

Beware of the Slinking Dragon

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Abstract

In the current political discourses of the parties as well as non-party forces, fascism has become the oftenest quoted epithet to describe the Indian panorama under BJP's rule. During the 1970s, in the wake of the first major split in the Congress, rise of Indira Gandhi as the supremo within the Congress, and then during the days of the Emergency, talks of fascism had become a regular agenda. Thereafter, emergence of regional parties as opposition to the Congress, many non-Congress Governments coming to office in various states and on several occasions, decline of the Congress as the biggest national party, pushed the talk of fascism behind the public arena (right or wrong, whatever one may think). Recently, following the ascent of BJP to the Union Government in 2014, with special reference to the premiership of Narendra Modi, the notorious organizer of the gruelling bloodbath of the Muslims in Gujarat, the talk has returned with louder voice.

1. Introduction

The two terms of the BJP rule awarded the people demonetization of good currency notes, sale of the PSUs to the private owners, which meant transfer of the huge nationalized wealth to Ambanis, Adanis, Tatas, etc. at a paltry sum, thereby draining of the resources of the national economy, surgical strike on the life and income of the unorganized and private sector workers, especially the migrant workers during the Lockdown period following Kovid-19 contagion, political repression on the protesting people, and so on. On a sober observation this cannot but remind one the situation of Italy and Germany of the interwar period. Hence the talk of fascism.

In a capitalist system the rule of a bourgeois party will entail gain for capital and loss for the people—this is almost an axiom. But the degree of corporate loot of resources in the economy in the Modi regime since 2014 has shamelessly gone far beyond the normal line and the expected norm. From various corners of the capitalist world criticisms and warnings are being hurled against Modi and his Government. The way the thirty entrepreneurs (of whom twenty nine from Gujarat and all are close friends of Narendra Modi and Amit Shah) looted thousand crores of rupees of the nationalized banks unpaid and flew abroad, could hardly do so and break the security check points of the airports unless there were underhand clearance from the very top.

But there are differences in the evaluation of the prevailing situation. While some people are trying to seriously understand the situation in terms of fascism, there are others who use the term with a vague idea of what they want to describe as an open authoritarian and reactionary rule. Various

wrong and opportunist policies adopted by the different left parties in the past and their present obligations arising out of a practice of narrow politics compel them to shy away from a correct class assessment of the fascistic drive of the present rulers. Some people who are writing earnestly on fascism seem to fail to integrate the past experiences of fascism in Italy and Germany with the present ones in a synthetic theory.

I would like to explore the reasons behind the failures and present my views in brief to initiate a more fruitful dialogue among the co-fighters against fascism. I request the readers to read it as nothing more than a loud thinking on my part.

Fascism arose in Italy and Germany in the aftermath of peculiar economic and political crises following the First World War. In both countries the post-war situation was alarmingly precarious for the ruling bourgeoisie. Workers' agitation was at its height. In both cases, especially in Germany the working class was virtually in a position to carry out revolution and rise to power. Could a revolutionary party and leadership resolve with prompt determination to take to power, revolution might be accomplished. The bourgeoisie of both these countries were therefore in frantic search for a party which might obstruct or derail the potential revolution. It was in this situation that the Partito Nazionale Fascista in Italy and the Nazionalsocialistische Deuche Arbeiter Partei in Germany took over the game. This gave birth to the idea that fascism is a sort of reflex reaction of the bourgeoisie against the impending proletarian revolution. Hence the classical definition of fascism was that it was a defence mechanism of a counterrevolutionary violent upsurge to forestall the advance of proletarian revolution.

In the first half of the last century this approach to fascism

was okay. But today it is an insufficient and inaccurate understanding. Fascism has become a ubiquitous character of all capitalist countries, small or big, developed or undeveloped. But that does not appear to have any immediacy against a possibility of a revolution. This forces us to view fascism as a general symptom of an inherent antidemocratic tendency with a distinct corporate character.

2. Comparison

What fascism based itself on and achieved in Germany and Italy in the 1930s, may be listed as: national jingoism, hatred against a target community, ideological regimentation, authoritarian discipline, concentration of political power, centralization of the economy and business, elimination of all democratic rights, rigorously atrocious punishment, war manoeuvres and militarization of the economy, military control of the civic life, etc.

Now, most of these features, except some political actions and executive trials, are the very basic components of the so-called corporate culture, found in the big enterprises and conglomerates. While corporate culture nourished itself with much of the elements garnered from the classical fascism, modern fascism feeds back from the corporate lobby and transcribes its elements in to the routine politics of the capitalist state.

Perhaps this statement needs further clarification. Let us try that in the light of our hard experiences in the real life situations.

Suppose you have gone to a big corporate concern with some job. You will meet two kinds of situations one by one. Let me enumerate.

First you will see, everything is very much well-knit and organized. Things are well arranged and disciplined. The employees and officers, irrespective of their religion, gender and language, are smartly dressed in suits, ties and boots. Each of them is well behaved and smiling, well caring to you as a customer. Various jobs are neatly distributed in tables and counters. There is someone to guide you to the proper table/window/person as per your job. You will be naturally highly impressed. If you face no difficulty and get your job done smoothly, you will come back home joyfully and tell everybody: The office there is very much caring, customer friendly and efficient.

However, suppose the company committed a mistake in calculations that cost you a loss. You want to get things corrected. Now you will see the interior. After you point out the mistake you will have to move from desk to desk, table to table. You may have to call a toll free number, or send email to some customer care centre. The toll free number will be in all likelihood a mechanical one, where you have to press buttons one after another to reach the desired cell. Being an aged man, you may lose your way in between buttons and refresh the entire process. Then you may discover that on the fourth attempt your number is blocked from reaching the target. Or the reply to your mail will sweetly advise you to meet the same office where they committed the mistake. After much of harassment if you lose your temper, the same previously sweet behaving employees will inform you that they have no interest in your troubles and you may go to wherever you may like. You may shout and raise your voice against their non-cooperation, but they will barrack you with some members and

push you out of the office.

