characters who threaten his leadership.

the observances of particular days all work towards the creation of a fascist political culture. The fascist uniforms, the different drills and salutes of the fascist cadre, the mounting of the processions and rallies, the conversion of existing popular events into fascist celebrations and events are efforts at creation of mass hypnosis or mass hysteria. The Nazi rallies used the darkness of the night, torchlights, and elaborate movements of columns of Nazi cadre to awe the general population. The rallies were always spectacles, very elaborately staged. The arrival of the leadership – particularly of the supreme leader – at the rally was also theatrical. The address by the leader was also dramatic. After the annexation of Austria (March 1938) Hitler went to Vienna and addressed a rally. He opened his speech with the remark, “As German Chancellor and Fuehrer I report to the history of the German people----- “. <sup>120</sup> The spectacle combined with the rituals and the street violence were core parts of the operations of the fascists. These were their vehicles to convey their ideology and programme to the masses. <sup>121</sup>

## 06. ‘Radicalism’ of fascism

Fascism, as a movement and then as a regime, created an upheaval – particularly in Europe. The attention (in many cases with attraction and admiration) was not limited to Europe. The effects were felt in other continents too – America and Asia. The upheaval was not limited to a change in the political rule or regime. It was seen as a momentous social change of profound proportions. The fascists were seen to have undertaken an unprecedented social experiment to create a new type of society, a new regime, and a new man.

The fascists themselves of course thought that they were revolutionaries. Mussolini and Hitler declared that their aim was a revolution – a total revolution that would transform every aspect of life. Of course, Hitler also claimed that the Nazi revolution would be the last revolution Germany would witness – since there would be no need for

<sup>120</sup>Parts of this speech and rally can be seen in the film **Hitler: A Career**.

<sup>121</sup>The RSS in many ways has copied this style. The distinctive uniforms, the parades, the salutes, the military style rallies are similar though not as efficient as the classical fascist spectacles. The RSS also tries to stage parades of various kinds around various festivals. The *Vijaya Dashmi* parade is traditional but now even the New Year by Hindu calendar is marked with a parade and street celebrations. SS organises its major rallies as spectacles with floats, gigantic flags, blowing of traditional battle horns, etc. Thackeray’s arrival at the venue and subsequent address is also a carefully choreographed event.

any more revolutions; that was precisely why he declared that the Third Reich would be a “1000 Year Reich”.

Other commentators too have described the fascist project as radical, though with the proviso that it was a radicalism of the right. <sup>122</sup> This radical element of fascism needs some examination and discussion since that is to some extent and in some ways responsible for the attraction fascism holds for various elements, as also for its mass appeal. Like most other characteristics of fascism, the radical nature too encompasses contradictory elements.

Unlike most other right wing movements, fascism is not conservative, though it does exhibit some conservative elements.

It is obsessed with rejuvenation and rebirth – not of an earlier regime or social formation but of a nation and nationality. As argued earlier this nation and nationality are imaginary and mythical.

Fascism attempts to create something new – something that does not exist, has never existed. At an immediate level it was and always is a response to existing conditions – conditions that are considered intolerable, demeaning, dehumanising (or rather emasculating), and humiliating. The promise that is held out to the masses in particular is of political stability, political determination – particularly in dealings with the rebellious anti-national elements (read revolutionaries – principally communists but any others as well), the ‘enemy other’, and the oppressing foreign powers. The existing rule according to the fascists was too weak and too spineless to effect the necessary changes. The changes are necessary to bring immediate relief – work, bread, and law-and-order as well as to rejuvenate the nation and the national people. Imagery of past regimes – mythical or ancient historical - may be used to hold up an example and to claim lineage with legitimacy, but what is advocated is a new regime, a new system of rule. Italy evoked the images of the Roman Empire and its primacy in the world as natural rulers as well as a great civilisation. Germany did not have similar historical example of global domination political, military, or cultural. Nevertheless, the Nazis did evoke images of capable emperors and generals (Emperor Frederick Barbarosa, for example). These images are

<sup>122</sup>Talcot Parsons describes it as radicalism of the right. Griffin goes further and calls it a revolution from the right. (Both works have been mentioned earlier. Parsons used this characterisation in 1942 when fascism was peaking though caught in a devastating war; Griffin’s article is of 2000.)

purely symbolic and evocative. There is no effort to restore those particular regimes.

