



THE HINDUTVA OFFENSIVE

By

R. R. Puniyani

***'The Hindutva Offensive'* by R.R.Puniyani, noted member of EKTA, was originally published by FOIL (Forum of Indian Leftists) <http://web.archive.org/web/20010309201843/http://www.foil.org/> in USA, 1998 under the Title *'Hindutva Offensive Social Roots: Characterisation'*. This edition has been edited by Hadwa Dom and was reproduced by Dalitstan Journal, Volume 1, Issue 1 (August 1999) being thus archived in the Ambedkar Library in compliance with US Copyright Code, Title 17, Chapter 1, Sec.107 on Fair Usage - <http://web.archive.org/web/20010309201843/http://www4.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.html>; cf. also <http://web.archive.org/web/20010309201843/http://fairuse.stanford.edu/>**

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Introduction

Chapter 1

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Last decade has seen the Hindutva onslaught going from strength to strength to the detriment of poor and oppressed sections of society. Though Sangh Parivar (SP), RSS and the paraphernalia of its affiliates, is at the core of Hindutva movement some other forces have also broadly contributed to the social and political agenda of Hindutva, the main such associate is Shiv Sena, prior to consolidation of SP, Hindu Mahasabha propagated Hindutva, while variable expression of Hindutva has also taken place through congress as well. The turmoil created by its offensive has disturbed the very fabric of our society, and this has threatened to change the very rules of social politics.

This movement is based on the premise that Hindus alone constitute the Indian nation as they are the original inhabitants of this land and have created this society and its culture. Hinduism, as per their assertion, is a very tolerant and catholic, which makes it superior to all other faiths, but its tolerance has often been mistaken for weakness..... The Hindu nation has been repeatedly conquered by aliens, particularly the Muslims and then the Christian British and must acquire strength through RSS Sangathan to counter all present and future threats. The subsequent entry and takeover by foreigners created the illusion that India was land of many different and equal cultures -- `Pseudo Secular' nationalists like Nehru, who preferred bondage to an alien system of thought, perpetuated it by integrating this notion within the `pseudo secular' constitution. This must be changed and only a `truly secular' Hindu Rashtra will afford protection to non-Hindus. The threats remain because the present state is ruled by traitors to the Hindu nation; `pseudo secularists' who `appeased' Muslims in their pursuit of a

politics of 'vote banks' (1). Its own perception of itself is thus of a movement meant to build a Hindu rashtra (nation) for the Hindus.

Formation of Hinduism as a Religion

Chapter 2

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Today's social common sense believes Hinduism to be the religion of all the people in India except those who are specifically Muslims, Christians or Buddhists. It will be interesting to note that contrary to the popular belief the truth is that "Hindus" and "Hinduism" are orientalist constructions originating with late eighteenth century British administrators who believed *"the essence of India existed in a number of key Hindu classical scriptures such as Vedas, the codes of Manu and the shastras that often prescribe hierarchical ideas"* -- a conclusion eagerly *"supported and elaborated by Brahmins"* (2). Britishers not only absorbed this understanding, they put an official seal on it

"... by applying a legal system based on Brahminic norms to all non-Muslim castes and outcastes, the British created an entirely new Brahmin legitimacy. They further validated Brahmin authority by employing, almost exclusively, Brahmins as their clerks and assistants." (3)

... this fabrication through repetition of India as a unitary Hindu society has ... obscured the reality of a segmented society, with Brahmins and other upper castes exercising a monopoly of power, fabricated Hinduism is found everywhere." (4)

The historical process whereby Brahminism gained ascendancy has variously been formulated by different sociologists. To give one example, Arun Bose (5) paraphrases Mill's beliefs,

"The ideological and a fortiori social, political and economic development of Indian society was arrested at a primitive nomadic stage by the sterilizing despotic power of ruthless caste of Brahmin priests who fabricated more successfully than any other priestly caste ever known, myths and legends to deceive, oppress and exploit the remaining castes, particularly the Sudra caste. By draconian punishments, reinforced by legends about creation and the cycle of rebirths through which strict conformity with caste taboos was rewarded and infringements penalized, they were able to enforce total and resigned submission to their omnipotent power."

Initially the term Hindu began with regional tones. The term was coined by Arabs and others, who pronounced `S' as `H', and to denote the people living on this side of Sindhu (Indus) they called them Hindu. Its only much later that this term was bestowed with a religious meaning. Nehru (6) pointed out that

"Hinduism as a faith is vague, amorphous, many sided, all things to all men. It is hardly possible to define it, or indeed to say definitely whether it is a religion or not, in the usual sense of the word, in its present form, and even in the past, it embraces many beliefs and practices, from the highest to the lowest, often opposed to or contradicting each other."

Formulating it more sharply to bring to focus the caste factor, Hinnells and Sharp (7) concede that "*A Hindu is a Hindu not because he accepts doctrines and philosophies, but because he is a member of caste*", thus implying that Hinduism is a social order and not a religion.

Romila Thapar (8) in her analysis posits that

"The new Hinduism which is being currently propogated by the Sanghs, Parishads and Samajs is an attempt to restructure the indigenous religions as a monolithic uniform religion, rather paralleling some of the features of semitic religions. This seems to be a fundamental departure from the essentials of what may be called the indigenous `Hindu' religions. Its form is not only in many ways alien to the earlier culture of India but equally disturbing is the uniformity which it seeks to impose on the variety of `Hindu' religions."

Hindu sects are multiple and diverse with many founders, and these sects have survived over a period of centuries. At times scholars used the word for a group of different indigenous religions which could vary in their belief system from animism to atheism, which are looked at with suspicion by todays votaries of Hinduism. Thapar goes on to say (8)

"Hinduism as defined in contemporary parlance is a collation of beliefs, rites and practices consciously selected from those of the past, interpreted in contemporary idiom in last couple of centuries and the selection conditioned by historical circumstances ... in a strict sense, a reference to `Hinduism' would require a more precise definition of the particular variety referred to Brahminism, Brahmo-Samaj, Arya Samaj, Shaiva Siddhanta, Bhakti, Tantricism or whatever."