This is what we call corporate culture. Just beneath the outer veneer of its "politeness incarnated", there resides a strict and thorough bureaucratic tick wood ethos. I have painted here the simple most phenomena possible in anybody's life. The real problems you may have to experience may be still harder and more capricious.

Fascism resembles much these manners. At the first sight, it is quite attractive. The government and administration it runs talk well and of good things, pronounce nice catch phrases: "No Bribe to Us or Anybody"; "All Black Money will be Seized"; "Stock of Black Money Saved Overseas will be Recovered and Distributed among the People"; and so forth. Whatever little the common man on the street wants to achieve in his/her daily life, a fascist ruler is, as it were, willing to cater to. Solutions to all your problems have, so to say, come to your doorsteps.

And they will start making you run in lines. Indian citizens may recall how many times they have stood in lines in recent years, for how many cards. Let us make a quick counting:

1. First you stood in a long line to get your photo done for the EPIC or the voter I-card;
2. Then you had to stand in a queue to receive the voter card;
3. There was line for getting your photo and biometry done for the Aadhaar Card;
4. You had to stand for the initial digitization of the Ration Card;
5. The next line was for submission of application forms of the final digital Ration Card;
6. You have stood in periodic lines for KYC to your bank;
7. Then you had to stand in the queue for linking the bank account with Aadhaar;
8. You stood to get your KYC to the Gas distributor done;
9. Another line was there for linking the gas booking with Aadhaar;
10. You were asked to go to the line to link your bank account with gas booking;
11. Just remember the number of big lines to withdraw money in the first six months of the demonetization of the good currency notes; etc.

These queues are not for once; these go on repeating. There may be various kinds of printing mistakes, which distort your name and/or address, for which you are not responsible; but you will have to chase offices in endless lines to get these corrected. You will find no end to this running from line to line. And this is especially true of the backward countries like India.

In this context we may saliently re-read some parts of the analysis of fascism Comrade Georgi Dimitrov presented at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935:

"What is the source of the influence of fascism over the masses? Fascism is able to attract the masses because it demagogically appeals to their most urgent needs and demands. Fascism not only inflames prejudices that are deeply ingrained in the masses, but also plays on the better sentiments of the masses, on their sense of justice and sometimes even on their revolutionary traditions. Why do the German fascists, those lackeys of the bourgeoisie and mortal enemies of socialism, represent themselves to the masses as "Socialists," and depict their accession to power as a "revolution"? Because they try to exploit the faith in revolution and the urge towards socialism that lives in the hearts of the mass of working people in Germany."

Some more:

"Fascism aims at the most unbridled exploitation of the

masses but it approaches them with the most artful anti-capitalist demagogy, taking advantage of the deep hatred of the working people against the plundering bourgeoisie, the banks, trusts and financial magnates, and advancing those slogans which at the given moment are most alluring to the politically immature masses.”

It seems astonishing to see him so long back utter words that match the present Indian scenario under the saffron fascistic brigade:

“Fascism delivers up the people to be devoured by the most corrupt and venal elements, but comes before them with the demand for “an honest and incorruptible government.” Speculating on the profound disillusionment of the masses in bourgeois-democratic governments, fascism hypocritically denounces corruption.” [Dimitrov 1935a; also see: Dimitrov 1935b]

Who will Survive?

When we sit down to study fascism, we have to remember some basics about capitalism, its sociopolitical progenitor. Frederick Engels had already pointed out the fundamental contradiction of capitalism as follows: “The means of production and production itself have become social in essence. But they are subjected to a form of appropriation which presupposes private production by individuals, and under which, therefore, everyone owns his own product and brings it to market. The mode of production is subjected to this form of appropriation, although it removes the presupposition on which the latter rests. The whole conflict of society is already present in embryo in this contradiction which gives the new mode of production its capitalist character. The more the new mode of production became dominant in all decisive fields of production and in all economically decisive countries, and the more it reduced individual production to an insignificant residue, the more glaring did the incompatibility of social production with capitalist appropriation necessarily become.” [Engels 1976, 348; italics in the original]

He further observed: “The fact that the social organization of production within the factory has developed to the point at which it has become incompatible with the anarchy of production in society, which exists side by side with and above it—this fact is made palpable to the capitalists themselves by the forcible concentration of capitals which takes place during crises, through the ruin of many big and even more small capitalists. The whole mechanism of the capitalist mode of production breaks down under the pressure of the productive forces, which it itself has created. . . . Means of production, means of subsistence, available workers, all the elements of production and of general wealth, are there in abundance. But “abundance becomes the source of distress and want” (Fourier), because it is the very thing that prevents the transformation of the means of production and subsistence into capital. . . .

If the crises revealed the bourgeoisie’s incapacity to continue to administer modern productive forces, the conversion of the large production and communication establishments into joint-stock companies [, trusts] and state property shows that the bourgeoisie can be dispensed with for this purpose. All the social functions of the capitalist are now conducted by salaried employees. The capitalist no longer has any social activity save the pocketing of revenues, the clipping

of coupons, and gambling on the Stock Exchange, where the different capitalists fleece each other of their capital. . . .

The modern state, whatever its form, is an essentially capitalist machine, the state of the capitalists, the ideal aggregate capitalist. The more productive forces it takes over into its possession, the more it becomes a real aggregate capitalist, the more citizens it exploits. . . . State ownership of the productive forces is not the solution of the conflict, but it contains within itself the formal means, the handle to the solution.

