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Imperialism today

Communal fascism and its dangers

- Debate - Imperialisms today -

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This is an edited version of a speech given at the Calcutta Press Club by the author in April 2014 as part of a national seminar on Communal fascism. It is reprinted here as part of our discussion on the question of imperialism.

Friends, it is necessary to be passionate about the fact that Narendra Modi, leader of the BJP, is being projected as the next Prime Minister of India when we know the results of the General Election in the middle of May. But it is also necessary to reflect coolly about what it would mean and how to react..

We have to be careful in using the term fascism. It is often used indiscriminately. When the police beat up striking workers or agitating students, ultra left groups issue leaflets talking about “the barbaricÂ fascismÂ of the police”. What is a bourgeois democratic baton charge, please? I remember when I was a student, graffiti on Calcutta walls could be seen condemning Jyoti Basu as a new Mussolini. And of course, we have the regular attacks on Indira Gandhi’s “fascism”.

Make no mistake, we have had despicable, very right wing, authoritarian governments. Like Indira Gandhi, especially during the emergency. But it was notÂ fascism. If we do not get this right, we will be crying wolf so often, that we will be diluting the gravity of the meaning ofÂ fascism, and making people feel, oh, thenÂ fascismÂ is not that bad. If the emergency wasÂ fascism, then you survive a degree of terror but then vote it out roundly. Keeping this in mind, we need to understand why it is the Sangh Parivar, including the BJP, that we call fascist, not others.

In doing this, we however have to note something else. Bourgeois liberal intellectuals are rapidly coming out and declaring that the Sangh is not that bad, or, if the Sangh is, Modi is not. There are many examples, but for lack of time I want to talk about just two of them. Both are well known, and have Wikipedia articles on them, which means they are not recognized only among intellectuals, but much more widely.

One is Ramchandra Guha. Guha is a smooth, supposedly Gandhian intellectual, who, as befits a modern time Gandhian, is quite anti communist. He is the one who attacked Arundhati Roy as “the Arun Shourie of the Left”, alleging she was trying to take away credit from Medha Patkar.

Now that Medha Patkar is contesting as AAP candidate, where is Guha? He is telling his readers that Indian democracy is so strong that the coming to power of a Modi will not damage it. Even while democratic institutions are already reeling, and as I hope to show, despite the evidence that wherever the RSS enters it systematically attacks democratic institutions, our learned scholar tells us, institutions are so strong we do not have to take strongest measures to save it. Then he goes on to make lying comments, drawing a parallel between Chavez and Modi.

Another person is Rudrangshu Mukherjee. Wikipedia tells the world that he is a leftist historian who opposed the left after Singur-Nandigram. I remember him as turning bitter anti-communist the moment the crisis of the Stalinist system made it evident there would be no more grand patronage from left circles, writing worn out charges against Lenin even while recent research was proving them to be sheer falsifications. He has made his name as a thoroughgoing anti-communist for whom democracy and liberalism have to be defended from communists.

But he is very keen to teach us that there is no fascist threat. Modi? Oh, we have seen all that before, such as Indira Gandhi. So do not call Modi fascist – that is the message he dings out, as Opinion page Editor of The Telegraph, one of India’s leading newspapers for the upper class.

Why does this happen? Because the liberal is at bottom much closer to the fascist than to the left. You may find this difficult to swallow. But liberalism bases itself on the free market. And therefore it finally opposes itself to any kind of communism, even if it pretends that it is doing so because of the crimes of Stalinism. The proximity of liberalism to

fascism, and the suppleness of liberal intellectuals and their readiness to submit to fascists is being documented anew with these writers, and standing behind them, the institutions of Indian liberal civil society, the media, the academic institutions, and others. The bourgeois dynamics of rising fascism eventually forces liberals to accept it. However, I want you to understand also that fascism has an autonomous dynamics, and we would be wrong to reduce fascism to economic determinism. I. G. Farben may have delivered Zyklon-B as per contract and received payments from the state. But IG Farben did not dictate the Holocaust.

So in that case what is fascism and why do I say that the RSS/BJP is really fascist while others are not?