The two major religious categories which existed were **Brahminism and Shramanism . Shramans were those who were often in opposition to Brahminism, these are the groups which had belief structures away from Vedas and Dharmashastras. Their teachings transcended castes and communities, and in contrast to Brahminism which categorised religious practice by caste, shramanic religions opposed this in order to universalise their religious teachings. Bhakti tradition emphasised selfless action projected as the need to act in accordance with ones' moral duties. This shift of emphasis, away from Brahminical rites and sacrificial rituals provided the root, in later time, for a number of cults like, Shaiva, Vaishnava and many**

others, it also provided the rough outline to much that is viewed as traditional `Hinduism'. Lot of variations occurred in this tradition. Much later Kabir and Nanak brought in sufi ideas in their teachings. Shakta sect and Tantric rituals also gained wide popularity. These are now played down as being anathema to the current version of Hinduism, i.e. Brahminical Hinduism.

The religious practices of untouchables and tribals have a lot of rituals which involve offerings and libations of meat and alcohol. Also these groups could not afford the costly donations required for Brahminical yagnas. Gradually dharma (religious duty) became central to religion, regarded as sacred and which had to be performed in accordance with one's varna, jati and sect and which differed according to each of these. Thapar (8) goes on to add

"`Hindu' missionary organisations, taking their cue from Christian missionaries are active among the adivasis, untouchables and economically backward communities, converting them to `Hinduism' as defined by upper caste movements of the last two centuries. That this `conversion' does little or nothing to change their status as adivasis, untouchables and so on and that they continue to be looked down upon by upper caste `Hindus' is of course of little consequence."

Jainism and Buddhism were the major amongst Shramanic tradition. These religions were persecuted in many parts of the country. The premodern Hinduism was not a monolithic religion, as being projected by the SP, but was a juxtaposition of multiple religious sects.

Thapar calls the Hinduism, currently being propogated as `Syndicated Hinduism'. This projection is made by the social base of the SP, a powerful urban middle class with a reach to rural rich who find it useful to bring into politics, a uniform, monolithic, Hinduism created to serve its new requirement. The Hinduism which more or less has won the social space and draws mainly from Brahminical texts, and also draws from Dharmashastras. The attempt of this

exercise is to present a modern reformed religion. The net result is a repackaged Brahminism. The Hindu communities settled abroad, look for a parallel to Christianity, as their religion. This is to overcome the sense of inferiority and cultural insecurity which they experience in their life. Thapar goes on to say

" Syndicated Hinduism claims to be re-establishing the Hinduism of pre-modern times; in fact it is only establishing itself and in the process distorting the historical and cultural dimensions of indigenous religions and divesting them of the nuances and variety which was a major source of their enrichment."

To put the understanding in a linear way:

"The Hindu religion as it is described today is said to have its roots in the Vedas, -- In any case, whatever we call the religion of these nomadic clans, it was not the religion that is today known as Hinduism. This (Hinduism in its current version) began to be formulated only in the period of Maghadha-Mauryan state, in the period ranging from Upanishads and the formation of Vedantic thought to the consolidation of the social order represented by Manusmriti. Buddhism and Jainism (as well as the materialist Carvak tradition) were equally old - Hinduism as we know it, was in other words, only one of the many consolidations within a diverse sub-continental cultural tradition, and attained social and political hegemony only during the sixth to tenth century A.D., often after violent confrontations with Buddhism and Jainism (9).

As per Gail Omvedt (9) this Brahmanic Hinduism adopted and identified with the authority of the Vedas and Brahmans. Material base of this system was the caste structure of the society. Its cooptive power was qualified to the extent that dissidents had to accept their place in the caste herarchy. The masses of people did not have the identity of `Hindu'. Multiple local gods and traditions existed side by side forming the base of popular culture. Later only during colonial period this identity of Hindu was constructed for all the inhabitants of this land except those who were followers of Islam or Christianity.

This construction was thrown up by English scholarship and by Indian elites. Gail posits that "In the nineteenth century, people like Lokmanya Tilak adopted the "Aryan theory of Race", claimed a white racial stock for upper caste Indians and accepted Vedas as their core literature. Tilak was also the first to try and unite a large section of the masses around brahmanical leadership with celebration of Ganesh festival - also by the end of 19th century, Hindu conservatives were mounting a full scale attack on their upper caste reformist rivals with the charges that latter were "anti-national." One gets a clear idea that SP has succeeded in perpetuating a perception amongst Hindus to forge a communal solidarity through elective projections of the past, and this does involve a deliberate reformulation of history. Emergence of nation state does bring in its wake and imposes a homogenisation. In case of India this evolution of "national religion" and Hinduism has mainly been defined in opposition to the Muslim "other".

Construction of Hindutva

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The construction of Hindutva is to be seen in the backdrop of emergence of Hinduism as a homogenous religion. The concept of Brahminical Hinduism, projected as Hinduism was at the root of multiple religious revivalist movements. Its political translation began mainly with Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who initiated the Ganapati Festival to wean away the popular participation of lower castes people in Muharram festival. Some sociologists (10) have called such ideological maneuvers as "*manipulative reinterpretation of cultural material*" and "*invention of tradition*". Later Tilak went on to organize a festival in honor of Shivaji, who broke the Moghul hold on western India and opened the way for rampage of Maratha armies through much of India. A strong anti-muslim slant was brought into the function. This nationalism was based on hate of Muslims. At the same time Ram, was popularised as a symbol of moral power, along with Hanuman symbolising the masculine strength. Shivaji's guru Ramdas had the image of anti-Muslim crusader and this was highlighted by Tilakites. Guru Ramdas's vision was limited to ending the Moghul rule and establishing Brahminical hegemony. Guru Ramdas was also given prominence in the initial phases of RSS activities. Shivaji tradition was and is an important means for Brahminism to assure themselves of the essential similarities of their interests and those of current society.

Anti-Muslim sentiments were consistently used by Tilak to project a political methodology of consolidating the Hindus. Starting from Bankimchandra Chatterji, various other Hindu national ideologues had whipped the fear psychosis with Muslims as the ones' threatening the survival of Hindus. All these fabrications were manufactured and propagated by the ascendant, nascent, amorphous Hindu nationalist forces. The combination of 'syndicated Hinduism' with nationalism was brewed by Vinayak Savarkar who can be called the first exponent of the doctrine of Hindutva. The mix of Brahminical Hinduism with nationalism reflecting the interests of upper castes and part of upper class was defined and later refined on the exclusionist principles, which are so basic to the Brahminism. Savarkar's initial anti British struggles were very impressive. After his assuming the role of the proponent of Hindutva his major energies were channelised in strengthening the politics of hate, the formation of communal Hindu Mahasabha and helping RSS from distance.