This solution can only consist in actually recognizing the social nature of the modern productive forces, and in therefore bringing the mode of production, appropriation, and exchange into harmony with the social character of the means of production. This can only be brought about by society’s openly and straightforwardly taking possession of the productive forces, which have outgrown all guidance other than that of society itself.” [Engels 1976, 356-61]

The essential point I want to drive home from Engels here is that in the wake of its capitalist development society has already come to the doorstep of socialism. Drawing upon this in his classic work on imperialism, V. I. Lenin also elaborated this aspect: “What then does this catchword “interlocking” express? It merely expresses the most striking feature of the process going on before our eyes. It shows that the observer counts the separate trees, but cannot see the wood. It slavishly copies the superficial, the fortuitous, the chaotic. It reveals the observer as one who is overwhelmed by the mass of raw material and is utterly incapable of appreciating its meaning and importance. Ownership of shares, the relations between owners of private property “interlock in a haphazard way”. But underlying this interlocking, its very base, are the changing social relations of production. When a big enterprise assumes gigantic proportions, and, on the basis of an exact computation of mass data, organizes according to plan the supply of primary raw materials to the extent of two-thirds, or three-fourths, of all that is necessary for tens of millions of people; when the raw materials are transported in a systematic and organized manner to the most suitable places of production, sometimes situated hundreds or thousands of miles from each other; when a single centre directs all the consecutive stages of processing the material right up to the manufacture of numerous varieties of finished articles; when these products are distributed according to a single plan among tens and hundreds of millions of consumers (the marketing of oil in America and Germany by the American oil trust)—then it becomes evident that we have socialization of production, and not mere “interlocking”; that private economic and private property relations constitute a shell which no longer fits its contents, a shell which must inevitably decay if its removal is artificially delayed, a shell which may remain in a state of decay for a fairly long period (if, at the worst, the cure of the opportunist abscess is protracted), but which will inevitably be removed.” [Lenin 1974, 302-03]

On the basis of these observations, Lenin concluded: “Imperialism is the eve of the social revolution of the proletariat.” [Lenin 1974, 194]

In fact, all the stages and components of the capitalist economy today—production and reproduction, distribution, exchange, sale and purchase, movement of capital and values, selection of commodities, research, investment and

reinvestment of capital, share, profit and its distribution into various segments, e.g., interest, dividend, etc., industry, bank, insurance and other financial sectors, service sector, legality—in a word, everything has assumed a social character. The lifeline and dynamics of the economy are dependent on the disciplined and interlocked activities of innumerable people, visible and unseen, collective and continuous. The only arena where the social character is denied is the ownership of production. The whole of mankind has to shoulder the wellbeing of this system, but the basic benefits of the system, profit, accrues to the private coffer. With everyday passing, in all the crisis times, this antagonism of the private profit and social obligations is becoming ever blatant. The owners have no role in the production other than lobbying with the ministry and state officials.

In this situation, things are leading to an eventuality where the shell “will inevitably be removed”. The bourgeoisie and its intelligent hirelings are aware of this. They feel the oncoming of their doomsday and are haunted by a fear. The spectre of communism Marx and Engels spoke of in the historic Manifesto of 1848 for Europe is now haunting the entire capitalist regime. There arises the communist movement, workers’ struggles, environment movement which would jerk off the shell of private ownership over social affairs!

So they need a handy but sure therapy.

One of my younger Marxist friends belonging to a leftist group in Kolkata had recently observed in one of her writings: Capitalism today has been carrying two embryos in its womb—fascism and socialism; the one may see the extra-uterine light only by killing the other. This means that either victorious socialism will seal the fate of fascism for good; or, if the working class fails to carry forward conscious well organized and protracted class struggles capable of overthrowing capitalism through to socialism, and as long as they fail, capitalism will invariably continue to give birth to fascism. This is the visible trend of today’s dominant politics. In the portrayal of the social reality of capitalism, the metaphor is quite cogent.

This is an inevitable, irrefutable and prevailing tendency of the system that be. The system may work well in a bourgeois democratic environment, under peaceful conditions. There is no immediate threat before them in any country of a revolutionary upsurge of the working people, similar to the conditions obtaining in interwar Germany and Italy. It therefore does not require fascistic rule for its smooth running at the moment. As far as my knowledge goes, there is no communist party theoretically equipped and organizationally prepared to overthrow the rule of capital in any country.

However, it still needs fascism for its continuing ontology—to ensure its long term survival. For the working class can also utilize the peaceful democratic conditions to develop its own struggle for emancipation from the clutch of capitalist exploitation. Moreover, in some very rare eventuality, in some remote corner of the advanced countries, even parliamentary democracy itself may become mortally useful to the working class for its revolutionary transformation of the society. A party may come up with a mature theoretical groundwork, correct programme and strategy and a large band of dedicated professional cadres, thereby challenging the system and putting radical change of the society in the agenda. Hence the compulsion to squeeze democracy and

push up fascistic tendency. Especially, they look to diminish the space for democratic mass action against the state policies with various legal and illegal restrictive instruments.

Capitalism as a global system had been able to overcome its crisis to some extent and developed with a smoothly secular trend for two decades and a half (1946-72) in the industrial, commercial and financial sectors. Since then it began to face newer crises. Dollar crisis, growth of huge quantity of petrodollar, mounting indebtedness and trade deficit of the US economy, emergence of France, (West) Germany and Japan as rivals of the USA, and so on, aggravated the internal mutual conflicts of the capitalist camp leading up to trade war. In order to capture the sources of raw materials like crude oil the US imperialism and its allies launched several crassest aggressions upon Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan in three decades. In 1997, there was a shocking fall in the stock market indices owing to a crisis of the so-called South Asian Tigers. Recession in the global scenario has since taken possession of the capitalist economy in all the big centres. After the collapse of the socialist camp together with the erstwhile Soviet Union and deviation of China from the red path, there was an all pervasive frustration among the toiling people. Even then leftists and socialists are gaining strength in parliamentary politics in Europe with an ever greater influence among the voters.