The fascists advocate, seek, and attempt a change. The content of the change is quite peculiarly radical. It is a severe restriction if not eradication of democracy. Mussolini was quite explicit in his **Doctrine** in the condemnation of democracy. He said that the majority cannot govern with wisdom merely because it is a majority. Numbers do not decide the desirability of a system of rule. He emphasised the inequality of human beings and insisted that masses through periodic consultations cannot come to the right conclusions. He went further and attacked the concept of the wisdom of any collectivity and its capacity to govern. The fascists are not opposed to a republic. Only in a republic can they advance any legitimate claim to their own right to rule. The opposition is to democracy and the limits democratic institutions, processes, and norms impose on their authoritarianism. The attack on democracy finds a receptive cord in the general population only in certain situations. Devaluation of the legislature is the prime condition that fosters anti-democratic sentiments. The inability of the legislature to meaningfully deliberate issues of vital concern to the people, to take decisions, to govern, to control and command the bureaucracy and other organs of the state machinery erodes the legitimacy of the legislature as well as of the electoral process that gives rise to such legislatures. The fascists capitalise on the erosion of faith in the legislative institutions and processes to attack democracy itself. It is also interesting to note that the fascists came to power in Germany and Italy not by gaining an absolute majority of seats or votes but through kind of parliamentary coups.<sup>123</sup> Hitler saw himself as the saviour of a world on the brink of disaster – the chosen leader who stood alone burdened by greatness, says the documentary film mentioned earlier.

There are other elements to the radicalism of fascism. One of them is the organisation of the economy. As mentioned earlier, fascism believes in private property. The doctrine of private property and private entrepreneurship is quite in keeping with the social Darwinism fascism adopts as a key concept. The markets however do not get a total free play under fascism. The markets operate and are arenas for realisation of surplus. They do not however determine the structure of the economy,

<sup>123</sup>Ebenstein in his introduction to the section on fascism (titled *Fascism: Government by Force and Lies* in **Modern Political Thought: The Great Issues**, mentioned earlier) characterises fascism as a post-democratic phenomenon and a reaction to democracy.

the investment patterns, or the production priorities. All available literature (cited earlier) suggests that the capitalists garner profits but do not have a decisive say in determining investment or production. This right is reserved by the state. There is no unanimity amongst scholars about the nature of fascist economic thought or even about its existence.<sup>124</sup> It is clear, however, that the state – in Mussolini's thoughts the supreme human institution with almost supra-human attributes and capacities – is in control of the economy. In the corporatist (or corporativist) model of economy, the state makes the overall policy decisions about sectors of economy and enterprises, the capitalists manage the particular enterprises and are entitled to the profits, while the workers through their state-controlled organisations maximise productivity and efficiency. This was a radical step. State intervention or control of the economy was not then an accepted practice. The only country to have practiced it was the USSR, which had eradicated private ownership of enterprise and capitalism. Mussolini's pattern of state control of economy and direction of economic activity predates Roosevelt's New Deal. Notions of regulation of markets, state supervision of economy, central planning at that time were unacceptable concepts outside the USSR. Total freedom to capital, individual capitalists and firms was the norm. In fact, in the USA the New Deal was termed a fascist step by advocates of total freedom to enterprises and markets, despite the recent experience of the crisis. On the other hand it is also suggested that President F D Roosevelt was enamoured by Mussolini's somewhat successful efforts to regulate and direct the economy through the medium of the state, to control the chaos of the markets, to tackle unemployment, and to discipline labour.

The fascists were also radical in their elimination of the unions, of all other independent organisations of the working class as well as other sections of the society. They brought the entire society under the control of the state and the fascist party. This also endeared them – at least for a period – to capitalists all over the world. The capitalists saw fascism as an effective way of dealing with the threat of communism and

<sup>124</sup>A very useful survey despite the ideological sideswipes it takes is The '*Political Economy of Fascism: Myth or Reality or Myth and Reality*' by David Baker. This is titled a 'work in progress' and is a paper presented to the Political Economy Research Centre (PERC) Research Seminar on March 10, 2005 at University of Sheffield. The author prohibits quotations from the paper since it is a work in progress though the paper is/was available on the internet. (<http://www.shef.ac.uk/~perc/sems/bakerpaper.pdf>)

proletarian revolution in the long term and labour 'indiscipline' and 'blackmail' immediately.

