

The Genocidal Pogrom in Gujarat: Anatomy of Indian Fascism

THE FASCIST UPSURGE¹

Kunal Chattopadhyay

The Roots of Reaction :

A full-fledged radical bourgeois democratic revolution has historically been the exception, rather than the norm. The German revolution of 1848 and its aftermath showed a different possibility, whose wider validity is shown also by the history of class struggles in India. The modern class struggle is fought out under economic conditions dominated by the worldwide system of imperialism. At the same time, the battle of classes takes place on a particular terrain – national, ethnic, cultural – where the traditions, forms of thought, organisations and political culture are generated by conflicts reaching back to the dawn of capitalist society and even beyond it.

Though the fascists, whether in Germany in the 1920s and early '30s, or in India in the 1980s and 1990s, have been financed, supported and armed by modern monopoly capitalism; though the fascist ideology is propagated with most up-to-date, sophisticated technology, yet it cannot be simply characterised as a tool of monopoly capital. The struggle against fascism can be successful only as we understand how it presses into service the past to serve the aims of present-day reaction. Recent events in India show how a failure to do so results in either of two equally dangerous errors on the part of the left. One wing, sometimes in a straightforward way, sometimes decked out with currently fashionable “post-Marxian” theories, attempts to analyse the fascists as a “New Right” that can be combatted only by creating an alternative indigenous discourse, shifting away from “class” to progressive nationalism, liberal trends in Hinduism and Islam, subalternity, etc. The other wing, in the name of a supposed leftist purity, classifies all rightwing or bourgeois currents as authoritarian, fascist, etc., in a totally indiscriminate way, thereby obscuring the specific nature of the fascist movement.

Communalism is the desecularisation of both public order and society. From birth, it has been a political current. Though it was promoted by the British colonial rulers due to their own reasons, they were not its sole creators, as Indians took it up consciously as a political programme.² Ideologically, communalism claimed that Indian society was divided into homogeneous communities defined in terms of adherence to particular religions that brought about shared common interests in all other spheres. The interests of the “community” were different from and antagonistic to the interests of other “communities”. British administrators and intellectuals worked to create the ideological basis of this communalism by their organisation of Indian history and social analysis. In Indian history, they highlighted a supposed greatness of the early “Hindu (or Aryan) race”, their subsequent degeneration and the centrality of the race/religion/community conflict in Indian history.

From the last 19th Century, communal politics was encouraged as a means to counter the growth of bourgeois – liberal nationalism. The fact that in areas like Bengal, brought early under British rule, the Muslims constituted the majority of the population and hence of the toiling poor, while “modernity” and its fruits were enjoyed almost entirely by well-to-do Hindus, meant that late “modernising” Muslims saw in the Hindus their main rivals, and often trend to the British for patronage.

However, while British rule and Orientalist ideology provided the basis for the growth of communalism, the objective conditions by themselves did not create communalism. On the contrary, the Hindus and Muslims who took an active and leading communal role must be viewed as conscious actors. A significant trend of Indian nationalism was built on an attempt to blend religious identity with national

¹ Written in early 1993, this was to be the basis for the ICS political resolution at the 1993 Conference.

² Tanika. Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, New Delhi, 2001, is among those who trace the emergence of Hindu “cultural” nationalism.

identity. Similar developments can be observed with all the religions, but it is Hindu communalism that is the basis of the fascist movement in present day India.

In the development of militant nationalism, the use of overt religious symbols, while often helping to create cohesion within those mobilised, also divided people in terms of religion on purely secular political affairs. National awakening was identified with religious revival. Thus, the Indian nationalism they created had a clear Hindu bias. This extended even to Gandhi, with his slogan of Ramarajya, the acceptance of cow protection as a socio-political plank, etc. Thus, while communal politics and nationalism were not identical, nationalist politics had its communal wing. Communal politics properly speaking, was, from its inception, nurtured by upper class, usually land-owning elements, and found its base among the petty bourgeoisie. As electoral politics developed, communalists had to enter into contests with secular and nationalist forces. Hindu communalists found it easier to mask their politics under a democratic rhetoric, urging the imagined majority community to vote en bloc for those who would defend them, and claiming at the same time that since Hindus form the majority in India, they were simple democrats.

From the viewpoint of electoral mobilisations, the petty-bourgeoisie was the ideal target group of communalism. Though the founders of the communal organisations were often upper class and upper caste, in organising masses, they had to turn to apparently non-class issues. The petty bourgeoisie, in periods of relative economic stagnation, limited modernisation, and lacking adequate modern social and cultural services; with a dwindling landed property and a shrinking employment opportunity, found upward mobility all but impossible, and the prospects of social decline all too real. In the absence of progressive ideas and struggles, the petty bourgeoisie could be led in the direction of reactionary pseudo-solutions through the masking of the real exploiters, and through the portrayal of the crisis as being the product of the machinations of the "rival community".

Nevertheless, the limits of this approach became evident in 1937. Hindu communalism's more far sighted campaigners had realised well before then that without a prior conquest of civil society, without also, to a considerable extent, the desecularisation of the state, they would remain no more than an influential ginger group at best. Hence, while the Hindu Mahasabha went in for relatively short-sighted electoral battles, the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh began its decades long fight for an alternative culture.