Savarkar's politics was a rival to Gandhian politics. Gandhi the representative of Indian Nationalism was branded as conciliator and appeaser of Muslims. Savarkar propounded that struggle for supremacy would begin after British left and that the Christians and Muslims were the real enemies who could be defeated only by "Hindutva". His key sentence was *"Hinduize all politics and militarize Hindudom"* . His definition of a Hindu was the one who regarded this land from Indus to the Seas as Pitrabhumi (Father land) and Punyabhumi (Holy land). This land belonged to Hindus and so by implications Muslims with Holy land in Mecca and Christians with Holy land in Jerusalem, can not have equal status to 'Hindus'. This was later to be made more explicit by Guru Golwalkar, who despite adoring Hitler, was 'generous' and 'kind' enough to these 'aliens' by granting them the status of second class citizens. Also began the concept of "Hindu Raj" the precursor of present SP goal the 'Hindu Rashtra'.

The final crystallisation occurred with foundation of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) which became the `Father' organization for plethora of organisations which were to take birth after a period of consolidation of the core swayamsevaks (volunteers).

Birth and Growth of RSS

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With the transition of leadership of Congress from the Brahminical Tilakites to Nationalist Gandhi, transition in the anticolonial struggle took a major leap. Gandhi's Nationalism, though used religious idioms was not a religious nationalism and unlike the religious nationalism of Tilak, was able to inspire the large section of Indian masses into anticolonial struggle. With the leadership of Congress slipping away from the Chittapavan Brahmins, with the dissatisfaction with Gandhi's conciliatory methods and in the backdrop of the slipping hegemony of Brahmins over the lower castes, the idea of an organisation representing the aspirations of these high castes took roots and this is what gave birth to RSS (in 1925), an explicitly Hindu organisation, working for the achievement of Hindu Rashtra and calling it a `Nation'. Thus the synthesis of religious construct, Hinduism and Nationalism got crystallisation through this organisation, which in due course, was to take the central place in the political battles of upper castes, displacing the Hindu Maha Sabha.

RSS decided to model itself on 'Hindu Joint Family' and on analogy with the patriarch of Hindu joint family created the post of Sar Sangh Chalak (supreme dictator). Its emphasis was, one, physical fitness of volunteers and their training in methods of street battles (Not battles against the British Raj), and two, it started discussion groups, the Bouddhiks, where the glorified Hindu history was (and is) shoved down the throats of trainees. This non-dialogic, authoritarian mode of teaching emphasised the core of RSS doctrine as per which, during the glorious Hindu past of vedic times, the glorious Hindu Kings ruled this Bharatvarsha in the most Hindu way. The Hindu society is the most tolerant society, the chosen race, the society which gave wisdom to the world. However, this tolerance of Hindus was misconstrued by the Muslims who invaded this holy land and converted the people on the force of the sword. This rule of Muslims has created big problem for the Hindu Nation. Later the rulers of this country, under leadership of Gandhi, have appeased the Muslims and pampered them. After independence Nehru took over Congress whose pseudosecularism pampered the Muslims and the Hindus are suffering in their own country. Now the time has come to rise in the defense of holy Fatherland, to consolidate the Hindu Nation, Hindu Rashtra through the organisation of the Hindus, the RSS."

After its formation RSS got lot of support from Brahmins/Banias, landed aristocracy and a small section of petty bourgeoisie. It concentrated on so called 'cultural' work of spreading the Hindutva doctrine by molecular permeation, keeping aloof from the anti British struggles which were being led by Gandhian Congress. It went to the extent of ridiculing the 1942 Quit India Movement and supported the British war effort. It also encouraged its followers to infiltrate in army, bureaucracy, and the police. After independence it helped in the formation of first, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh and later Bharatiya Majdoor Sangh, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and a plethora of organisations have sprung up in last few decades. Its social presence had been inconspicuous till mid eighties. The first time it got broad notice was when one of

the trained cadres of RSS, Nathuram Godse, killed the Father of Indian Nationalism, Mahatma Gandhi. Later it got noticed for its `anti communist' noises during India China War in 1962. Despite low social visibility it strengthened itself by continuing to `train' the cadres who occupied crucial positions in army, bureaucracy, police and media. The second major social recognition of this organisation came with JP movement in early seventies, when riding on the wave of middle class movement, JP launched a mass struggle and permitted the `committed' RSS to be a part of it. This recognition of RSS by a figure like JP, helped to wash a bit of the `sin' of the murder of Mahatma Gandhi.

Following the emergency and elections, Janata Party of which Jan Sangh became one of the constituents came to power. After the split in Janata Party, the old Jan Sanghis unwilling to break their RSS connection, split from Janata Party to form Bharatiya Janata Party on the agenda of Gandhian socialism. This probably was due to the calculation that socialism was a popular cliché and can be encashed upon. Despite its prolonged sustained work, RSS did not get its social visibility till quite late and its political arm did remain a marginal force. What transformed this marginal force into a major political power?

Indira Gandhi, loosing her popular appeal, did subtly try to win over the `religious nationalist' social base of upper castes by communalising the Kashmir and Punjab problems. With Rajiv Gandhis' blunder on Shah Bano, it was necessary to appease the Hindu communalists by opening the locks of Babri Masjid. This gave a lot of fillip to the Hindu communalists. Later VP Singh's regime implemented Mandal Commission recommendations. And this was 'The' point which transformed the Indian politics. The reaction to Mandal Commission was a wide spread backlash of the upper castes, especially in Hindi belt. BJP cleverly encashed upon it by giving an emotive touch to the political events. SP by a masterstroke projected Hindutva, Mandir issue as the core of social problems. It was not possible for BJP to directly oppose Mandal Commission, also

it had to express the aspirations of its social constituency, those opposed to the social justice, those for status quo, those for privileges of upper castes. Advani's Rath Yatra campaign came at a time, by which the industrialisation process had thrown up a new layer of petty industrialists, also in north the construction of Hindu identity was strongest amongst this new layer and the earlier Brahmin/Bania/Rich peasant, upwardly mobile middle classes (an unavoidable mix of caste/class categories).