There was perhaps one more aspect to this. The severe crisis of 1929 had shaken capitalism to its very foundations – and that too in the strongest and most successful capitalist countries. This had also jolted capitalist ideology. Attraction for socialist thought – particularly its critique of capitalism, and admiration for the Soviet Union had increased in some sections of the society. (In the US the period has been referred to as the Pink 30s. Many prominent literary, artistic, and intellectual figures exhibited receptive fondness for leftist thought in this period.) Those opposed to the socialist vision probably thought the liberal formulations were insufficient to counter the ideological offensive of the left. In fascism they perhaps found a strong enough opponent of socialism with the added advantage that the fascists were capable of meeting the socialist challenge in the streets (through violent confrontations) without always relying on the forces of the state to do the job.<sup>125</sup>

The radicalism of fascism was not merely instrumental, institutional. The fascists wanted to create a new society, a new community, and a new man. The fascists sought to create a new community of people, of new people. Hitler saw the new people as people with determination, no longer ashamed, no longer plagued by degradation, weakness, loss of faith, but a people strong once again. The fascists attempted to create a national community with which the individual would merge completely and become a new person. The new person would overcome degeneracy; would be lean, lithe, swift, and hard as steel.<sup>126</sup>

The other crucial radical element is of course the concept of the nation – the mythical nation. This nation that was being born was almost a divine entity. It was more than its nationals; it was not just a collectivity of its citizens. It had a life of its own, a will of its own.

The fascists are also radical in their conception of culture. This embraces their notions of time that becomes mythical and historical-magical, of space that is enslaved and yet overawes through grandiose

<sup>125</sup>In the late '60s and early '70s many otherwise liberal persons were attracted to the *Shiv Sena* because it seemed a force capable of fighting the communists in the streets. This was perhaps one reason of the electoral alliance of the *Praja Socialist Party* (PSP) with the SS.

<sup>126</sup>The documentary film **Hitler: A Career** referred to earlier has many excerpts of speeches by Hitler as well as other Nazi material that advocates these goals.

loftiness, of daily cultural practices that become hierarchical and the formal expressions in art and architecture. The imaginary, resurrected, purified, or recreated cultural practices of the genuine nationals become privileged over all others. Other practices are considered depraved, degenerate, or perverse. Obviously, freedom of expression has no place in such an atmosphere. All art becomes grandiloquent, designed to dwarf individuals and to overawe them. It becomes a spectacle. The fascist spectacle has a strong component of the (imaginary) historical-magical. It is mystical. It also built up cults of blood, darkness, and fire. In Italy, and to some extent in Germany, it copied Caesarean spectacles and evoked occult powers.

The fascist did not limit their activities to ideological sermons about these ideas. They tried to put these into practice, however crudely. In fact, the fascist relied far more on activity – continuous directed activity that was not critical or reflexive but almost thought-numbing. The glorification of physical culture and creation of athletic strong bodies through strenuous exercise and activity that was also organised at a collective mass level was an important component. The very materiality of the physical activity with its physiological impacts also limited thought. At another level the fascists organised numerous group activities which combined the physical activity and collective spectacles. They also intervened in the civil society – in all aspects of life – from providing help to members and supporters in petty matters to organising some services that were beyond their reach. There was a heavy concentration of attention on children and youth in both Italy and Germany. The effort was to organise their leisure time, to make them socially responsible, and to indoctrinate them – in love for the ethnic and ethno-centric nation, hatred for the enemy other, and glorification of violence. The fascists also organised – despite their essentially sexist, patriarchal, and male chauvinist views, the women, and in particular the young women. The RSS in India has copied all these activities and even extended some. The Sangh Parivar has penetrated the Adivasis as a social group with careful planning and design. It has also stabilised its presence in the educational (particularly primary and middle level also in the villages) and health service sectors. In a way the fascists attempted an ideological struggle and domination in the 'molecular' form in the Gramscian sense.