The Unfinished Bourgeois Revolution :

The German revolution of 1848-9 showed that the French revolution was only one of several possible models of bourgeois revolutions. History has shown that the bourgeoisie can gain economic dominance and even political control without its "self-emancipation", through the actions of other social groups, classes, etc. The revolutionary years 1848-49 showed that "The history of the Prussian bourgeois class, like that of the German bourgeois class in general shows that a purely bourgeois revolution [if the French revolution is taken, as the author here does, as the paradigmatic revolution].... is impossible in Germany and that only a feudal absolutist counter-revolution or a social-republican revolution is possible." (Karl Marx, "The Bourgeoisie and the Counter Revolution".)

But in an era of developing capitalist economy, the victory of feudal absolutist counter-revolution could not be the last word. This victory was earned with the compromise of Bismarckian Bonapartism. Politically, he was not willing to let the bourgeoisie get any power. His aim was the defence of the interests of the absolutist state and the Junker class. But in the long run, this was possible only by granting the essential elements of the socio-economic programme of the bourgeoisie. One reason for the compromise was the role of the proletariat in the revolutions of 1848 and the fear of both sides of that role. Besides, the bourgeois forces everywhere in Europe in 1848 showed that they wanted an extension of political privileges, not a total levelling.

Even as the German working class grew, matured and turned socialist, capitalist development in Germany remained limited to the economy. In politics and culture, important elements of the pre-capitalist past continued to dominate.

In 1918, the revolution that broke out in Germany therefore had the task of not only overthrowing capitalism, but also all precapitalist elements. The German Social Democratic party not only betrayed a proletarian socialist revolution, but thereby, they also kept alive in the apparently absolutely democratic Weimar Republic all the quasifeudal, monarchist, militarist and violently anti-democratic elements, mostly concentrated in such organisations as the Deutsche National Volkspartei, the Stahlhelm, etc. The failure of permanent revolution meant that modernisation had a highly contradictory character, and was

reactionary in form in many ways. Fascism as a movement was a mobilisation of the petty bourgeoisie. While it was wholly counter-revolutionary in its attitude to the working class, working class organisations, and democratic institutions as a whole, going so far as to proclaim the negation of 1789, it also had no soft corner for semi-feudal privileges. By promoting fascist cadres it broke the back of feudal-bureaucratic privileges.

Our aim is not to make a point by point analogy between the German situation and the Indian. But the general tendency is the same – an incomplete bourgeois revolution, a compromise with the precapitalist forces, though in India the compromise was tilted much more towards the bourgeoisie, the failure of the proletariat, and the emergence of a far right movement blending “tradition” with modernity.

Pre-independence India had one of the most developed of the colonial capitalist classes. Between early 19th century, when the so-called Bengal Renaissance began, to the early 20th Century, when the national movement took on an all-India character, the dominant nationalist organisations and ideologies developed a clear capitalist goal, while seeking to enfold broader masses. The early nationalists, the so-called moderates, developed an economic doctrine that cooped popular anti-imperialism into a framework of indigenous capitalist development. With the rise of Gandhi, there came a leader who stood close to many of the capitalist groups, yet with the ability to portray himself as a symbol of the common people. “The Gandhi leadership was able to weld together, from the late 1910s, a coalition of interests (class, caste, religious, regional etc.) under the growing hegemony of Indian big capital. The realization of these diverse interests that the fulfilment of theirs specific needs required the prior dismantlement of the stultifying structures of the colonial state was utilised by big capital, in alliance with semi-feudal landlords in the provinces, to strengthen its base in order to bargain better with the imperialist bourgeoisie. Contrary to old and new apologists and lackeys of the Congress, the Congress did not have a definite strategy for independence up to at least as late as the early ‘40s. However, the need to make the Congress and its leadership the primary instrument of mediation not only externally with respect to the British, but internally with respect to its constituent parts, forced the leadership to alternate periods of compromise with periods of pressure for higher types of demand or for greater autonomy. The essentially compromisist nature of the Congress is brought out perfectly by the deal of 1935, the response of the leadership to the mass upsurge after 9 August 1942, the bargains it carried on after being released from prison in 1944-45, its out and out hostility to the post-war mass upsurge, and its retention of the colonial administrative, military, judicial, and legislative (at the provincial level) structures, as well as the collaborators (the ICS etc.) who in other places like Vietnam were justly treated as Quislings.

“Nevertheless the Congress did play a role quite different from that of, for example, the Kuomintang. It was dominated by the industrial bourgeoisie.... There was a conscious effort to co-opt all mass movements ... the Congress structure... developed into a complex and sophisticated hierarchy of leaders most of whom had gained some measure of respect and authority from their participation in the national movement. (*The Rajiv Era –A Historical Perspective*, Inquilabi Communist Sangathan, 1985).

While popular movements could not be contained within the fold of the Congress, the bourgeois hegemony could not be broken in a major way, the more so as the two main left parties, the CPI and the CSP, were not willing to challenge it most of the time. Localised challenges, too, became significant only in rare cases, like in Andhra in the late ‘40s. Much more problematic was the Congress failure to certain communal ideology and politics, and its increasing compromise with the latter. For Gandhi, nation building involved Hindu –Muslim unity as an essential task, and he could therefore say that he would accept partition only over his dead body. But even this notion of a Hindu-Muslim unity stressed the communal identity. Other bourgeois leaders, like Nehru and Patel, were committed to strong central authority, and therefore preferred partition to unity, which would have meant either great concessions to the federalist demands of their opponents, or even greater concessions to the democratic aspirations of the masses.