On the other side, the climate crisis and environmental degradation are daily exposing in clearer light the destructive role capitalist system plays for man, society and biodiversity in the green planet. The successful safety valve for the pent up anguish among the common people created by Greta Thunberg Campaign for a safer and cleaner climate has nonetheless brought the agenda of system change to the fore in all discourses.

On account of all this it is now difficult to ignore the potential birth of the embryo of socialism. The intelligent and farsighted bourgeoisie are therefore busy nourishing the other embryo of fascism with proper nutrients. Let the semblance of parliamentary democracy continue, but gradually diminish its effective space and proceed towards an authoritarian rule. Bring in draconian Acts and curb the democratic and human rights of the toiling masses as protection from the eruption of mass discontent against the anti-people pro-corporate policies of the governments. To that extent, for the ruling bourgeoisie fascism is a natural choice, an international class tendency.

3. Tendency

A tendency implies that the goal inherent in the tendency is yet to be accomplished. In the cases of Italy and Germany too, we may that fascism appeared as a new political tendency in the post First World War years. In Italy fascism entrenched in all out power in 1925 and in Germany it happened in 1933. In this particular case it means that, say in India, fascism is under way; it is advancing; even then there are some important steps in between the things done so far and the final goal of all round fascism. The history of the fascist rule in these two countries and the ghastly sequel leading to the Second World War is so well cultivated with scorn that the bourgeoisie of no country would like to get its favourite party branded as fascist inland or overseas. They will prefer the fascist party to move towards ever greater power and control through gradual subversion of democracy.

For example, the McCarthy period of the US post-war administration had appeared as such a tendency, which persisted

despite the Constitution, Bill of Rights, Second Amendment, etc. It is nicely documented in two novels of Howard Fast—Silas Timberman (written when he was a communist) and Pledge (when he came out of the ideology). Though that dark period is over long back, the federal government still can violate the democratic rights of any citizens by virtue of some clandestine dicta. Recently I came to know of such an order from a thriller by Dan Brown: “Under title 18, Section 3056 of the United States code, agents of the U. S. Secret Service can carry firearms, use deadly force, and make ‘un-warranted arrests simply on suspicion that a person has committed or is intending to commit a felony or any act of aggression against the President.’ [Brown 2009, 358] The tendency advances or recedes depending on the viability of the political situation obtaining in different countries at various times.

Scholars in the academies, who have undertaken detailed study of the rise of fascism as a global phenomenon, also take note of this fact. Two authors recently showed that much of development of fascism takes place more as a gradual and long process than as an accomplished outcome of events. [Thorpe 2011; Ross 2016, 13]

We may also quite clearly understand the tendency of “fascization” in the Indian context. Here, the Indian bourgeoisie have been striving to push forward such a kind of regimentation for a long time on the basis of Sanskrit/Hindi language and soft Hindu religion. The Congress was a slow performer in this respect, although a steady and determined one ever since the time of Jawhar Lal Nehru, painted as a democrat and socialist. In the field of economy, they sought corporatization of the major industrial and financial sectors (both private and nationalized) and gradual infiltration of corporate culture into agronomy. Since 1950, the Constitutional practice of the country has never been rid of a British variety of the Defence of India Rule—in diverse nomenclatures, e.g., DIR, MISA, ESMA, POTA (this of course under BJP rule), TADA, UAPA, AFSPA, and so forth—which were designed to curb the very rights the Constitution literally assured. In this way fascism was the lulling agenda of the ruling class in both the basis and the superstructure since long.

With BJP in the office at the Centre as well as in several states, under the regime of Narendra Modi, the riot don within the BJP, and the RSS working from behind the screen, the tendency has gathered much momentum no doubt—both in the spheres of the basis as well as the superstructure. The undemocratic Acts have been amended to have become more restrictive and coercive; democratic Acts like the RTI Act, have been amended to have lost some degree of efficacy. Even then the ruling schedule has remained distant from an absolute fascist stage; it has not yet been possible for them to stop the election mechanism altogether and switch over to a lasting one party system. Till now they have to accept the eventuality of defeat in elections. Neither could they abjectly restrict the anti-NRC movement in 2019-20 and the peasant demonstrations in 2020-21. While the distance is sought to be minimized through various measures, there are still some societal factors against the complete bridging of the gulf. In that sense fascism remains a trend while gathering storm and dust. However, coercion, arrest and imprisonment without trial for years together are on the increase. Murder

of recalcitrant intellectuals too is a means to threaten the living protesters. We may fairly expect that this trend will continue to grow with increasing fascification of the system.

To understand this tendency and fight fascism it is necessary to grasp its character.

Fascism is a totalitarian programme of the bourgeoisie. In fact every class ideology is so. Religion also used to exercise a total spiritual control over the relevant human groups, its subscribers, their daily life, mode of thinking and social intercourse, under feudalism. Humanism, the earlier ideology of the rising bourgeois, was similarly an all-encompassing inspiration. It had liberated men from the absolutist domination of the kings and priests with slogans of freedom of thought and action, and fostered a flexibility of opinions, replacing the monist approach with a pluralistic attitude. This admitted difference of opinions and respect for the other viewpoints and also allowed a modicum of elasticity in the mobilization of public opinion on various issues of life. It was on this basis that democracy could take some firm roots in many of the western capitalist states.

Fascism tends to smother all divergences of opinions and to forge a rigid regimentation in all spheres of life—social, political, cultural, linguistic, ideological, psychological, emotional and moral—among the citizens of the country in question. It also drives for virtually a one party rule by undermining, if not totally scrapping, the elaborate election mechanism, with one hero as the iconic dictator of the nation. Of course, a thoroughly one party rule and a total withdrawal of electoral process has the problem of identifying the icon with Hitler and Mussolini—which the mature bourgeoisie today prefer to avoid as long as possible. But the basic trend is clearly universal: illiberalism, irrationalism, and immaterialism.