A strange radical element of fascism is its opposition to reason.

Rationality of any kind becomes an anathema to fascism. Liberalism, tolerance, universal humanity, notions of equality are also similarly rejected. The radicalism of fascism has this strange character. The fascists do seek to restructure polity, economy, social relations, cultural life, individual relationships, even the anatomy and physiology of the human being. They do it in the directions discussed above. This radicalism too can create a hypnotic mass hysteria, and mass adulation. The two leaders of the classical fascist states – Mussolini and Hitler – were also charismatic personalities. They embodied the strong patriarchal leader who would think for the masses and direct them. The cult of the leader was easier to build given their presence and personal direction of all aspects of the fascist organisation and regime. It may not however be correct to state that fascism requires charismatic leadership in all situations. The more or less abstract leadership of the organisation itself can play the role of the supreme leader even as a council.

## Clear and Present Danger

The temptation in any last section of such writing is to be too elaborate and lengthy. In effect the contents may become repetitive. This is thus quite deliberately not a *conclusion* but just *afterthoughts* and a *re-reflection* of the issues already examined and to at least some extent elaborated in the main text. The specific area has actually already been covered in the Prelude and in the preceding section on *Understanding Fascism*. In a way this is a return to the original concern that prompted the entire exercise: to examine whether there is a fascist danger of whatever kind and form in the present period in India.

It would be absolutely necessary to begin with the statement that the conditions that prevailed during the period between the two world wars in Europe are not to be found anywhere else at the present moment.<sup>127</sup> Capitalism has itself changed considerably, so much so that it is almost unrecognisable as the same entity, except in the basics. The problems that it faces today are not necessarily or predominantly economic. The political and social aspects seem the most important. The change is not only in capital but also labour. Every aspect of the life of the working class has undergone a radical transformation. No political phenomena that are exact replicas of the ones that occurred during the period between the two world wars will hence be noticeable now. This point need not be disputed. Mirror images or clones of the Fascism in Italy or Nazism in Germany will not be found. (Actually they never were, anywhere in the world, at any period in history.) This writing has however argued that the phenomenon of fascism can be nevertheless identified as in existence. This writing also does not use the terms *neo-fascism* or *semi-fascism* principally because they may be misunderstood

<sup>127</sup>It seems a little awkward to state yet again this point that is so obvious but writers still refer back to the historical analysis to draw conclusions about possibilities of fascism in any given country in the contemporary period. See for example *Postscript: proto-fascist politics and the economy* in Barbara Harriss-White; **India Working: Essays on Society and Economy**; Cambridge University Press; South Asia edition by Foundation Books, New Delhi; 2004. The rich and excellent collection [B.F00b.H1] in the post-script takes Poulantzas' analysis of the conditions of origin of classical fascism as axiomatic and draws conclusions that are debatable. Another piece in the book *Appendix 1: Liberalisation and Hindu Fundamentalism* also makes interesting reading.

to mean that the contemporary version of fascism, the *mutant version*, is fundamentally different and therefore needs new analyses. This writing has in fact argued that the basic character of the various *contemporary* fascist organisations (particularly in India) – in their ideology, organisational structures, aims, and programmes remains very similar to that of the *classical* fascist organisations. Information about the RSS and the *Sangh Parivar* is easy to come by. Numerous analytical studies also exist. Some works about the *Alleanza Nazionale* in Italy<sup>128</sup> or the various ‘neo-fascist’ outfits elsewhere in Europe also support similar conclusions.<sup>129</sup> One more qualification is called for at this stage. This writing has nowhere argued that fascist regimes exist or even that they are likely to come to rule in any significant parts of the world. All that has been said is that fascist movements and organisations exist and do become strong periodically, enough to threaten pluralist, multi-cultural, secular democracies in different countries of the world. The clear and present danger today is the existence of these organisations and movements, the impact that they have on the society, the fascist culture based on ethno-centric (mythic) ultra-nationalism that they promote, and a mentality principally amongst the middle class of intolerance and elimination of all inconvenient elements within the society with different degrees of violence.