The global context must also be kept in mind. In the post-war world, the balance of forces then existing was detrimental to imperialist interests. Revolutionary and democratic struggles were developing in many countries. It is in this context that the characterisation of the post-war upsurge in India as an “Almost Revolution” can be understood. The road to a united, democratic, anti-imperialist, and social revolutionary India lay through the massive struggles to free the INA prisoners. The Royal Indian Navy uprising, the working class struggles that culminated in the general strike of July 1946, and the present struggles in large parts of the country, Throttling this became the united task of the British, the Indian bourgeoisie, and the precapitalist forces, This is what allowed the massive and virtually unchecked rise of communalism in the mid – ‘40s.

Like the evolution of Germany from 1848-9 to 1918-19, the political and socio-economic evolution of India between 1857 and 1947 therefore created a metastable system. Bourgeois hegemony was incomplete, and it contained within its ideological makeup and political apparatus the unresolved tensions, the undigested residues of the past, and the conflicts resulting therefrom.

What emerged was a weak bourgeois democratic set-up, heavily dependent on the continuity of the Congress, which in turn came to be dependent on a charismatic leader (or what could be somehow made to appear as charisma). This reflected the flabbiness of the Indian bourgeoisie since its youth. The leader, standing as a sort of supreme arbiter, functioned as the symbol of the national class that the bourgeoisie itself could not become. The key tension that emerged in India till the early 1980s was that “between a relatively dynamic, yet backward capitalist economy and the endemic crisis of political instability. i.e the long term crisis of political leadership within the frame work of a real (though weak) bourgeois democracy.” (*The Rajiv Era*, pp.1-2)

Political Developments After 1947:

Post transfer of power Indian politics falls into two phases. The first was a period of growth, of relatively peaceful capital accumulation, of a state sector that both provided jobs and assisted the accumulation of private capital. The Stalinist theory of stageism meant that the CPI and subsequently the CPI (M) always emphasized the need for an alliance with the “progressive bourgeoisie” (the difference being over who constituted the said progressive bourgeoisie). So bourgeois domination remained unchallenged at the political level. In this phase, communalism, bereft of big bourgeois support, had become a purely petty bourgeois movement.

The second period began from the end of the 1960s. The economic crisis of the early 1960s, followed by an IMF-sponsored devaluation, a crisis over the PL-480 loan, etc, contributed to a swing away from the Congress. The elections of 1967 saw the emergence of numerous non-Congress alternatives at the provincial level. There was also the possibility of the growth of a revolutionary movement. But the left split-off from the CPI, the CPI(M), did not become a revolutionary party. Its radical cadres left to form the All India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries, and then the CPI (ML) and a few smaller groups. But their revolutionism consisted of a simple counter position of “violence” to “peaceful” revolution, of the “Chinese path” to the parliamentary cretinism of the CPI-CPI(M), and the notion of a rural poor, constantly straining at the leash, tightly gripped by reformist misleaders, so that a single spark was supposed to set off a prairie fire. Once this was shown up as an unrealistic, utopian view, the continued adherence to a stageist perspective and the identification of a workers’ revolution with a caricature “Chinese path” led to a relapse to left parliamentarism.

Meanwhile, the obsolescence of the old economic model in a period of gathering crisis of the world economy during the downward swing of a long wave deepened the crisis of the bourgeois order. As the Inquilabi Communist Sangathan noted in 1985, all differences between the different political parties notwithstanding, “the essential economic perspective is common” – the package that in the final years of the 1980s and the early 1990s came to be known as liberalisation – i.e., the market as the main social regulator, augmentation of the private sector, limiting the power of unions, incentives for the kulak economy, reduction of corporate taxes, etc. (See *The Rajiv Era*, pp.30-31).

From V.P Singh to Manmohan Singh, a number of finance ministers attempted to carry out this structural reform, but with very limited success. East Europe and the ex-USSR has provided imperialism with a much more profitable field than the still regulation ridden Indian scenario. At the same time, the imperialist pressure has been so much greater that liberalisation has been more and more geared to the aims of the imperialists.

Politically, the leader-cult oriented politics became troublesome in an era of sharp ups and downs. Plebiscitary parliamentary polls in 1977, and again in 1989, showed up the nature of the decline of the Congress. The major centrist bourgeois alternative was sought to be built by V.P. Singh, whose model of social modernisation was based on the selection of the OBCs as his key constituency and on upholding the Mandal Commission report as the key factor in the modernisation drive.

The other line that developed was the fascist offensive, which now was pushing forward aggressively. The failure to project the BJP as a rightwing liberal party, adhering to parliamentary politics, combined with the growing political instability and economic pressures, pushed the fascist option into third gear. The RSS strengthened its grip on the BJP, and turned to a militant counterrevolutionary politics.

What is Fascism ?

Most sections of the left are uncertain in their use of the term fascism. Two reasons exist for this. On one hand, there is the general ultraleftism among sections of the left who view all forms of authoritarianism as more or less interchangeable – as distinctions without difference.