The movement, Hindutva, which existed only as an ideology so far, got the real flesh and blood with the consolidation of anti-Mandal sentiments. The social sector which was supporter of Religious nationalism, which was living in the category `us' in contrast to the category of the `other' the Muslims swung into a social action to aggressively guard its privileges and status. The cultural onslaught of VHP (Ramshilapujan and the like) came in to supplement the political campaign of BJP and the heady mix of religious emotive symbol and political agenda of protecting the interests of the upper castes, watered the so far dormant, poisonous seeds of SP movement, culminating in the demolition of Babri Masjid and accompanying nationwide anti-Muslim programs, reaching their crescendo in the Shiv Sena controlled anti-Muslim riots in Bombay and the ghastly rape of Muslim women in Surat.

The political force which had a semi-notional existence till mid 80's, and was mainly surviving on the ideological fodder of `ban cow slaughter', `Indianise Muslims', `abolish article 370' and the like as an ineffective social distraction, found its moorings and strength in late 80's to create a `social monster' which after a `acute' beginning of early nineties has crystallised itself as a social political and ideological force asserting its political agenda at every opportune moment in the society.

Social Base of Hindutva Movement

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One will like to add a comment about the relations of Hindutva with Congress and Shiv Sena. Congress came up mainly as a 'national', anticolonial movement but Hindutva was constantly associated with it, at times dominant, at times hidden and at times a marginal accompaniment. Under the leadership of Tilak Congress was the vehicle of Hindutva in a major way. With Gandhi assuming the leadership of Congress, Hindutva was subjugated to the main 'anti-British' project and was side tracked. But it existed within Congress all the time. Lala Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Sardar Patel and later Purshottamdas Tandon were the main 'Hindutva' votaries. Also there was a uniform scatter of these 'strong saffron' to mild saffron leaders at all the rungs of leadership. With Nehru assuming strong 'socialist, secular' principles as the state policy, the Hindutva elements kept themselves maintaining their roots. After Nehru's demise and with change in social dynamics, Indira Gandhi veered to upper castes as the main support base, the upper caste vote bank, in 84 elections.

Rajiv's Congress lost out the battle for the 'upper caste' vote bank, to the blatant puritan and unadulterated upper caste agenda of BJP, which since then has not looked back and has by now become 'The' vehicle of Hindutva politics, marginalising the Congress from the upper caste arena. All in all though Hindutva has played a 'hide and

seek' expression in some periods, through Congress. But it is the BJP which has been the major and preferred vehicle for Hindutva agenda. Shiv Sena, which thrived on the 'sons of the soil' garbage, watered from the backyard by some elements of Congress, came up strongly in Bombay. Supported by the big capital, it unleashed a 'physical annihilation' of communist labor leaders in Bombay.

After exhausting this agenda, it temporarily campaigned against the 'lungiwallahs' (South Indians), and Gujarathis before latching on to the upswinging Hindutva movement. In the process it boosted and supplemented the SP, playing the combine role of a mini Maharashtraian BJP and the storm trooper Bajrang Dal (the lumpen 'son' of R.S.S., specialising in anti-muslim onslaught/pogroms). In early simmerings of its emergence this movement to begin with was spearheaded mostly by Brahmins. Its support came from the landed aristocracy and some layers of middle classes. Most amorphous sections identified with the Gandhian Nationalism, while the subalterns identified more with the movement of Ambedkar or the communist parties.

Despite the training of cadres, dedicated, committed, ascetic on so on, the reach of religious nationalism was confined to Brahmin/Bania/Rich peasant and petty bourgeoisie in the Hindi belt in Northern India. And the failure of its campaigns on cow slaughter ban, Indianise the Muslims, was well indicative of that. Even the communal riots which began from 60s began with a slow pace and picked up more and more dangerous proportions with passage of time. The ideological propagation of Hindutva and the rise of its support base went hand in hand, and by late seventies and early eighties the anti-Muslim riots began to assume horrendous proportions.

Though BJP and its predecessor the Jan Sangh began with small electoral support, this support was well designed. It was the urban middle classes, sections of twice-born castes, and the Banias. Let us have a brief look at the changes in social composition which have occurred during last 50 years of the republic. The proportion of

urban population has gone up by 20-25 per cent. They also constitute the ones' having derived maximum benefit of modern education and the facilities thrown up by the industrialization process. They do have a sort of dominant presence in the society. The cultural, social and political aspirations of this sector is the ground on which has risen the edifice of SP.

To understand the social base of the SP we will like to go into the regrouping of social groups in Gujarat. Nandy et al (11) have described this process in detail. Along with urbanisation there has been a parallel process in which the rich peasants of Gujarat have achieved an enhanced social status. These Patidars', (cash crop farmers) caste has been upgraded by a process of religious manoeuvring. The polarisation of middle class (Brahmin, Bania) and Patidar occurred around 1980, around the issue of reservations for the lower castes. In 1981, Gujarat witnessed an extreme form of caste violence directed against the lower castes. These antireservation agitations played a key role in consolidating the base of upper castes and upwardly mobile middle classes. SP directly or indirectly stood by to support this upper caste onslaught.

By using clever strategies SP was also able to give an upwardly mobile channel to a section of Dalits, aspiring a better place within Hindu society. In Gujarat, one can clearly see the social functionality of creating the `other'. Here earlier the ultimate object of hate was the dalit, by a clever manoeuver, the Muslim is substituted for that, the dalit is unleashed upon the "other", a atmosphere of terror is created, which helps to maintain a `status quo' of social hierarchy. The core of this social base was given a cohesion by various Yatras and campaigns by VHP.

Basu, Datta, Sarkar, Sarkar and Sen in their enlightening work `Khakhi Shorts Saffron Flags' (1), have tried to trace the roots of SP movement. They correlate it with the rise of new religiosity around worship `Jai Mata Di', `Jai Santoshi Ma', around functions like `Jagrata' and pilgrimages like `Vaishno Devi'. All these which emerged in northern states in late 60's and early 70 got co-opted

and colored by the VHP campaigns. Basu et.al. identify a significant social base of SP in new urban middle class, spreading in small towns as well, which has come up due to the rapid growth of relatively small enterprises and the accompanying trade boom. "These small scale units flourish without the concomitant growth of organized working class, since individual work-places are far too small to consolidate the labor force and enable effective unionization." This type of industrial development, based on screw driver technology has mushroomed all through in 70's and 80's. This newer middle class tends to be fragmented into smaller more individual units. "They are marked by intense internal competition and steady pressure of new opportunity structures, ever expanding horizons for upward mobility and a compulsive consumerism that keeps transcending its own limits. The very pressure of growth is disturbingly destabilizing; the brave new world of global opportunities creates anomie and existential uncertainties." (1) The Green Revolution in parts of UP has increased rural purchasing power feeding into the boom in urban enterprises, consumerism and trade.