The age of corporate driven globalisation generates very contradictory forces and impulses<sup>130</sup>. It need not be argued that in the

<sup>128</sup>Roger Griffin; *The ‘post-fascism’ of the Alleanza Nazionale: a case study in ideological morphology*; **Journal of Political Ideologies**, Vol 1, No 2, 1996.

<sup>129</sup>See for example the following sites: <http://www.neofascism.com> or <http://www.fascismo.com>. For a telling description see Eve Goodman; *A Letter from Germany on Neo-Fascism*; <http://www.socialistalternative.org>. Two descriptive, analytic articles are also found in the English edition online of **Le Monde diplomatique**; both by Ignacio Ramonet. The first is *Neo-fascism* (April 1998) and the second one *Old Italy, new fascism* (February 2002). These can be found at <http://mondediplo.com/>.

<sup>130</sup>The extremely current and now common-parlance term ‘globalisation’ is peculiarly ideologically loaded and hence hides as much as it expresses. To the defenders or ‘soft critics’, it indicates a mere historical almost natural process of integration of all national economies into an international economy and market/s and sometimes a disastrous neo-liberal policy package. To many of its critics it signifies only the invasive and predatory operations of foreign capital spearheaded by the trans-national corporations. Both implications are politically inadequate, to say the least. They obscure the essential characteristics of the contemporary phase of capitalism, which cannot of course be discussed here. Most available analyses, with justification, concentrate on the economic aspects of ‘globalisation’. In comparison (and only in comparison) the attention paid to political, social, and cultural facets of this contemporary phase of capitalism is scant, almost cursory. It is perhaps not necessary to even mention that these aspects deserve more detailed attention since they are likely to be somewhat different and partially ‘out of sync’ with the economic facets; they are also the ones that will cause the social upheavals. Very simply, detailed discussions of the economy cannot explain the rise of virulently communal forces and the violent conceptions of religion like *Hindutva* unless the social, political, and cultural dimensions are taken into account.

present stage the shift is from manufacturing to service and knowledge-industry based activities with a tremendous preponderance of speculative financial and commercial activities. This may be a global feature. In a country like India there are more facets to the occurrence. There is a sudden need for rapid reorganisation of the economy with faster accumulation. This of course involves reorganisation of not only the economy but also polity and culture though these may not always be conscious changes or occur at a concurrent pace. The quest for faster accumulation is not only through the intensification of the exploitation of organised, industrial labour through enhancement of absolute or relative surplus value. It takes numerous forms today that almost seem a throwback to the age of ‘enclosures’. The assault is also on common property resources and personal/ small private properties. If there were any doubts earlier – about the phenomenon being general – Singur and Nandigram in West Bengal should remove them once for all.

A relatively closed labour intensive economy has jumped into a competitive market. This has led to redundancy for a very large number of the work force. The new economic activities are not able to or willing to absorb this surplus work force. The situation exists in almost all countries. The US exhibits as much unemployment as India, for example. Self-employment and entrepreneurship is glorified in words but in reality sustenance activities are destroyed. The petty entrepreneur, for example, say the neighbourhood shopkeeper is rendered bankrupt as mega marts and retail giants render her/his operations non-viable.<sup>5</sup> In the developing world, India for example, peasant agriculture is destroyed by corporate logic. The dislocated peasantry has no other recourse but to flock to urban centres – particularly new urban “industrial” centres. At the same time a certain section (claimed to be almost 25 to 30 per cent of the population) has derived benefits from the growing economy. This is the new rich middle class with unprecedented possibilities of consumerist delights.

This has multiple effects, some of which may be quite ominous.

<sup>131</sup>The reality of the much vaunted self-employment or entrepreneurship in India is quite disturbing. Looking merely at trade it is now known that there are 11 shops per thousand of population, the density being much higher in the cities – 45 per 1000 persons in Delhi for example. Of these shops only 2% shops are in the organised sector employing only 500,000 persons. The unorganised sector employs, in contrast, 40 million persons. 96% of these shops are below 500 sq. ft. (Report by Subodh Varma – based on National Sample Survey Organisation releases of the results of its 61st round in **The Times of India**; December 15, 2006.) These figures do not touch the petty vendors and hawkers and other self-employed persons who take to varied occupations.