The simplistic definition of fascism that Zinoviev and Stalin had put forward at the time of the Fifth Comintern Congress, and that was taken up by the ECCI after the Sixth Congress, as well as the equality simplistic and false definition put forward by Dimitrov at the Seventh Congress, have only served to becloud the issue and create obstacles to the development of a genuine anti-fascist fighting front. The essential element of Stalin's definition is that fascism and social democracy are not antipodes but twins, and that social democracy is, in fact a left mask of fascism (whence the epithet "social-fascists"). Taken up further by the ECCI and the German Communist Party (KPD) in 1929-33, this came to mean that all parties, apart from the Communist Party, were in some measure fascist. This meant further that any special attention to building an anti-fascist proletarian united front was uncalled for.³

Within this "ultra-left" position, there already existed embryonically the rightwing definition. Stalin had written that "fascism is the bourgeoisie's fighting organization that relies on the active support of Social Democracy". Evidently, if the latter could be detached, it would be nice. And as appetite comes with eating, it would be even nicer if the "friends of peace", "democrats" and all other non-fascist bourgeois elements could also be brought into an antifascist front. So Dimitrov, who in 1931 had urged united action of the KPD and the Nazis to speed up the revolution, called in 1935 for an all embracing united front and an effective liquidation of the Communist Party and the Communist International. Radicals who reject the line of aligning with supposed bourgeois democratic antifascists correctly point out that the "antifascism" of rightwing Stalinists or Social Democrats consists of repeating the arguments of Dimitrov. But from this, they often draw the false conclusion that fascism is equal to authoritarianism of any shape, and hence a general anti-capitalist struggle is enough. Thereby, they fall back to the line of the 'Third Period', and often they even use the "Third period" vocabulary, including the belief that the worse it gets, the better it is for the revolutionary (After Hitler – Us). It is claimed that a draconian dictatorship will push forward the growth of revolutionary consciousness. Against this kind of error, bordering on gross betrayal of working class, it is necessary to explain clearly the nature of fascism in order to fight it.

The Seventh Congress definition, in fact, called fascism the most reactionary wing of imperialism. From this, two conclusions can be drawn. First, that fascism is a creation of imperialism. Second, that it is the agent of a more or less well defined segment of imperialism, so that the opponents of that wing can be roped in the anti-fascist alliance. Moreover, the first conclusion can lead to a further conclusion, namely, that the social base being purely manipulated, its aspirations, and the specific ways in which that has an impact on the state form, the relationship between the different classes and social groups, etc., are irrelevant. Both ultraleftism and class collaborationism can flow out of this erroneous definition. The proof lies in the easy switch by Stalinists and Maoists in India from one to the other mode, constantly swearing by the 7th Congress.

Any definition of fascism that has as its aim the prosecution of a successful struggle against fascism must include the following elements: Fascism is the product of the declining periods of capitalism of the age of imperialism. It is a mass movement, based chiefly on the petty bourgeoisie, and the diverse intermediate strata between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. In its origins, it is not a creation of the big bourgeoisie. In countries where proletarian struggles have a long history, the most advantageous form of rule is bourgeois democracy, because it permits a recurrent reduction of social tensions through regular elections, changes in governments, reforms, and because a great part of the upper classes come to wield power through various institutions like parties, newspapers, the bureaucracy, the economic bodies, the institutions of local self-government, etc. But the stability of this model of bourgeois rule is dependent on a particular balance of social and economic forces. If the equilibrium goes, the big bourgeoisie fights as it can to defend its historic interests. For this, it is willing to put up with considerable state autonomy and even a consequent loss of political power. With the growth of a powerful proletariat, forms of authoritarianism that had been adequate in the past are now inadequate. Hence, fascist leaders try to come to terms with the big bourgeoisie, pointing out the difficulties in achieving the desired sift in

³ For Trotsky's critique and alternative, see Leon Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, New York, 1971. For a detailed study of the Comintern and the Communist party of Germany, see Kunal Chattopadhyay, 'The Communist party of Germany, the Comintern and the Theory of Social Fascism', *History*, Department of History, Burdwan University, 1998.

reallocation of surplus through a purely police state set up. The fascist solution is the establishment of a counter mobilization, based on "nation" instead of "class". The fascists want, not just to "defeat" the workers, but to destroy their entire sense of class, all their organisations, etc., through a combination of alternative ideology and mass terror "from below", from within civil society, as well as, rather than only through, agencies of the state like the police.