Characterisation of the Movement

Chapter 6

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Most of the social scientist have characterised this movement as a communal one. The broad perception amongst the segment of liberal, progressive intellectuals is that this is a communal movement, spearheaded by the SP, to strengthen the social and political power of Hindu elites. It's most commonly perceived activity is to train the cadres in its core doctrine to float the different organisations (BJP, VHP, Bajrang Dal, Swadeshi Jagran Manch, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, etc.) which overtly spread the communal venom against minorities in general and Muslims in particular. By now the success of SP (Sangh Parivar) in communalising the social space, infiltrating police, army and bureaucracy is well recognised. And it is, and is broadly perceived as a communal movement.

'Religious nationalism' is a characterisation by many a sociologists who pick up the assertions of these movements and give them a decent looking veneer (13). In Juergansmeyers' understanding the religious nationalists see the failure of democracy and socialism, both western models, leading them to conclude that secular nationalism has failed. And so they view religion as a hopeful alternative, which can provide a basis for criticism and change. As per him the differences amongst various religious leaders are immense, but they all share one thing in common - seeing Western secular nationalism as their enemy and their hope to revive religion in public sphere. Juergansmeyer hesitates to call these movements fundamentalist as this word tends to suggest "an intolerant, self-righteous, and narrowly dogmatic religious literalism." The term is

less descriptive and more accusatory. Also it is an imprecise term for making comparisons across cultures. The better term for this phenomenon is offered by Bruce Lawrence (14) which suggests a global revolt against secular ideology that often accompanies modern society.

The 'modern' according to this are those who are 'modern' while opposing the values of modernism. Also fundamentalism does not carry any political meaning and conveys the idea of solely being motivated by religious beliefs rather than broad concerns about the nature of society and the world. The term religious nationalist conveys the main meaning of religious and political interests and also holds that there is no clear distinction between religion and politics, as this distinction is a mask of western thinking.

But this characterisation is not able to totally understand different broad and deep facets of its offensives. Also it is not able to explain the intensity and sustained nature of this movement. To fill this gap some social scientists and activists like Ram Bapat, characterise this as being a fundamentalist movement, akin to the one in countries like Iran (12). As per this formulation Indian fundamentalism, like the global one which exists everywhere in post industrial societies, has been generated by the system of advanced capitalism or late capitalism.

In third world countries it is in a manifest form in contrast to the latent form in advanced countries. Bapat feels that due to lack of power of public opinion of the progressive world at the turn of century, the first world is making every attempt to put fundamentalism on top of the agenda for the world politics and even for military purposes. After the decades of 60s and 70s, which constituted the years of triumph of socialism and also of emancipatory nationalism, the next two decades marked the beginning of revivalism and fundamentalism. Originally fundamentalism developed in America where capitalism faced a lot of turmoil from 1870 to 1930. Similarly other countries when faced with severe economic crisis, came up with the fundamentalist

response from some sectors of society. In America this fundamentalist response came in the form of a movement which asserted the revivalist trend to identify essential absolute to enable American citizens to take on the force of darkness. Bapat makes a pertinent point that since 1818, Maharashtra, amongst all Indian states has served as a kind of hot house plant for sustaining all kinds of orthodoxy, revivalism, fundamentalism and communalism, particularly of Hindutva variety. To begin with Fundamentalist Hindutva is not the Hinduism practised by millions of people. It (the Hindutva) is an imaginary Hinduism which is essentially extra-historical, extra-religious and is a political credo for those who want to make much of the ideology for their political ends. The fundamentalism is neither based on traditional modes of thought nor traditions as they existed. They win over people by propogating of `manufactured traditions.'

They adopt the gains of modernity, science, technology, weaponry and industrial production. It wants a modern apparatus of life without the necessary relations between human beings which would give them space to struggle for their rights. In nutshell, it wants to achieve a certain modern culture i.e. the modern production process sans the accompanying space for improvement of human relationships. It is a post feudal phenomenon aimed at inventing a new identity for the ruling classes.

It uses the language of religious discourse. Fundamentalism is possible only in semitic religions. The semitisation process of Hinduism is going on from last many decades. This semitic Hinduism which in fact is the Brahminical Hinduism has discovered the Book in `Gita', the holy deity in `Ram' from amongst hundreds of contenders for this status. The attempt of this fundamentalist movement is to read their interests and programmes of the present into the past. Bapat feels that Sangh Parivar is not fascist as, fascism does not lean upon religion to give it the cohesive aggressive slant. In contrast Aijaz Ahmed, K.N. Panikar, Sumeet Sarkar and many other sociologist characterise the SP as being

Fascist. As per Sarkar (15) the SP movement may not look exactly parallel to the German Fascism, but a closer look at the pattern of affinities and differences helps to highlight the crucial features, notably as the implications of the offensive of SP go far beyond the events of 92-93. The drive for Hindu Rashtra has put into jeopardy the entire secular and democratic foundations of our republic. It is only Hindu communalism, and not the Muslim communalism which has the potential of imposing fascism in India. Sarkar points out that Fascism was introduced in Italy and Germany through a combination of carefully orchestrated street violence (with a mass support) and deep infiltration into the police bureaucracy and the army, with the connivance of 'centrist' political leaders. Hitler, for example, had repeatedly asserted his party's respect for legality even after coming to power, but meanwhile his colleague Goering, Nazified the German police, organised street encounters in which more than 50 anti-Nazis were murdered and set the scene for Reichstag fire; after which first the communists and then all opposition political parties and trade unions were quickly destroyed. The methodology adopted in destruction of mosque is so much reminiscent of the same method. The mosque is demolished in 51/2 hours in total violation of supreme court order and repeated assurances given by leading opposition party, and the central government does not even lift a finger till the mosque is totally razed to the ground. Countrywide riots follow, police partiality is painfully obvious, the land grabbing vandals build a temporary 'temple', illegally, and this structure is protected, while the political force behind this, the BJP alternates between occasional apology and more frequent aggressive justification, while their brother organisation, the VHP adds Delhi's Jumma Masjid in the list of Hindu monuments and denounces the Indian constitution as being anti Hindu. The beating up of journalists on Dec. 6, is no surprise as the fascists forces, who carefully cultivate the press usually, like to combine persuasion with an occasional big stick.