Following the First World War, the capitalist enterprises the world over have gradually taken to the corporate structure. Now the various institutions of the bourgeois state are also adopting the corporate culture. In the process, on the one hand, the corporates are coming closer to the state and on the other, the state institutions are promulgating policies in consultation with the corporates in and through varied kinds of participatory processes. One may glean the Marxist perception about the dialectics of Base and Superstructure with a clearer view. When the Government of India nationalized the insurance business in the 1950s, and then nationalized 28 banks in 1969 and onwards, those were some bold steps towards corporatization of these financial institutions with state support. Today the Indian state has adopted a reverse process to sell out those state properties to the private hands and/or launched a so-called PPP model to give birth to a commercial partnership between the two sides. This is leading to the eventual corporatization of the state institutions. If you add the digitalization of the institutional functions of all these private corporates and the government offices, you may see corporatization increasing in depth and breadth with a growing pace.

Sadly, Marxists the world over are yet to look into these processes. A large number of academics, however, came forward to study the new phenomena associated with the advancing fascism in the capitalist world. For example, Professor Antonio Costa Pinto of the Lisbon University of Portugal, investigated the rise of fascism in different countries in a number of publications, and in the last chapter in one of them he devoted special attention to the fact of corporatization. [Pinto 2012, 119-48]

The Corporate culture presupposes and necessitates that there is nothing relevant to it beyond its purview and jurisdiction, including the private life and personal hours of its employees. Similarly, fascism aims at so reorganizing the socio-political system that nothing remains beyond the control and supervision of the state. While liberal democracy, at least verbally and superficially, emphasizes the role of the civil society as against the state bureaucracy, fascism, on the contrary, extolls the state. Mussolini had declared as their motto: "Everything for the state; nothing against the state; nothing outside the state." [Cited, Sabine 1941, 639]

Now let us look at another aspect. Usually the ruling party has some influence over the police and administration. In a backward country like ours this is much more so. In all countries, the regular police force is being supplemented with ever newer paramilitary forces with this corporate design, vested with virtually unlimited power. In a bourgeois set up, police, military and judiciary are supposed to work independently of the ruling party and the government. They neither interfere in daily businesses nor openly favour the policies of the government. The government also behaves accordingly.

In India in recent times, however, this mode of behaviour seems to have changed. Late Bepin Rawat, the Chief of Defence Staff (Modi created this post, which previously the President of the Union held ex-officio), had advised the government to stop pension of those ex-servicemen who had joined the peasants' rally in Delhi. The Chairman of the NITI Commission, which replaced the previously powerful Planning Commission, as a voiceless forum, last year told the press that there is too much of democracy in the country which is obstructing the government from functioning. He naturally hinted at the peasants' rally against the Farm Bills brought to serve the interests of Ambani, Adani, and other agro-product tycoons. Mr. Ajit Doval, the chief of the NIA, another product of Modi after the US FBI, who has acquired a notoriety by putting a large number of eminent personages in jail under the UAPA in false charges and without trial, and in the wake murdering an accused, the octogenarian Father Stan Sami without treatment, recently suggested that the government will have to engage into war with the educated citizens of the country.

It would be wrong to regard these utterances as those of some slavish cohorts of the ruling party deputed in the newly created institutions. These are echoes of the motives nurtured by the ruling corporates, inadvertently articulated through their spokespersons in some critical moments. What they are saying are in complete tune with the aims Modi had created these instruments. If we collect and compare the utterances of the fascist agents of Italy and Germany before the Second World War, we shall be surprised to see the similarity!

4. Fanaticism

In my opinion, fascism requires an unstinted fanaticism in the mental processes, first among its party functionaries, and then also among the common people of a country. Such a mental frame makes them easily gullible to any propaganda launched by the fascist rulers from the top. While religion is the single largest and surest source of inculcation of this frame of mind, it needs to be refurbished by a kind of rigidly mechanical façade of logic, which may be best adapted from the knowledge of technological operations of machines. Hence fascism depends for the fostering of this regimented psyche on a combinative culture of religion

and science, especially its technical details.

What is the ideological or philosophical argument of fascism?

As such fascism has no consistent system of ideas. What George Holland Sabine, a scholar of philosophy in the USA, had observed long back in a comparative study of communism and fascism, remain valid still today: "The philosophy of communism has behind it a long history of intellectual development, the outcome of three generations of investigation and discussion, which has given it a considerable measure of coherence and continuity of growth. In it, thought in a measure preceded action, in the sense that neither Marx nor Lenin made his philosophy fit the exigencies of an occasion. The philosophy of fascism has been largely ad hoc and has been patched together from the existing fund of ideas either to justify what had already been done or to meet situations that were immediately in prospect. The philosophy of communism at least puts a value on intellectual consistency and objectivity of investigations. . . . The philosophy of fascism is fundamentally irrationalist, offering a myth created by intuition and made "true" by the very act of willing or believing it." [Sabine 1949, 647]

We have already noted that this irrationalism breeds as well as feeds on a rabid ultra-nationalism and constant showering of virulent hatred against an imagined enemy of that nation. This mental frame not only abhors rationality and positive knowledge, but necessitates thorough destruction of these two intellectual functions. Unless a fanatic frenzy is created throughout the country it will not be possible to mobilize millions and millions of people to behind the demagoguery and false "mythification" of the fascist hero, neither to inject the hatred in their mind against a fellow community so easily. In other words, it requires a tremendous washing of brains of the majority population off their culture, fellow feelings, intelligence and knowledge.

How did Europe so developed in culture and education succumb to such a sordid fanaticism? We need to delve into that history too.