This explains both why large sections of the bourgeoisie are not easily attracted by fascism, and why at times the fascist appeal increases so much. Under "normal" circumstances, i.e., when profit-making is easy, the fascist movement seems, to bosses, only another mass movement, capable of disturbing the peace and causing loss of profits, etc. The ideological elements like anti-Semite or anti-Muslim politics appear as irritants at best and dangerous at worst. Even in such situations, capitalists use fascist gangs to break up strikes occasionally, frighten trade unionists, and the like. At the same time, precisely because of the distancing between the big bourgeoisie and the fascists, fascism is able to assume a "truly national" supra-class appearance, though its exact structure and contents naturally vary from country to country. Ideologically, fascism claims to struggle against particularity, to subordinate it to the "totality", the "organic" or the "nation" in order to establish "harmony". Fascism is an illusory transcendence of particularity. It seeks to "overcome" class conflicts on the basis of and within the framework of the existing class society. The fascist ideology seeks to negate the concepts of freedom and equality. It is not by accident that in 1933 Goebbels said that the Nazi victory meant that "by this we have obliterated the year 1789 from history". For the petty bourgeoisie, the growth of capitalism only brings increasing fear of freedom, for freedom appears as the freedom of big capital to accumulate and the freedom of the working class to organize. By revoking the ideal of liberty, fascism appears to save the interests of the petty bourgeoisie, which wants the reestablishment of the "ancient harmony", but actually serves the big bourgeoisie by announcing the truth of modern capitalist society and elevating its actual practice to the status of a principle. Equality is also revoked, by an apparent rationality that is heavily conditioned by the social psychology of the petty bourgeoisie. In a schematic way, it is possible to talk of certain typical character traits (subject to modification by class struggle and the entire past of that class and nation):

A focussing on particularity –an uncritical relationship to one's own self. One's needs, desires, ideas are simply given.

This is accompanied by an uncritical relationship to the group to which one is attached (family, kin group, community, nation). Their scale of values are assumed to be natural and unconditionally and universally valid. This is carried over into a "freely chosen" community. A genuinely freely chosen group affiliation presupposes the continual critical reflection on the ideology and practice of the group, the maintenance of a conscious relationship to the scale of values and the attitudes of that group. As a result conflicts may arise. But with the type we are examining, there is only uncritical acceptance or equally unthinking rejection.

The consequence of this is a rigid division of society into in-groups and out-groups. Society appears as a set of concentric circles – the self at the centre surrounded by in-groups. Whenever the aims of the in-groups fail, the root cause is traced to the perfidy and hostility of the out-groups.

Along with this we find a conservative orientation towards the past. "Rebellions" are sanctioned only if one's own position is declining, and that against those deemed responsible – ending usually in an attempt to find scapegoats. This revolt is never revolutionary, for a revolutionary attitude is inevitably a critical one.

Even in rebellion, this personality remains authoritarian. All responsibility for one's own life and actions are shifted on to an absolute authority. At the same time, towards the weak they consider themselves the transcendent power.

When a conflict situation arises where the issue of simultaneous allegiance to the different in groups is in trouble, this authoritarian character identifies the self with the strongest group. This is the fascist moral obligation. This is so, because the repudiation of the most powerful group would mean that the isolated self, which is linked, in this view, to the human species only through the particular groups, would surrender one's very existence as a human being.

As a result, fascism turns one's sense of being a human into the most destructive, anti-humanist outlook. While brutality is found in any kind of upper class rule, any dictatorship, fascism brutalises the entire social existence by arguing that it is not really brutal, that the "enemy" is so inhuman, so bestial that destruction of the enemy is a humane action to save those who are truly human, who are of course one's in-groups.

The overt fascist demands are often unrealisable and amount to self-deception. Moreover, in fighting the working class, the fascists objectively side with the big bourgeoisie. That is why numerous Marxist writers, beginning with Angelo Tasca (debating Antonio Gramsci) have denied the petty bourgeois character of fascism. Certainly, as a movement that is not ultimately fighting against capitalism for the revolutionary reorganisation of society on the basis of abolition of exploitation and through self-emancipation, fascism ultimately reveals itself to be on the side of the bourgeoisie. But it does so in its peculiar way. The German and Italian experiences show that fascism is the modern plebeian form of capitalist development. As such, within the capitalist structure, it can fight for certain limited forms of rights and opportunities for the petty bourgeoisie. It can also fight for the complete capitalisation of the economy. The result is of course a further crisis of the petty bourgeoisie, but this at a time when the proletariat has already been atomised. At this stage, a bureaucratisation of fascism, through the establishment of a “totalitarian” party-state, absorbs a section of the politicalised petty bourgeoisie, while “militants” or “radicals” are disposed of through a rapid surgical operation resulting in the murder of hundreds, or even thousands of their key activists. In the long run, also, this fascist politics has an expansionist tendency. Despite its autarchy rhetoric, by intensifying class polarisation and by drastically cutting down the share of wages in the GNP, it not only allows big capital to accumulate but also forces it to turn outward for markets. Despite the actual weaknesses of India, even Indian fascism has such a pretension.

The Making of Indian Fascism:

The RSS history, structure and ideology show how it conforms to the general fascist pattern while adapting to the specific situation in India. Founded on Vijaya Dashami in 1925, it has since birth consciously identified itself with Ram. The idea of the Hindu Rashtra, with Ram as its central mythic figure, is the creation of the RSS. Using the sham façade of being a “non-political” organisation, the RSS has, over the decades, avoided scrutiny while deeply penetrating civil society. From birth, it aimed at the consolidation of upper class and upper caste domination through petty bourgeois mobilization. The caste bias is expressed by an official publication which says that its establishment was at a time when “Brahmin –non-Brahmin conflict was nakedly on view.” The Hindutva ideal of Dr. Hedgewar was the result of his realisation that “the Hindus were the nation in Bharat and that Hindutva was Rashtriyatva.”