Unlike the Fascism in Italy and Germany which came into power within a decade or less of its emergence as a political movement,

Hindutva had a long gestation period, which has given added strength and stability to the movement and it has been a long enough time for their ideas to become part of the social common sense. Sarkar correctly points out that the real base of Sangh Parivar remains the predominantly upper caste trader professional petit bourgeoisie of cities and small town mainly in Hindi heartland; with developing connections perhaps with upwardly mobile landholding groups in countryside. He quotes Daniel Gurien's definition of fascism as "not only an instrument at the service of big business, but at the same time a mystical upheaval of the petite bourgeoisie. Specific linkages of big business with fascism remain controversial. By a sustained propaganda work SP has succeeded in creating a communalised common sense in which Muslim has become a near equivalent of the Jew - or the Black in contemporary white racism. As per SP the Muslim in India is unduly privileged a charge much more absurd than it was in Germany where Jews had been fairly prominent and well to do. In India Muslims are grossly underrepresented in business, bureaucracy, army, police, private enterprise etc. Here the alleged privileges are the appeasement of Muslims by pseudosecularists.

Like Hitler in Germany, the SP arrogates to itself to be representative of Hindus, who are in majority, and thereby its democratic credentials are above board. Similarly since SP is 'The' representative of Hindus, any body deviating from its line is anti Hindu at worst and pseudosecular at best. Unlike Jews who had to face the gas chambers, Hindutva line is 'kind and generous' and offers a second class citizenship to the Muslims.

The constant anti Muslim violence, euphemistically called 'communal' riots has succeeded in ghettoising large chunks of the Muslim population. Also unlike Nazis, SP grounds the identity on religion.

Aijaz Ahmed (16) calls it Hindutva Fascism and points out that it differs from the Italian and German ones' on the ground that it speaks relatively rarely of economic instance and fashions its

ideological discourse along categories of 'nation' and community seeking to obtain the identity between these two categories nation and community - through methodical use of violence as a political instrumentality. Hindutva has nationalised the violence as a means for capturing state power. As per Ahmed the whole series of mass spectacles, mobilizations and blood baths that began with rath yatra and culminated in the demolition of masjid on one hand, and terrorization of Bombay on the other has introduced into Indian politics a qualitatively different dynamics, pushing the urban culture of diverse regions across the country in a distinctly fascist direction, and giving to the new phase of Indian communalism a form at once hysterical and methodical which is similar to that of European anti-semitism.

The true object of SP's desire is not submission of the muslims alone but of state power as a whole, and remaking of India in its own image. This, it is achieving by imposing a homogenisation on the lines of Brahminical ethos on the society. Concieved and executed as at present, the SP fascist project has some limitation since it does not 'pose' to be radical enough to win over the masses and India is too diverse a country to buy SP's homogenisation at a quick pace.

The Hindu Right (SP) has been equated with Nazi Germany by Jan Breman (17), who points out that popular support for Hindutva primarily stems from social sections which enjoy better life than earlier generations were used to. " - both (German Fascism and Hindutva) originate within and also appeal to the petty bourgeoisie, a composite class which is growing in size and political weight". Despite minor differences Breman posits that there are deeper similarities. Nazi ideology worked into a pseudo religious dogma, while Hindutva has packed its gospel in purely religious terms. This religiosity of Hindutva is a mere facade for a more comprehensive societal reconstruction which is very materialistic in nature. Breman, who was born and bred during Hitlers reign and has also seen the Hindutva onslaught from close quarters, gets a distinct feeling of de ja vu. This is partly because of the fact that similar to

the Hitler regime here also one community is singled out as arch enemy of the people (the nation), the Hindu majority. The persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany was planned and controlled by the party machinery. Though in the maze of propaganda which gives advanced legitimization to the pogroms which are to follow, the Hindutva offensive tries to cleverly masquerade its role in the pogroms on Muslims. This is possible because of a clever division of labor between 'father' (RSS) and different 'sons' and 'daughter' of this 'parivar'. RSS trains the cadre in ideology, BJP plays this game on political chessboard, VHP gives an emotive touch to the communal project by roping in the Sants, Mahants and the NRI's, the Rashtra Sevika Samiti backs up the RSS ideology by taking it in the sphere of home, and the Bajrang Dal translates it in to the street violence, which can take off only because of the ground work done by other members of the 'parivar'. This was painfully obvious on Bombay and Surat in 1993. In addition the Hindutva forces encouraged hunt against the deviant forces, with those upholding the secular ethos, being next on the firing line.

But unlike the Jews in Germany, Muslims are no capitalist sharks, so their 'privileged' 'appeasement' is projected and they are shown to be a pampered lot. Also part of this aggression is justified by their political domination and harassment of Hindus in the medieval times. Bremen sharply perceives the project of Hindu right- "marginalised as Mohammadi Hindus they may be allowed to hide in their own ghettos, cordoned off like the judenviertel" were in the Nazified Europe. In their defiled habitat they will live beyond the pale, as new untouchables in a modern India which is thoroughly Hinduised".

Trying to take a broad and critical look at the Fascist analogy of Sangh Parivar Achin Vanaik (8) theorises the phenomenon of fascism and uses it for analysing Hindu Nationalism. Vanaik feels that fascist paradigm is inappropriate and of very limited value for situating not just Hindu nationalism but a whole host of political phenomena, particularly in the third world. There are important

similarities and dissimilarities between Hindutva and Fascism. To take up dissimilarities first: lack of charismatic leader in SP, absence of an explicitly anti-liberal/anti-democratic and anti working class themes, absence of any verbal anticapitalist demagoguery, absence of any orientation to the theme of a 'generalisational revolt' etc. Vanaik states that though Fascist formations can draw their support from all classes, they are not multiclass political formations or movements. They are not a form of authoritarian populism. "Fascist formations win ideological and political hegemony because their decisive victories are achieved on non-ideological terrain. Their momentum is convulsive. They grow rapidly but they also fade out fast if they do not achieve power. In postcolonial societies the political vehicles of religious fundamentalism or religion based nationalism are not so much the fascist formations as, at most, potential fascist formations, where that potential may or may not be realised. While fascist state in India would necessarily be Hindu nationalist, the Hindu nationalist state would not necessarily be fascist."

