

Clear and Present Danger

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

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

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

to mean that the contemporary version of fascism, the *mutant version*, is fundamentally different and therefore needs new analyses. This writing has in fact argued that the basic character of the various *contemporary* fascist organisations (particularly in India) – in their ideology, organisational structures, aims, and programmes remains very similar to that of the *classical* fascist organisations. Information about the RSS and the *Sangh Parivar* is easy to come by. Numerous analytical studies also exist. Some works about the *Alleanza Nazionale* in Italy¹²⁸ or the various ‘neo-fascist’ outfits elsewhere in Europe also support similar conclusions.¹²⁹ One more qualification is called for at this stage. This writing has nowhere argued that fascist regimes exist or even that they are likely to come to rule in any significant parts of the world. All that has been said is that fascist movements and organisations exist and do become strong periodically, enough to threaten pluralist, multi-cultural, secular democracies in different countries of the world. The clear and present danger today is the existence of these organisations and movements, the impact that they have on the society, the fascist culture based on ethno-centric (mythic) ultra-nationalism that they promote, and a mentality principally amongst the middle class of intolerance and elimination of all inconvenient elements within the society with different degrees of violence.

The age of corporate driven globalisation generates very contradictory forces and impulses¹³⁰. It need not be argued that in the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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