Initially a local (Nagpur) organisation, its techniques of collective prayer, a standardised ritual, physical training, the constant re-telling of tales of Hindu heroism against Muslim invaders, and the recruitment of young boys (12-15) who were impressionable soon paid dividend, as the organisation succeeded in beating up Muslims in riots, in gaining wealthy patrons and in spreading beyond the city. The physical training was not aimed to confront the British. The weapons in which training was given could best be used to terrorize other civilians. Also, between 1925 and 1947 the RSS distinguished itself by a total abstention from the anti-imperialist struggle.

Expansion brought strains, and so, after a split, in late 1929, the RSS decided on the principle of absolute command of the leader.⁴ Utilising and intensifying strains in the Hindu-Muslims relations, the RSS grew between 1937 and 1940, its membership jumping from 40,000 in 1938 to 100,000 in 1940. The assumption of leadership by Golwalkar brought an intensification in aggressiveness. In his *We: or Our Nationhood Defined*, he had elaborated on his concept of “cultural nationalism”. Crucial to this was the open avowal of Nazism as his ideal, a theme further explained by Anthony Elenjimittan, a Christian convert to the RSS outlook. “The RSS from the very inception of the movement hoisted Bhagva flag, Dharma Chakra and Satya Meva Jayte 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).

The concepts of Hindutva and Hindu Rashtra were clarified by Golwalkar. At the heart of Hindutva lies the myth of a thousand year old struggle of Hindus against Muslims, making up the alleged outline of Indian history. Historians have taken apart this myth as a pack of lies. Such refutations are important, since, history is one of the chosen battlefields of the RSS. But the politics of historical mythmaking has far outstripped the refutations. Even many secularists are disposed to accepting the

⁴ Official accounts of the RSS therefore ignore the early role of the Hindu Mahasabha forces in building up the RSS.

myth of a present day Muslim aggressiveness as at least a partial truth. But as the Inquilabi Communist Sangathan pointed out in its 1984 resolution on communalism, in recent riots the Muslims have been the major victims. For the RSS, by contrast, the lie propagated by Hedgewar still holds good – that there are no Hindu – Muslim riots, but only Muslim riots, because Hindus merely resist rioting Muslims. The function of this “aggressive Muslim” myth is to prove that Hindutva is the true nationalism, and thereby to unite broad masses on a reactionary basis. Non Hindus are not patriotic, because, “Together with the change in their faith, gone are the spirit of love and devotion for the nation..... They have also developed a feeling of identification with the enemies of this land. They look to some foreign lands as their holy places “. (Golwalkar -- *Bunch of Thoughts*, p. 128)

Hindutva itself is first presented as supremely catholic, where no particular ritual, no place is essential, for it is like an ocean where all rivers meet. After all the metaphor making, however, there is a resanctification of specific symbols in the name of nation and face. In a moment of fantasy (or extreme expansionism) Golwalkar talked of Hindus being the defenders of the integrity of an India stretching from Iran to Singapore and from Kashmir to Sri Lanka.

Along with this went an opposition to “territorial nationalism” and the bourgeois nationalist movement. Gandhi and the Congress were lambasted for harping on Hindu- Muslim unity, for equating the anti-British struggle with patriotism and nationalism, and for causing the “defeat” of the Hindus, the defeat consisting of the creation of a relatively secular India. Feeding each other, the RSS and the Muslim League grew in the 1940s, till in 1945 the RSS was training some 10000 Swayam Sevaks in Officers Training Camps. In the wake of the partition, the RSS hate campaign reached a fever peak. What halted it was the murder of Gandhi by a former member of the RSS, Nathuram Godse. Legally, the RSS escaped responsibility. But the hate campaign and Godse’s action dovetailed so much ideologically, that even rightwing Congress leaders like Patel, far happier suppressing Communists, had to ban the RSS.⁵ Legalization came with the promise of Golwalkar to stay out of “politics”. This of course has been very liberally interpreted by the RSS, for all it stays out of is contesting elections directly. At the same time, in the face of the attack from the government, Golwalkar began disclosing the hidden agenda of the RSS. In letters to Nehru and Patel, he promised RSS help in combatting communists. This agenda has become clearer since then. In his ‘Introduction’ to *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). Democracy and communism are attacked in the same work by Golwalkar as false theories. Democracy gives political equality, creates the desire for social equality, and fuels communist propaganda. In competing electoral with communists, others, (i.e., the Congress with its Nehruvian Socialism) also make populist promises, strengthening the communist case. The alternative is the dictatorship of a party that would claim to stand above classes and class conflicts in the name of morality. This would of course ensure capital accumulation, but that function is masked by the stress on building a “faith to live by and die for”, that would organise the struggle against communism, which in turn is equated with Stalinism and its terrors.

The rebuilding of the RSS in the post independence period blended modern concepts with its traditional view, so that all themes of exploitation (class, caste, gender) are glossed over in the name of harmony through the familial model. All out ideological struggles was and is carried out against secularists, and all manner of rites, functions, local obscurantisms and superstitions, are pressed into service to destroy the secular bases of society. The RSS training programme, as described by Golwalkar, has more than a touch of the paramilitary, hovering just outside the playground.