It is obvious that the small peasant and landless labourer is the victim of the changes in the agrarian economy. In the urban areas it is the workers rendered unemployed who form the pauperised mass. Their situation as argued earlier is almost hopeless. Those who have managed to hold on to some occupations or employment are threatened with unemployment and pauperisation in the near future. Their future generations have no real chance of gainful employment or livelihood opportunities. They are constantly in a flux, constantly forced to change occupations and employment. There seem to be no opportunities for cheap labour that once could find sustenance in some way or the other. The stability is totally gone. The collectivity has collapsed. The middle class of yesteryears – particularly those sections that were the petty traders, professionals, artisans, clerical employees, etc – is in an almost similar position. Its economic situation may not be as dire but it has no real role in the economy and society. Insecurity and instability are rampant.

All these people find themselves without any definite work – any specific occupations that they could take pride in. There is no reliance on skill, on any expertise. In fact their survival depends on this 'flexibility'. If knowledge becomes an instrument of accumulation at one end of the social spectrum, absence of knowledge becomes the passport to survival at the other end. Obviously there is no attachment to occupation, to work, to creative labour. It is a truly footloose mass of millions without any sense of self-worth. Needless to say that Adivasis, Dalits, and minorities (particularly Muslims) are the special victims of this process.

Another qualification is necessary. Neither agriculture nor industry is in crisis *per se*. They do not face any threat of destruction. It is the direct producers who are under threat – the small peasants and agricultural labourers in agriculture and the workers in the industry.

The existing secular, democratic organisations fail to represent these masses. This failure, despite occasional populist rhetoric, spreads across the entire political spectrum. The significance of Singur and Nandigram are in the fact that the Left too now accepts the same paradigm and path of development. On the other hand the BJP (or the SS for that matter) are unable to protect the livelihoods and lifestyles of their own bases.

This is an ideological and organisational crisis that threatens the very fabric of polity as it has developed over the years in India. In its new triumphant arrogance capital sees no need for any social compact, any welfare or alleviative measures. The middle class voices these sentiments stridently. The talk is of the rights of 'tax payers' versus the appeasement of the free loaders. Many spokespersons of this class openly advocate the disenfranchisement of the urban poor – particularly the slum dwellers. It seeks to redefine citizenship and rights in the country. The vast majority of the people then find very little relief through the normal democratic processes that are increasingly usurped by the new middle class. The collapse of the collectivities – at the workplace and at residential areas – along with the expulsion from the production process weakens the material base for secular democratic organisations. The dispossessed and pauperised mass gets increasingly more drawn into primordial organisations and identity politics. There is a danger that this may attract these people to mythic nationalism that provides a sense of belonging and larger identity.

The process of course is not one dimensional. In some ways the very heterogeneity of the Indian people prevents the consolidation of *Hindutva* except in temporary waves. The fascist forces have not addressed even at a populist level the issues of survival of these masses.

The period ahead is no doubt difficult. There is a real danger of the fascist forces gaining strength. It is also a period perhaps of churning – of searching and finding new solutions. The struggle ahead will be complex. It will have to take up questions of the path of development, of dealing with contemporary capitalism, of strengthening democracy, and of promoting a multi-culturalism based on equality of all groups in the country. It will be as much a cultural struggle as a political one.

The surge in Hindutva politics in the late 1980s raised the crucial question of the similarities and dissimilarities between communalism and fascism.

The demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992 and subsequent widespread violence of 1992-93, the formation of a BJP led government in 1998, and particularly the Gujarat Carnage of 2002 lent even greater urgency and sharpness to the debate.

This short book examines the question in some detail essentially for the general, non-specialist reader.

It dwells on the specificity of the Gujarat Carnage as well as the characteristics of the Sangh Parivar. It also explores the essential distinguishing traits of fascism as a generic movement. It then seeks to compare the classic fascist organizations and the Sangh Parivar.

The Introduction and Conclusion (called Prelude and Afterthoughts) attempt to place the debate in the context of contemporary Indian reality.

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