- a) The rise of fascism happens during periods of deep social crisis of capitalism in the age of imperialism. In the era of globalised markets and sharp competitions, when the "normal" processes of capital accumulation slow down, the structural crisis of capitalism demands a violent solution through shifting the balance of class forces in favour of monopoly capital, which is what the fascist seizure of power does.
- b) Normally, bourgeois democracy is advantageous for capitalism, because it allows tension to be released through periodically voting out a government party, as well as in the form of periodic reforms. Also, in this system a wider part of the ruling class becomes co-sharers of power. But this is not true for periods of crisis, when the bourgeoisie needs extreme surgery in its basic class interests.
- c) This calls for acute centralization, which cannot be achieved through state power alone. Even military dictatorships do not always have the required effect, because the primary level class conflicts in the market economy would daily reproduce proletarian class consciousness and allow it to grow to higher levels. What monopoly capital needs is a force that can be mobilised against the working class, that will organise and fight against the forces of the working class, create regular terror, demoralise the class-conscious elements, and after the fascist seizure of power smash all organisations of the working class and atomise the unity of the class conscious proletarians. This calls for a counter-revolutionary mass movement.
- d) The main constituents of such a force can only be the petty bourgeoisie. Deep economic crises create despondency and desperation within the ranks of the petty bourgeoisie. There are certain generally identifiable elements in the ideology of the petty bourgeois mass movement, including chauvinist nationalism, verbal hostility to capitalism, a deep and abiding hatred of the organised working class and the struggle for socialism, a sense of pain for a lost golden age, and a deep psychological malaise. This kind of a movement can only be built up if it begins as an independent one, not just an instrument of ruling class manipulation.
- e) Fascism can succeed only if even before the seizure of power it can make the working class retreat considerably. The balance must tilt in favour of the fascists before their seizure of power. The installation of fascism in power is a way of declaring civil war. That is a dangerous gamble, and so the bourgeoisie would like to have some guarantee of the superior strength of the fascists. In the initial stages, only the most aggressive and marginal elements among the petty bourgeoisie join the fascist bands. The "respectable" petty bourgeoisie do so only when it is reasonably sure that it is jumping in the right direction.
- f) When fascism smashes the organised proletariat with its hammer blows, it has rendered its services to the bourgeoisie. Thereafter, monopoly capital desires to bring it to heel. This involves a complex process, including the bureaucratisation of the leading layers of the fascist cadres, as well as the destruction of those layers who take too seriously the social rhetoric of the fascist movement. The fascist state also has international repercussions. The desire for change which pushes monopoly capital in the direction of an accommodation with the fascists involves an overcoming of economic downturns through a sharply inflationary policy. Military investments become an important part of the project of economic recovery as well as political strategy. So an aggressive foreign policy also develops.

Why do we call the Sangh, and Modi, fascist?

To start with, in its origin, the RSS consciously modeled itself after the fascists. The shakhas were modeled after Mussolini's Blackshirts. When the Nazis attacked Jews all over Germany on Krystallnacht, M. S. Golwalkar wrote approvingly in his *We, or Our Nationhood Defined*, : "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 Hindusthan to learn and profit by."

In the same work, he explained the political conclusion that needed to be drawn: "The foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e., of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, 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. There is, at least, should be, no other course for them to adopt. We are an old nation; let us deal, as old nations ought to and do deal, with the foreign races, who have chosen to live in our country."

The avowal of the Nazis as an ideal was further explained by Anthony Elenjmittan, a Christian convert to the RSS outlook. "The RSS from the very inception of the movement hoisted Bhagva flag, Dharma Chakra and Satya MevaJayte as their symbols, and have grown around these patriotic ideals. Hence, the RSS youth, given more favourable circumstances can be in India what was Hitler youth in Germany, fascist youth in Italy. If discipline, organised centralism and organic collective consciousness means fascism, then the RSS is not ashamed to be called fascist. The silly idea that fascism and totalitarianism are evils and parliamentarism and Anglo-Indian types of democracy are holy, should be got rid of from our minds" (*The Philosophy and Action of the RSS for the Hind Swaraj*, p.197).