The non-political stance notwithstanding, the RSS has been very active politically. In parliamentary politics, its first main try was the Jana Sangh. There followed a period of “entryism” in the Janata Party. The split in the Janata Party was due to the issue of dual membership. Thus, the Bharatiya Janata Party, founded after this split, was explicitly linked to the RSS. Nevertheless, a moderate liberal image was cultivated at times with Deen Dayal Upadhyay’s “Integral Humanism”, and later, Vajpayee’s moderate line leadership during the early years of the BJP. RSS cadres were also sent to work in other areas. Thus, a number of them participated in the bhodan movement. Fearing communist domination in the struggle to liberate Dadra and Nagar Haveli, the RSS participated in the struggle. More often, relief work among refugees, anti-cow slaughter agitations and the like provided the best form of activity. When,

⁵ Patel was willing to quickly rescind the ban, and at one stage, even to propose the induction of RSS cadres in the Congress.

after the India-China war of 1962, anti-Communism became a respectable attitude among the liberal intelligentsia, the RSS became bolder. The rise of Balasaheb Deoras also marked a period of more intense political activism.

The years 1967-1989 saw a rise in RSS power and its political role. A policy of broad anti-Congress alliances, at times even with the Stalinist CPs, benefited the RSS. The units were restructured to fit in with the electoral constituencies. The promotion of the ABVP and the BMS⁶ also showed the emerging strategy. Electoral gains and losses were not continuous. In 1977, the Janata Party had 93 BJP MP's. This went down to 16 in 1981. The formation of the BJP saw an attempt to set up a rightwing, but basically parliamentary party. But the turn in the Congress (I) economic policy under Rajiv Gandhi meant that the big bourgeoisie was happy to go on supporting its traditional party. Consequently, in the 1984 elections, the BJP got just two seats. But the RSS went on expanding, from 8500 shakhas in 1975, to 11,000 in 1977, to 20,000 in 1982. Donations from members and sympathisers had crossed Rs.10 million annually, while regular participants in the shakhas had crossed a million by 1981.

In such a situation, the failure of the "Vajpayee line" was grist to the mill of those in the RSS who wanted a more active, aggressive, extra-parliamentary political role.

Indian elections have very often been plebiscitary. The aim of the RSS was to penetrate deeply into civil society before making Hindutva the key plebiscitary issue. Advani's Ratha Yara, like other RSS-VHP sponsored yagnas and yatras, left a trail of riots behind it, as evidence of increasing communalisation. But the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi diffused the appeal of the RSS line. Following this, the shift of the Congress (I) to a policy of "liberalization" showed the rejection of the RSS by the big bourgeoisie. The RSS however, decided to up the ante by intensifying extra parliamentary mobilizations.

A crucial feature of this stepped up struggle is the change in the nature of riots. Riots can no longer be explained in the socio-economic terms used in the past by leftists, secularists, and academics. The ICS resolution on *Communalism in India*, correct in its day, is also in need of revision.

The VHP, set up in the 1960s, went into high gear after the furore over the conversion of some Hindus to Islam in Meenakshipuram in the early 1980s. It has sought to project itself as the "natural" voice of all Hindus. The riots it foments are no longer chiefly linked to locally specific issues. The Ram Mandir mobilization showed its successes in the field. It is not enmity to definite groups of Muslims occupying some special position in the social economic field that has made a success of this mobilization, but the perceived eternal clash between Hindutva and Islam. "Pseudo-secularists", communists, all are enemies of this resurgent Hindutva.

The recent riots, notably the Bombay riots of 1993, are what Tsarist Russia knew as pogroms. Here we will only emphasize that the aim was to warn Muslims everywhere that the "angry Hindu" had woken up, and that they must either accept the dictates of Hindutva or face the consequences. This was why Bombay was chosen, for people from all over India go there to work. By driving out over 100,000 Muslims through a pogrom, and by imposing a greater degree of ghettoisation on those who remained, "Hindu" identity is consolidated and Muslims are simultaneously brow beaten.

Behind all this is the RSS economic policy, unchanged since the days of Golwalkar. "Swadeshi" capitalism in a liberalized market society means far greater political support for capital against labour. This cannot be done unless the consciousness and organisation of the working class is smashed. This remains the goal of the fascist movement in India.

The Struggle Against Fascism:

The struggle against fascism is a part of the struggle for socialism, for the self-emancipation of the working class. Consequently, while the struggle against fascism has an autonomous dynamic, that cannot be considered in opposition to socialism. The anti-fascist struggle therefore cannot be viewed in non-class or multi-class terms. An anti-fascist united front cannot stretch from P.V. Narasimha Rao⁷ to revolutionary workers. In fact, the bourgeois parties have shown, without exception, that they are not fundamentally anti-fascist. Lessons from German and Italian history confirm the lesson of the Indian experience. The Congress (I) has been playing with Hindu communalism for several years. "No wonder that the Congress (I) began to systematically promote an ideology of Hindu communalism in order to woo this strata. Hindu communalism, simply because it is the majority communalism, it is the most

⁶ The Akhil Baharatiya Vidyarthi parishad is the RSS students wing, while the Bharatiya Majdoor Sangh is its labour arm.