Vanaik in his presentation is totally silent on the class base of fascism. This forces him to turn to ideological realms to characterise the nature of Hindu nationalism. In a subtle shift from class analysis, to analysing 'nation' Vanaik dumps the materialist understanding in the bin and walks on the crutches of idealism "In last 15 years there has been the dramatic rise of politics of cultural exclusivisms and xenophobia.... we are witness to four forms of which the politics of exclusivity have taken rise of religious fundamentalism.... Hindu nationalism spreading and swelling of carbuncles of racist and anti immigrant xenophobia in the first world. Vanaik does relate all these phenomenon to global changes in correlation and feels that politics of identity has by and large overshadowed the politics of class. He sees this movement, the political vehicle of religious fundamentalism not as fascist but only potentially so, it is an Indian variant of a generic phenomenon but does not belong to the genus of fascism.

Discussion

Chapter 7

The Hindutva Offensive

by

R.R. Puniyani

Different scattered views, not necessarily mutually exclusive are prevalent in the sociological domain. The communal nature of SP is very obvious at the very first level of approximation. Its fundamentalist character is easily discernible from its clinging to religious expressions. The proper characterisation can come by constantly relating the social roots with the political manifestations of the SP.

To begin with since Fascism has been a very major category which came into being and has serious implications, it is necessary to understand the 'core' of Fascism. Narratives and analysis on Fascism can go on and on at different levels. Martin Kitchen (19) has tried to give a succinct summary of this phenomenon. It is an ultraconservative movement rejecting liberal values, projects sovereignty of nation as absolute supreme, glorifies martial spirit, dictatorship of supreme dictator, calls for subordination of rights of individuals to the 'states' sovereignty'. It tends to identify the 'enemy' 'the culprit' for social ills, terrorising the social psyche and suspending the human rights.

The social backdrop of this ideology and social movement is 'fright' of the propertied classes by the unrest of the poor. Extreme poverty, inflation, malnutrition, unemployment are the ground on which unrest of the poor is founded. Along with section of the propertied classed it is the response of middle classes to the unrest of poor, unemployed and different social movement (organized working class in case of classical fascism). The major thrust of attack of fascist movement is on 'human rights' movements (trade union movement in case of German Fascism).

The core of Fascist movement is a threatened middle class, threatened by the struggles of the oppressed in the backdrop of general scarcity of resources. The European Fascism came up as a cataclysm which gripped the society in a brief span of time for a brief span of time. SP movements theoretical underpinnings began decades ago. The ideological exercises and consolidation has been going on since then. Despite a vast network of Shakha's and their followers in the state apparatus they were not a social force till 80's. 80's saw the turmoil of lower castes, asserting itself. The response was anti-dalit riots spread all over the country. The Gujarat anti dalit riots of 1980 are a clear example of this. The twin processes: formation of cash crop rich peasants, the small industrialists and urbanised middle class acquired a substantial presence by 80's. The precipitation of this amorphous mass into SP movement was brought in by many factors: the main of these was the 'Mandalisation', which brought together the 'core supporters of fascism (Rich peasants, small industrialists and sections of middle classes), threatened by assertion of the low castes, poor etc., immediately rallied around the SP.

It was not possible for SP to keep openly attacking the lower castes and other oppressed sections of society. A clever manoeuver has taken place here. The real project of this 'core fascist supporters' is to keep the dalits, poor workers and women in their place. (Also this can not be done openly due to the seeping in of liberal values in society). The upper castes have a morbid fear of protecting their privileges and social status. Last few decades have seen a systematic, subtle campaign to degrade 'reservations' and to look down upon those who avail of these reservations. Also they hate the movements supporting the rights of poor peasants and workers. The latter especially are the 'hate objects' for the upcoming 'petty industrialists'. One is not sure about what the extent of impact the 'women's rights' movement has been on the upper caste Hindu males in particular, but one can broadly say that the upcoming movement of self assertion of rights of women added up to the insecurity which this group faced in the society. Thus broadly in the complex class/caste/gender scenario the petty bourgeoisie, in this context, the upper caste Hindu male was looking for an ideology, support system and a political movement which can suppress the aspirations of these groups, as they were threatening his social and political power.

With the development of liberal ethos worldwide it is not possible, not to pay lip service to casteless society, gender equality and human rights in general. One (upper class/caste) hates these human rights but one has to either (a) distract attention from the situations which gives space for struggle to these or (b) propogates alternative set of value system which without directly opposing these 'threats' to their status, obfuscates these sharp formulations to propogate the ideology which neutralises the sharpness of these assertions.

'Hindutva' fits in the bill excellently. One one hand it creates an external enemy image in the hapless 'muslim' on whose head are dumped all the historical ignomities, the causation of present evils, and in this direction creates an 'enemy' who is to be hated, fought against, repeatedly subjected to street violence to 'ghettoise' him and this process is done with 'hysterical intensity, the pitch of which subsumes all the other genuine voices of struggling oppressed groups. The enemy's projection through 'manufacturing history', 'doctoring mass consciousness' is taken to a level whereby the 'anti-enemy' pogrom can be initiated at will, while the communalised social consciousness and communalised state apparatus aids and abetts it. The 'enemy' in this case is an extension of the low caste shudra, all attempts are made to engineer the hatred between the two, with the purpose that the latter can be used against the former. This whole process is so much full of 'social passion' that a terrorising atmosphere is created which is the best way to suppress the liberalism and the accompanying social space for the struggles of the oppressed groups.

'Hindutva' also has the 'merit' at another level. After 'excluding the other', all the remaining ones are Hindus. They are projected to be a homogenous Hindu mass, in which each has and 'assigned' 'dharma' to which each has to stick for the harmonious society to flower. The concept of homogenous and harmonious is propogated by the upholders of the status quo, by those who are beneficiaries in the present power equations. It is proclaimed, ours is a casteless society, the caste politics is divisive, we should (the lower castes) overcome the caste psychology, even at a time when caste exploitation is going on at full speed. The women is given the 'respectable' place of 'mother' and a 'sister' 'wife' and 'daughter' these relations which the patriarchs exploit to the hilt. The workers are supposed to be doing the productive activity for the 'nation' and so should conform to the present exploitative, unjust laws, lest the 'nation' will suffer. In

this 'national' project the unrestricted right of employer to exploit is conspicuous by its silent presence.