From the fifteenth century onwards came Renaissance in Europe and brought into being as its by-product modern science, with an allied correlate—rationality. Take nothing as given or ordained; judge everything on the anvil of fact and reason. In opposition to the religious culture, scholasticism, to believe on the authority of sacred books and sainted men, the newly enlightened men took to direct evidence and logical judgment as the key to knowledge. The mercantile bourgeoisie saw that trade and commerce, geographical expedition, plunder of resources abroad, better transport and communication, finding new land and marine routes, production of new commodities, large scale production—all this needed exact knowledge. That is why in contrast to the feudal monarchs and priests, the bourgeoisie appeared as the patrons of modern science and technology.

No sooner had capitalism secured a stable and dominant position in the society beyond Europe in major parts of the globe, than it confronted commercial crisis ever since the nineteenth century. The big capitalist powers of Europe embroiled in to mutual wars over the seizure of sources of cheaper raw materials and easy market. With large scale industrial production came into being large battalions of the proletariat, who also emerged as a reckonable force against the rule of capital. The Chartist Movement in the 1830s in

England, battles for democracy in France and Germany in 1848-50, Paris Commune in 1871 and the struggles for 8-hour working day in the USA in 1886-87 creating the May Day and Red Flag, rocked the bourgeoisie in the Western citadels of capital. From then onward, they felt a panic at the free pursuit of knowledge, unfettered development of the sciences and cultivation of the scientific attitude.

Karl Marx in his Afterword to the Second German edition of *Capital* (1873) observed in relation to the science of economics: "In France and in England the bourgeoisie had conquered political power. Thenceforth, the class struggle, practically as well as theoretically, took on more and more outspoken and threatening forms. It sounded the knell of scientific bourgeois economy. It was thenceforth no longer a question, whether this theorem or that was true, but whether it was useful to capital or harmful, expedient or inexpedient, politically dangerous or not. In place of disinterested inquirers, there were hired prize fighters; in place of genuine scientific research, the bad conscience and the evil intent of apologetic." [Marx 1978, 24-25] That is to say, the important question to the bourgeoisie was not whether or not something was true; what mattered was whether that would serve their interest or not.

The bourgeoisie then instinctively understood the efficacy of the fusion of science with religion going backward in history. Already Joseph Dietzgen, a contemporary and a disciple of Marx and Engels, observed the rise of a scientific "priestcraft" side by side the religious priestcraft, in which, he noted, many renowned scientists interpreted scientific theories in the service of clerical thoughts and esotericism. Lenin elaborately cited this in his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. [Lenin 1977, 340] He in fact made it an important duty in that work to expose the attempts of the professional scientists and philosophers to interpret scientific knowledge in terms of mystic religious and esoteric lexicons. We see him devote three sections in a chapter to deal with "fideism" (a term he coined for religiosity to avoid Czarist censorship) of the scientists in Germany, France and England in detail. [Lenin 1977, 274-98] This scientific priesthood began to find fault with rational thinking in their popular books, in seminars and conferences; they opposed "too much" of objective and dispassionate analysis; they branded science as "scientism", which is, as it were, an ideology and the product of fanciful imagination of the scientific personnel, and brought it to the level of scripture. This became the dominant trend in the propagation of scientific results among the lay public.

This kind of mass culture where some scientific information is blended with religious faith and/or prejudice acts as a powerful brain befuddling block in the intellectual exercises of a man. Myth making, false glory, distortion of history—everything the fascist needs get easy access in the social psyche. And the success of fascism is obviously contingent on the production of this mass culture in a country.

The more they saw the unbridled exploitation by capital, impoverishment of the common millions, wars and ravages, the well-meaning but confused intellectuals of the West—under the impact of the growing fideism—gradually lost faith in science, materialism, rationality. They regarded the crises of capitalist barbarism as the twilight of civilization and increasingly inclined towards religion and spiritualism, mysticism and obscurantism.

George Sabine explored the roots of the fascist culture quite correctly when he wrote that "fascism drew even more heavily upon . . . the philosophical tradition of the nineteenth century, the irrationalism which began with the romantic revolt and which produced, in Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Bergson, at

least three figures of first rate importance. This philosophy took a multitude of forms, but they all agreed in denying the persistent faith in reason that had been the common assumption of even the most diverse schools of earlier modern thought. For it the roots of conviction lay in some non-rational experience: in mystical intuition, in the drive of will, in the instinctive urge of vital forces, while the patient weighing of evidence and the systematic search for fact are plodding virtues beneath the dignity of the genius or the saint. [Sabine 1949, 632-33]

It was during this period, especially after the First World War, that Freudian theory of psychoanalysis replaced scientific psychology to explore the so-called unconscious; while surrealism, Dadaism, etc., seemed to overwhelm literature ousting realism and romanticism.

To grasp the point it will be useful to read the following comment by a critic of Dadaism in a chapter titled "Spread of the Dada Virus": "The war of 1914-18 was for many final proofs of the bankruptcy of a whole intellectual, cultural and social system. Religion, rational thought, humane values seemed implicitly contradicted by the slaughter initiated by Europe's civilized nations and all too often condoned by intellectuals and artists as well as politicians and militarists." [Bigsby 1972, 8] According to him, "Dada's apparent lack of values, its refusal to acknowledge terms such good and bad, was neither an indication of nihilism nor proof of anarchism but a sensitive reflection of an age which had no trust in the old dogmas and yet had equally failed to discover a new faith. What faith could one have for example in a religion which compromised itself in the cause of national ambition? What trust could one place in the idea of justice, progress and purpose when these were daily exposed as frauds?" [Bigsby 1972, 25-26]

In the 1980s, Jeev Sternhell, an Israeli historian wrote a book on the advent of fascist ideals in France, which met with a good response and created a stormy debate in Europe. The debate and disputation notwithstanding, there are some important arguments in his theses. On the basis of recognition of those arguments what Professor Pinto wrote may strengthen our observations above: "Fascism belongs not only to the post-war period, but also to the period that began with the modernization process of the European continent at the end of the 19th century. The crisis of liberalism at the time of the eruption of the masses into political life produced fascism as an ideology. The name did not yet exist, but its corpus was already formed. The First World War created the social conditions for the emergence of fascism as a movement but did not add to its ideology. . . .