⁷ Prime Minister of India when the article was originally written. This was a rejoinder to the CPI-CPM type arguments about a broadest anti-fascist coalition.

dangerous.” (*The Rajiv Era*, p.38). It was the Congress that campaigned in a communal vein against the socialist leader Acharya Narendra Dev in 1948 in Ayodhya, forming the basis of the “miraculous” appearance of the Ram idol etc. It was Rajiv Gandhi who stoked the embers by reopening the gates, and by allowing the shilanyas. It was Rajiv Gandhi who, even during Advani’s Ratha yatra, kept on attacking V.P. Singh alone. It is following this tradition that Narasimha Rao is acting as a parliamentary cover and aide for the RSS. The refusal to take action before 6th December 1992 has now been compounded by actions that in the long run benefit the RSS (e.g., a half-hearted ban, the ban on the 25th February Delhi demonstration, the overall “soft Hindutva” line).

The role of the Prime Minister is a clear indication that the Congress (I), the traditional party through which the big bourgeoisie has exercised hegemony, is now far more tilted to Hindutva than ever in its history. In the long run, this will benefit the BJP/RSS, which can ultimately count on the support of many Congress (I) MPs to achieve the 2/3rd majority necessary for constitutional changes in case that is required after future elections.

The VP Singh option is to develop lower and middle caste struggles to check Hindutva. A distinction must be made between support for Mandal Commission proposals for tactical as well as principled reasons, which we also do and support for VP’s Mandalised politics, which can check one reactionary force only in another reactionary way. The major left parties have clearly failed to realise this. Hence their uncritical attitude to leaders like Laloo Prasad Yadav. Bourgeois secularists like M.J. Akbar are pushing for an all-embracing united front to fight the RSS. In practice, this means giving up the class independence of the proletariat.

The working class needs to be anti-fascist for very specific reasons. Fascism means the destruction of all, even the most moderate, independent class organisations of the proletariat. It means a drastic restructuring of social relations and production relations in favour of capital. So the struggle against fascism becomes, in this period, the cutting edge of the anti-capitalist struggle. Concretely, this means that the struggle against the economic policy of the Central Government cannot be divorced from the antifascist struggle. It is only by focussing attention on issues that are capable of uniting the class that Hindu Muslim divisions with the class can be transcended. Failure to do so, failure to resist all communalism, would mean that Muslim workers would drift to Muslim communalism in sheer self-defence. But this in fact would strengthen Hindu communalism further.

The anti-fascist struggle has two levels of tasks – anti-communal and anti-fascist. In the case of anti-communalism, the first task is to struggle for organised self-defence. Unless the working class, in its Chawls, localities, etc., can actually, physically resist the Bajrang Dal, the Shiv Sena, et.al, shouting “Hindu-Muslim Bhai Bhai” days or weeks after the riots is useless. At another level, anti-communalism involves a determined fight for the restructuring of education. Given the history of the RSS, with its stress on pedagogy, this is a central task. This task is very elaborate, since included in it are such diverse tasks as opposing the type-casting of Hindus and Muslims, opposing the presentation of certain role models (e.g., Shivaji) or fighting to introduce a secular history of medieval India at the high school and undergraduate levels, where the lack of good secular text books greatly helps communalists.

The anti-fascist tasks are even more complex. The struggle against forces like Bajrang Dal, Shiv Sena, et. al., cannot be done by relying on the police. Over the years, there has been a growing communalisation of the police and paramilitary forces. The PAC riots in UP, the role of the police in Bombay at the time of the Bhivandi riots and even more at the time of the recent riots, all point to the absurdity of depending on the coercive apparatus. In so far as there is a struggle for the state, in so far as the victory of the RSS is expected to inaugurate a new era, this will be reflected in the changing attitude of the coercive apparatus. The correct response to this is two-fold. On one hand, it is necessary to develop class initiatives more and more, to push the fascists back and to force the coercive apparatus to reconsider its political stance. On the other hand, it is also necessary to propagate among those in the coercive apparatus, including army, paramilitary forces, and the police. Here no united front is either possible or desirable.

There is an economistic fallacy to think that the proletarian alternative can be built purely round the bread and butter issues. On the contrary, to be able to resist fascism, the working class must raise itself to the position of a hegemonic class. Failing that, the working class itself will be led by petty-bourgeois ideologues. It is here that the full significance of Lenin’s *What is to be Done?* emerges. It is only as a result of the political centralisation of the advanced workers and by their result, all-sided intervention within the whole proletariat, that the proletariat can resist communalism, or for that matter build its class alternative.

Precisely at this juncture, localised economic grievances will play less of a role. It is only by presenting the plan for a frontal attack on the NEP,⁸ by tying anti-fascist struggles to class issues at the national level, that the challenge posed by the fascists can be taken up clearly.

To resist fascist/communist attacks, it is necessary to build local and regional defence forces. It is also necessary to oppose bourgeois political strategy and the capitalist path of development through NEP. Here, there cannot be any all-embracing united front.

At the ideological realm, alliance with broad, secular forces is desirable in so far as it is a question of exposing the myths presented by Hindu communalism, etc. At another level, though, class independence is vital. This is the realm of anti communal campaign in, say, history. Nationalists turn against Golwalkar only to prove that his cultural nationalism was not real nationalism. For the working class of 1993, the issue is what lessons to draw. The bourgeois view of "unity in diversity" is as opposed as the communal view, in the realism of history, to the revolutionary proletarian view.

⁸ The first step of globalisation in India.