Thus nothing can fit into the political project of 'upper caste male', than the political construct of Hindutva. Unlike the fascisms of Europe whose occurrence was cataclysmic, Indian Fascism, is chronic and sub-acute. It comes in paroxysms and every occurrence of its exacerbation leaves a broader consolidation for itself. Every occurrence of its offense, leaves the 'other' more helpless and ghettoised. This ghettoisation is a necessary accompaniment of Brahminical domination, hegemony of Hindutva. Brahminical exclusivity needs a ghetto, be it of a untouchable centuries ago, or of a muslim in 20th century (nay probably even in 21st century for that matter).

Hindutva in essence is fascism, as to use Vanaik's 'Fascist minimum' criterion, its the 'core' and class character which should determine the nature of a movement, either in opposition or in power. Fascism's core, the minimum, is the middle class base. Hindutva's core, the social base is the cash crop farmer, the petty industrialist and multiple segments of middle classes (bureaucracy, professionals, traders etc) latched on to the big capital. The peripheral manifestations apart, which can change in place and time, Fascism and Hindutva share the commonality, the same social base. Hindutva is a sub-acute, chronic Fascism of a caste-ridden, post colonial society.

Where does Hindutva differ from the Fascisms of European variety. To begin with the ideological base and cadre of Hindutva were prepared for decades by the brahminism, before the change in social dynamics resulted in threat to the power of its social constituency fell back and on a ready-made formation. In between period there were many individuals, from these segments who had veered around to its politics. Secondly Hindutva, as a fascist variant, has invaded the social image in a much more consistent and planned way. Unlike cataclysmic Fascisms, its dedicated soldiers infiltrated army, bureaucracy, police, media and education for decades to prepare a conducive ground for smooth walk-in of the Hindutva in the social space.

Thirdly probably because of the above, Hindutva does not need a 'radical' rhetoric of 'socialism' or some such, which was used by European Fascisms. The absence of radical rhetoric is a strength of Hindutva as it eliminates the need to undertake

radical social reforms whenever it succeeds in capturing the power in small sectors, states, of the country. In a way Hindutva is a organically stronger variety of Fascism as it does not need the radical rhetoric to propel its engine. There is another subtle problem in native Fascism. The unspoken north-south divide. The imageries of Hindutva are mainly around north Indian upper caste male. This hegemony is yet to succeed in its goal in subjugating the non-Hindi speaking regions. With the rise of cash crop farmers and other social bases of Hindutva, in non-Hindi speaking regions also, there is a marginal possibility of this movement getting some foothold in these regions as well. But probably the extent of this will be too small.

The chronicity, i.e. slow speed of this movement has its inherent problems. Where as on one hand it can capture the social space, on the other it can also elicit a reaction to itself. This reaction to it from dalits, workers, women, section of middle class which is secular, is a big obstacle to the march of Hindutva. Big capital, the major industrial houses have a unique relation with SP. Whenever faced with crisis to their own existences the socially terrorising atmosphere created by SP helps the bourgeois to wriggle out of the compulsions of liberalism. The conservative movement of SP helps the needs of capital to keep thriving in an uninterrupted way. The noises of 'swadeshi' and the multispeak' adopted by different 'sons' of the RSS are an indication enough that overall the Hindutva project does not go against the global nature, 'computer chips', 'potato chips', 'Dump Enron in the Arabian Sea' (and bring it back through the roads of Konkan)', while the Indian capital continues its logical trajectory of more and more firmly becoming the part of global capital with uneven playing field, on which it has to play while the unfair immigration laws and hegemony of richer countries increasing the miseries of the poor people of the poor countries.

Thus this, chronic, resilient, thriving fascism, expressed through the idiomitable vehicle of SP continues to throw up different shades of its existence, sometimes terrorising (to the poor and minorities) sometimes aggressive (to the neighboring 'enemy' countries), sometimes appearing to collapse under the weight of its own contradictions. But the march, at the moment is on. The social roots of Hindutva are all for the support and continuation of the repressive capitalist regime; sustaining the bourgeois aspirations, while continuing to pursue its own project.

At present the situation is fairly in balance. The onslaught has achieved mammoth proportions in the north, but south and east is comparatively unaffected by its paranoid aggression. The reaction of dalits, though fragmented is definitely going to retard the march of the 'Rath' of Hindutva.

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Conclusion : Combating Fascism

Chapter 8
The Hindutva Offensive
by
R.R. Puniyani

The core of fascist movement is to suppress and suspend the rights of the oppressed. It is a social agenda of shaken, threatened middle class in the service of big bourgeois. It is a mass movement, Hindutva is the political agenda of petty industrialists, sections of middle classes and rich peasantry blessed by capital. Hindutva aims to create the new ghettoised untouchables, the poor muslims, a la the shudra of the olden times and keeping this goal in mind it wants to suppress/sidetrack the social and political aspirations of dalits, workers and women.

With growth of autonomous movements each struggling sector is asserting itself through small attempts to work for, to wrest its rights. This is a non-hegemonic way of struggle of the oppressed. Unfortunately this has a potential of advancement in liberal atmosphere only, where these fragmented, isolated struggles and movements can stand on their own feet to march towards their goals.

Hindutva is succeeding in creating a social atmosphere, where it will be difficult for these struggles to be carried on properly. Already lot of hurdles are cropping up in the march of these movements. These movements share an anti-authoritarianism which can be the basis of there coming together, to combat Hindutva, despite their seemingly diverse social agendas. The common platform which coordinates, without suppressing the aspirations of individual constituents, can aim against the Fascistic Hindutva and strengthen the secular, democratic rights of large sections of society. That alone can form the basis of secular, democratic ethos, which can stand upto the onslaught of Hindutva and in the long term show it, its place in the history, the dustbin.

Acknowledgement

(I am thankful to Irfan Engineer, Jairus Banaji and Vrijendra for the discussions which helped me formulate my ideas. However responsibility and weaknesses of these formulations are entirely mine.)

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Appendix

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