Constructed from social Darwinism, which gave it its conceptual framework, the ideology of the new right was a synthesis of anti-rationalism and anti-positivism, of racism and nationalism. It had a point in common with Marxism: determinism—but this was biological and racial. . . .

Elitism, racism, nationalism, and the unconscious versus reason were all an integral part of this revolutionary new-right ideology. Sternhell describes how this cultural change was rapidly translated in the political world. It legitimized and gave respectability to the violent downfall of the liberal order, as well as supplying the conceptual framework for the take-off of fascism." [Pinto 2012, 32-34]

In this way, a naked advocacy of irrationalism, loss of confidence in scientific epistemology, etc., had already

by the 1920s created a fertile soil for fascism in the European mainland. The successful November Revolution and the gradual stability of the Soviet socialist system made the warning of the 1848 Manifesto apparent to the bourgeoisie—namely, the weapon that the bourgeoisie had wielded for overthrowing feudalism is now in the hands of the proletariat turned against themselves. The weapon must therefore be blunted at any cost.

Science cannot be totally dispensed with. Capitalist production and distribution cannot run without science and technology. So scientific rationality, the method of thinking and logical reasoning indispensable in scientific works—both theory and experiment, has to be eliminated from the social mind, or, at least its worth must be devalued. Take the formula and equations of science; don't take the methodology that brought them into being. Let religion, spiritualism, mysticism and obscurantism reign in the mind. Speak of overlap between science and religion. Science be in the hands, but godliness in the head!

These are not our deductions from facts we got looking back. In Italy Mussolini actually told in 1922, "We have created our myth. The myth is a faith, it is passion. It is not necessary that it shall be a reality. It is a reality by the fact that it is a goal, a hope, a faith, that it is courage. Our myth is the nation, our myth is greatness of the nation!" [Cited, Sabine 1949, 635]

How can Germany trail behind? Alfred Rosenberg, a pupil of Hitler, told frankly: "The life of a race or a people is not a philosophy that is logically developed and consequently is not a process that grows according to natural laws; it is the construction of a mystical synthesis, or of activity of soul, which cannot be explained by rational inferences or made comprehensible by exhibiting causes and effects." [Cited, Sabine 1949, 639] And in still clearer terms, "The most completely developed knowledge possible to a race is implicit in its first religious myth." [Cited, Cited, Sabine 1949, 646]

At that time the existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger wrote in a declaration issued by the university professors in support of Hitler in 1933, "Truth is the revelation of that which makes a people certain, clear and strong in its action and knowledge." [Cited, Sabine 1949, 646]

Regarding science also they were after reversing the perception about the autonomy of the scientific endeavour and bring it under the jackboot of the fascist dictates. Bernard Rust, the minister of education in Hitler's regime, spoke in the centenary celebration of the Heidelberg University: "The old idea of science based on the sovereign right of abstract intellectual activity has gone forever. The new science is entirely different from the idea of knowledge that found its value in an unchecked effort to reach the truth. The true freedom of science is to be an organ of a nation's living strength and of its historic fate and to present this in obedience to the law of truth." [Cited, Sabine 1949, 646]

An analyst of our time has once again reminded us of this myth making in fascism: "Fascism is also "mythopoetic" insofar as its ideological system does not only seek to create new myths but also to create a kind of mythical reality, or an everyday life that stems from myth rather than fact. Fascists hope to produce a new kind of rationale envisioning a common destiny that can replace modern civilization. The person with authority is the one who can interpret these myths into real-world strategy through a sacralised process that defines and delimits the seen and the unseen, the thinkable and the unthinkable." [Ross 2016, 8-9]

As Ehrenburg noted about the subsistence of fascism, a great physicist of the USA, Robert Millikan, left evidence in an ill-famous observation: "The two great pillars upon which all human

well-being and human progress rest, are first the spirit of religion, and second, the spirit of science or knowledge." [Cited, Roy 1977] The director of military research during the Second World War, Vannevar Bush further extended the spirit: "Science has been misread. Science does not exclude faith. And faith alone can meet the threats that now hang over us." [Cited by Bernal, 1954, 47]

What was the threat with which the US military heads were so concerned? And what was the solution?

We may have a succinct answer from Aldous Huxley uttered in the 1930s. Since the threat continues, the reply remains as valid today as when he had voiced it: "[The bourgeois ruler's] ideal, we must remember, is not the perfect human being, but the perfect mass-producer and mass-consumer. Now perfect human beings probably make very bad mass-producer", [and therefore,] "the industrialists will find, as machinery is made more fool-proof, that the great majority of jobs can be better performed by stupid people than by intelligent ones. Again stupid people are probably the state's least troublesome subjects, and a society composed in the main of stupid people is more likely to be stable than one with a high proportion of intelligent people". [Huxley 1933, 219-20]

Even a non-Marxist thinker could read the game plan of the bourgeoisie in almost class terms.

The signal is clear. Mass destruction of the thinking and reasoning faculty of man widely opens the door for fascist propaganda. Then they may easily convince the people that "everything is in the Vedas", "the Rig-Veda is the storehouse of all knowledge of the world", etc., on the one hand, and misinform about the very many instances of beef eating in the Vedas on the other, in order to propagate the veganism of the "upper" caste Hindus of North India as a continuance of Vedic culture. That makes it easy to promote the hatred and animosity against the Muslims as beef consumers. If the RSS activists start looking for beef in the refrigerator of some houses or in the tiffin box of a fellow passenger in a train and kill the Muslim on that plea, the average Hindu psyche get satiated. It is in this milieu that history may easily be replaced by mythology; one may look for the birthplace of an epic character, claim a temple to have been built there (although there is not a shred of proof thereof), and since there is (was) a mosque extant there, one may further claim that the temple had been "destroyed" by some orthodox Muslim ruler to erect the mosque. Once these "misfactuals" are doctored and sufficiently propagated, it is possible to mobilize millions of free serving fanatics to demolish the mosque structure and still many millions to support the act of vandalism. This all-out militant Hindu jingoism can then stir a section of the highest arbiters in the court of law, some of whom, out of sheer beliefs as well as allured by the prospect of a lucrative political career after retirement may condone the vandalism and hand over the disputed site to the Hindu fanatics.