Though the RSS today pretends that the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha were totally distinct, in fact there was both considerable overlap between the two organizations, and a great degree of ideological overlap. The key Hindu Mahasabha ideologue, V. D. Savarkar, put forward many of the crucial aspects of present day RSS doctrine. It was Savarkar who first argued that territorial nationalism was a wrong concept. Those who did not have their *punyabhumi* at the same place as their *pitribhumi* could not be equal citizens. This ruled out Muslims and Christians. Golwalkar later added communists, asserting that they were all people having their *punyabhumi* in Russia. In place of territorial nationalism, Savarkar argued, what was needed was cultural nationalism, equating religion with culture. Likewise, it was Savarkar who advocated flatly the need to push Muslims into second-class citizen status. It was Savarkar who created the basic ingredients of the picture of the Muslim as the eternal enemy who must be fought by a so-called Hindu awakening. And it was Savarkar, again, who made raping Muslim women sound like a holy task for Hindus (read his *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*).

However, it is not this alone that makes them fascist. We could then have simply equated them with the Taliban or with Ayatollah Khomeini. This is where I would disagree with people who would be willing to extend the term fascist to most Islamic fundamentalist movements and regimes.

It is the specific relationship that the Sangh combine aspires to develop in relation to the Indian bourgeoisie that must be kept in mind. The RSS on one hand aims to clearly keep its agenda intact, and it has shown itself willing to let go of temporary advantages like ruling through coalition governments. But at the same time, the RSS has a definite class agenda in its own way.

Right from the 1930s, Moonje made it clear that for the forces of the Hindutva right, communism and socialism were fundamental enemies. M.S. Golwalkar for his part explained this equally bluntly. In the aftermath of Gandhi's murder,

when the RSS was banned, Golwalkar's exchanges with Patel show him offering a pact to Patel, on the basis of a shared hostility to communism.

And when Golwalkar and his followers talk of communism, we need to understand it very ecumenically. Just as when Hitler ranted against Marxism, he made no distinction between Social Democrat, Communist, dissident Communist, or just trade unionist with a degree of proletarian class-consciousness, the same is true of the RSS.

From the faintest pink to the most ultra-red, all come under its scanner. The RSS-BJP bloc is willing to fight in its own way against the working class. It is willing to smash every form of independent proletarian organisation. In his 'Introduction' to Golwalkar's *Bunch of Thoughts*, Prof. M.A. Venkat Rao writes: "Another advantage of the Indian [read RSS] view of society is that it eschews class war. It postulates social harmony as a potentiality, if not as a fully actual order of laws and customs, observances and enforcements. The state is not a class agent of the upper class. Not is it an exploiting agency. It is an agent of morality or dharma". (pp. xxxii – xxxiii).

So first, a violently aggressive model of Hindu nationalism lies at the root of RSS ideology. Second, it had in the past openly proclaimed itself fascist. Because it was forced to operate within a bourgeois democratic set up for decades, it concealed the past utterances, but it has NEVER repudiated them.

Third, there has been a fundamental difference between the role of the Jan Sangh in the past and the rise of the BJP in the last three decades, and particularly the anointing of Modi this time round.

The RSS had been seeking to promote its agenda, by whatever means, all these years. But by and large, the Indian capitalist class had preferred the Congress, its historic party. This is what has changed. So why does the ruling class prefer the fascist alternative, and why does it think *fascism* will be useful?

The Gujarat Model:

First, we need to look at how Modi has consolidated, how BJP and the Sangh have consolidated in Gujarat.

There are several dimensions to the Gujarat Model, and they all tie in. It is not that there was a so called aberration of 2002, and there is a since then one decade long story of growth in Gujarat. The Pogrom of 2002 was not an accident, not an aberration, and not a reaction to what happened at Godhra. At that time we put out and helped to put out many books, and I would suggest you look at some of them. I edited *The Genocidal Pogrom in Gujarat: Anatomy of Indian Fascism*, and Inquilabi Communist Sangathan published it from Vadodara itself. Maitreyee Chattopadhyay and Soma Marik edited a Bengali volume, *Garbhaghati Gujarat*, containing translations of a number of reports on the gendered nature of communal fascist politics, something about which I will not have time to speak, but which needs discussion. Soma Marik, Tanika Sarkar, and others have written on that subject.