This is a solitary but singular example of the toll fascism claims on human brain.

We regret to say, the various shades of the postmodernist school of ideas also contribute to or encourage today the generation of these nationalist myths. While opposing the elements of modernity the spokesmen of this trend reject all the valuable achievements of the Renaissance, brand modern science as a construct of western capitalism reject it as an

ideology of scientism, and in the process call the universal role of rationality and objectivity product and weapon of colonialism of the western powers. A section of this school, the so-called post-colonialists in our country, are found—while rightly criticizing the colonial aggression and plunders—pander some local traditions as valid and laudable knowledge, which go to include a lot of superstitious rubbish and mythical ideas. The way they oppose Ram Mohan Ray and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, criticize Bengal Renaissance and modern education, etc., virtually merges with the RSS themes upholding Brahmanism, male chauvinism, Sati, widowhood, and so forth. Quite unaware of the birthplace of fascism, they bring themselves easily to this fascist political camp. Or, we may also say, fascism is making use of some rightful criticism of men's genuine grievances about colonial rule through such schools of ideas to reinforce its advance.

Thus fascism is silently making deeper inroads in and around society through various means all over the world. As a scholar of our time observed: "Perhaps the most important strategy of fascism is what scholar Stephen D. Shenfield calls 'a gradual or creeping coup, accomplished by means of the steady penetration of state and social structures and the accumulation of military and economic potential'." [Ross 2016, 6] He called this "The fascist creep" (which is also a part of the title of his book) and pointed out that a large number of frustrated and confused leftist activists joins or supports the fascist movement and shifts their votes to them—which is "messy crossovers on the margins of left and right, the ways fascism cultivates a movement", and thereby "the left often unwittingly cedes the space for fascism to creep into the mainstream and radical subcultures". [Ross 2016, 6]

Had Professor Ross known that the biggest leftist party of our country tacitly offered a huge support and transferred the major part of their votes in West Bengal to the Hindu right in the last two major parliament and assembly elections in 2019 and 2021 respectively, he might feel gratified with sorrow. Although his analysis was true, the left and the anti-fascists have to learn to shy away from this suicidal politics.

5. Anti-Fascist Movement

Those of us who are aware of the impending danger of fascism in India, members of the radical left forces in particular, and the liberal minded well-meaning people in general, have a responsibility to shoulder. On the one hand they have to make the common people conscious of the threats imminent, on the other they have to rally all the antifascist forces against the evil power.

Let us have a look at that.

In order to resist fascism, it is first all necessary to understand its class nature and class perspectives. Accordingly the leftists should form a core of unity with a common minimum programme and a charter of demands in platform. Then they may unite with other bourgeois parties in opposition too as a broad based anti-fascist front on the basis of agreement on that charter of demands. It will make it possible to handle the contradiction within the bourgeois camp for power and pelf. How this united platform will be developed and/or what shape it will take depends on so many factors. I can say only the bare preliminaries.

Wrong understanding gives birth to wrong strategy. A wrong strategy is bound to mislead the anti-fascist struggles to a great extent. As it had happened in Germany. Compared to Italy

it took the German fascists much longer to usurp complete power. The communists had the entire 1920s in their hands to smash the Nazis. But sadly enough, they spent the entire time in fighting the social democrats under the guidance of Joseph Stalin. The mistake took its costly toll after 1933—as we know from history. It is true that the Comintern in its Seventh Congress changed the old tactical line and adopted the policy of all out United Front with all democratic and anti-fascist forces. But then it was too late. Ultimately the Soviet Union had to pay much dearly in the Second World War to smash the Weimer Republic and its war machine to smithereens.

We have to learn from the past mistakes and carve out the path ahead.

Fascism has developed as an international network. Fascist elements and organizations by various names are working in all countries and wreaking successes of varying degrees. Everywhere fascism incites the most backward conservatism of the people and communities with the help of the most sophisticated technology of the day. The fascists are using computer and mobile phone to spread their venomous campaign materials through e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, web portals, and other social internet media. Recent studies show a heavy spurt in this direction. [Wiederer 2014; Ross 2016, 10] They send a hate message through such networks to millions and millions of people in a second, who—without knowing the contents and judging the veracity of the message—carry on the campaign in their vicinity.

Where do the opponents stand in this respect? Although the electronic gadgets have become pretty cheap, the Marxists and leftists are yet to come out of the bounds of the propaganda style followed in the 1970s. It is true that they have somewhat adapted themselves to the use of the new technology, but they remain far behind what is necessary. Moreover, many of those, who are skilfully using the gadgets and the media, often suffer from too strong a personal, group and/or party ego to share and propagate a good message created by one outside their ken. This becomes thus a greater hindrance than even fascism.

They must acquire the mentality to dismantle such barriers in no time—at both the leaders' as well as ranks' levels. Then they have to learn a more positive form of propaganda, which means they will not merely sit in the benches to reply to the questions raised by the saffron brigade. The technique of campaign will be such that we shall pose the questions in a series and make the teachers, students, scholars and employees of the WhatsApp Universities rush to answer in the sequence.

We are sure, historically fascism will not be able to permanently ride over the collective human knowledge, wisdom and good sense. But it is our responsibility to fix an early expiry date for fascism the world over.

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