The pogrom was built on years of preparation. Hindus had had hatred preached to them by the RSS.

The BJP, once it came to power in Gujarat, wasted no time before declaring that its police would monitor all cases of Hindu-Muslim marriages, because it suspected that these were conspiracies. The post-Godhra pogroms showed sustained preparation. Electoral rolls were used to find out Muslims. Municipal records were used to identify shops and establishments owned by Muslims. Lies were peddled by Gujarati newspapers, to the effect that women had been taken away from the train and raped inside a Madrasa.

Then the pogrom was fanned, and allowed to check unchecked. As the Ehsan Zafri case and the Best Bakery Case

both show, the police did nothing, and even encouraged. All this was done to consolidate a strong Hindutva sentiment.

And as there is a myth, a lie being peddled, that no communal violence has happened in Gujarat since 2002, let me make two quick points. First, there was a serious issue in Vadodara in 2006 – just one example out of several. The reason Modi was forced to act, to even accept the army, was because, this time he did not have Advani as Union Home Minister covering his rear. Second, so called Islamic terrorism and fake encounter deaths now took over. And they also helped in building the fake 56 inch image. We are fortunate to have with us today a member of the Jamia Teachers Association. They played an important role in fighting Modi over the fake encounter deaths in Gujarat. Ishrat Jahan, Sohrabuddin, Tulsi Prajapati, these are all supposedly people who were terrorists trying to kill Modi because he is the soul of India's Hindus. They were all murdered. And now, investigations have put many of the leading police personnel, the killers, behind bars. They have shown that these were innocent people murdered so that an anti-Muslim rage could be whipped up.

So the communal politics, including the frenzy, has been an integral part of the Sangh strategy, of Modi's strategy. Now we need to relate it to "development", Gujarat style.

Certainly, as I said, there is a difference between Modi's bid for power this time, and the previous efforts. Modi was anointed by the big honchos of Indian capitalism at the Vibrant Gujarat programme. This makes his bid different from the Vajpayee-Advani efforts of earlier years. This also shows why Modi had the clout to brush aside – more accurately, kick aside – everyone in the BJP challenging his absolute power.

What has happened, is that the Indian capitalist class can no longer do with its traditional instrument, the Congress. This is not because the Congress has become a leftist, or even a centre-left party. It is deeply right wing. It has passed most of the reactionary laws in operation in India.

The era of globalisation was initiated by a Congress government, and a Congress government has presided over the economic policies for the last decade. And what have we seen? In the last one decade, despite overall inflation, the rupee prices of motor cars, air conditioning machines, and PCs and Laptops have come down. Taking 2004 as base 100, on the other hand, the price of food has gone up in the wholesale market to 233 by February 2014. And as you all know, what we buy is the retail market price, which is higher.

This means that we, the well off middle class, managed to make a trade off, and gain slightly. Our consumer goods – the laptops, the smart phones, the cheap flights, all cost us relatively, and sometimes in absolute terms, less. So we could shrug when we had to pay more for carrot, capsicum, or tofu, saying that the laptop and the new TV cost less. The poor, who spend the bulk of their earnings on food, fuel, room rent, and transport, with very little for education, health or even less for luxury, were being increasingly pushed to the wall.

But given that we still have a democratic political system, within limits, people can and do protest. We have had some of the world's biggest working class fight backs over the last few years, with huge general strikes which the Congress could not stop.

Between 2008 and 2011, the productivity of labour in India has gone up by 7.6 per cent. In the same period the real income of workers went down 1 per cent. The ILO's Global Wage Report 2012 shows the foregoing, and punctures the myth of "reforms" as aids to the poor. So the toiling people have responded sharply. We have had powerful general strikes in 2010, 2012, 2013.

In response to the strike of February 2013, The ASSOCHAM or The Associated Chambers of Commerce and

Industry, in its press release, it stated, inter alia, that "Against its initial estimates of Rs 15,000-20,000 crore, the GDP may be eroded by about Rs 26,000 crore, it is apprehended based on the damaging effect of the Bandh on the industrial activity and the services sector like banking, finance".

This is where Modi and his model are being welcomed. Modi has no fear of trade unions and is willing to use force to put them down. And Modi is willing to walk the extra, not just mile but hundred miles, for the benefit of capital.

The Gujarat government claims that it has generated vast numbers of jobs. This was investigated by our comrades. When an RTI was filed, the Gujarat government was tardy in replying, and instead of providing collective data, data came in bits and pieces. Instead of 65,000 beneficiaries, the number of jobs provided based on information given by the authorities in 23 districts, totals only to 51,587. Out of that 11,172 are apprentices (30.4%). i.e. the actual figure is 40,415 and not even 51,587. But, the names of only 32,372 were provided to us. Collating all the information, we got some important facts. Nobody had been given an "Appointment Letter". What they got was a piece of paper called "Employment letter", which is bad in law.

Thus, we get a picture that some 32,000 to 40,000 (at best) got some sort of unspecified jobs, while another 11,000 odd got apprenticeships. Thus, the "employment" given ranged from apprenticeship to private sector employment for temporary jobs, with very few being skilled workers. The state was using its finances and officers to procure low paid workers for private capital, for example the GIDCs.

As an important aside, let me add that Gujarat holds the distinction for killing the biggest number of RTI activists in India. Not surprising, then, that Modi shouts against the RTI.

Another story we are told is, Gujarat has a great advantage for industry. So we need to understand what that advantage is. At whose cost is it coming? Tata relocated from Singur to Sanand, only partly because of agitations. The CPI(M) government was willing to use a good deal of force to put down agitations. But Modi offered a combination of force and sops. The total sops to the Tatas have been estimated at around Rs. 30,000 crores. This included 1100 acres land, and against a Tata investment of 2000 crore rupees, an interest free loan from the Gujarat Government worth 9570 crore rupees. By contrast, the CPI(M) led government of West Bengal had offered to take away peasants' land but give it to the Tatas at a subsidised rate, and give subsidy on power, tax paybacks, and some 200 crore rupees soft loan.

It should also be understood that Gujarat has long been a developed capitalist province in India. That is not to Modi's credit. What is to his credit is the way he is pumping wealth from the poor to the rich.

At this point, let me make a point to this audience. We are speaking in English, a fact that shows this is an audience of relatively educated, relatively well to do people in the main. What people of our social position are constantly told is, our taxes go to provide subsidies for the poor, who are supposedly poor because they are lazy. In fact, the poor work hard and still get nowhere, and the tax you pay goes very little for these people. To illustrate this, I want to provide data from Gujarat. An end of 2012 data showed, Gujarat had a debt of Rs 13,89,78,00,00,000 and was paying interest worth Rs 3550 crores. Certainly it was not Ratan Tata, or Mukesh Ambani, or the Adanis, who were being bled dry to pay this interest.

So if Modi represents the leadership of a fascist force, and if Indian capitalists want this force to augment their profits, what are we to do? How do we fight them?

We must begin by becoming aware of what is being done. We are being presented with absolutely imaginary information. Look at the media. Modi to your left and to your right. Never has the BJP been so flush with funds. But look at the reality by probing just a little. Every mainstream media, printed, TV or online, has been predicting a Modi

wave. This is a manufactured lie, and its aim is to make opponents of the fascists give up the battle and to get the wavering to jump on the BJP cart. Why do I say this? The Indian Parliament has 543 seats. The best of predictions, so called, do not give even the entire NDA a majority (272). Then where is the wave? Secondly, it has been recently revealed how data distortions are done, so that a trend can be artificially strengthened. Remember 2004? AC Nielsen had predicted an outright majority for the NDA on that occasion. Instead, the UPA formed a government with Left Front support.

Secondly, we are being presented with a supposedly straight choice—vote in Modi or defeat Modi at any cost, which translates into vote Congress. Yet Congress, in power, has done all it could for the ruling class. It is Indian capitalism that needs a so called “stable government”. We need to vote every candidate whose victory will in fact strengthen people’s struggles for rights, for justice, and to destabilise all parties who will ensure greater profits for capital and greater exploitation for the vast majority.

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