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Youth Climate Strike Friday, March 15, 2019

In a most inspiring development, hundreds of Youth Climate Strike groups have appeared around the world after Greta Thunberg's courageous one-person protest in Sweden caught fire. They have called for a global Youth Climate Strike on March 15th. Below we reproduce the mission statement and demands of the US Youth Climate Strike, one of these youth groups.

—Editors

Our Mission

We, the youth of America, are striking because decades of inaction has left us with just 11 years to change the trajectory of the worst effects of climate change, according to the October 2018 UN IPCC Report. We are striking because our world leaders have yet to acknowledge, prioritise, or properly address our climate crisis. We are striking because marginalised communities across our nation—especially communities of color, disabled communities, and low-income communities—are already disproportionately impacted by climate change. We are striking because if the social order is disrupted by our refusal to attend school, then the system is forced to face the climate crisis and enact change. With our futures at stake, we call for radical legislative

action to combat climate change and its countless detrimental effects on the American people. We are striking for the Green New Deal, for a fair and just transition to a 100% renewable economy, and for ending the creation of additional fossil fuel infrastructure. Additionally, we believe the climate crisis should be declared a national emergency because we are running out of time.

Our Demands

Green New Deal

- An equitable transition for marginalized communities that will be most impacted by climate change;
- An equitable transition for fossil-fuel reliant communities to a renewable economy;
- 100% renewable energy by 2030;
- Upgrading the current electric grid;
- No creation of additional fossil fuel infrastructure (pipelines, coal plants, fracking etc.);
- The creation of a committee to oversee the implementation of a Green New Deal:
 - That has subpoena power;
 - Committee members can't take fossil fuel industry donations;
 - Accepts climate science.

A halt in any and all fossil fuel infrastructure projects

- Fossil fuel infrastructure disproportionately impacts indigenous communities and communities of colour in a negative way;
- Creating new fossil fuel infrastructure would create new reliance on fossil fuels at a time of urgency.

All decisions made by the government be tied in scientific research, including the 2018 IPCC report

- The world needs to reduce GHG emissions by 50% by 2030, and 100% by 2050;
- We need to incorporate this fact into all policymaking.

Declaring a National Emergency on Climate Change

- This calls for a national emergency because we have 11 years to avoid catastrophic climate change;
- Since the US has empirically been a global leader, we should be a leader on climate action;
- Since the US largely contributes to global GHG emissions, we should be leading the fight in GHG reduction.

Compulsory comprehensive education on climate change and its impacts throughout grades K-8

- K-8 is the ideal age range for compulsory climate change education because:
 - Impressionability is high during that developmental stage, therefore it's easier for children and young adults to learn about climate change in a more in-depth manner, and retain that information;

- Climate change becomes a nonpartisan issue, as it truly is because it's based solely on science from the beginning.

Preserving our public lands and wildlife

- Diverse ecosystems and national parks will be very impacted by climate change, therefore it's important that we work to the best of our abilities to preserve their existence.

Keeping our water supply clean

- Clean water is essential for all living beings, when we pollute our water supply, or the water supply of someone else, it's simply a violation of an essential human right.

Our Solutions

These are not the sole solutions, these are just some solutions that we approve of. To be effective, these solutions need to be implemented at a large scale by the United States government:

- **The extraction of Greenhouse Gases from the atmosphere:**
 - Reforestation—replenishing our forests by planting trees and allowing them to thrive, sustainable forestry;
 - Reduced food waste—methane emissions from rotting food in landfills contributes immensely to overall Greenhouse Gases emissions.
- **Emission standards and benchmarks:**
 - We need to create standards and benchmarks for reducing Greenhouse Gases that align with those expressed by the science community to avoid

- 1.5° Celsius warming.
- **Changing the agriculture industry:**
 - Less carbon-intensive farming;
 - More plant-based farming.
- **Using renewable energy and building renewable energy infrastructure.**
- **Stopping the unsustainable and dangerous process of fracking.**
- **Stop mountaintop removal/mining:**
 - It is very harmful to our environment and people working in these field.

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India: Liberal Democracy and the Extreme Right

Aijaz Ahmad

(Note: This article is excerpted from a longer article, and we are publishing it as a single piece rather than in two parts because of its importance.)

The Indian polity of today seems to be undergoing a historically unprecedented process: the irresistible rise of the extreme right to dominance in vast areas of culture, society, ideology and economy, albeit with commitment to observe virtually all the institutional norms of liberal democracy. It is moving to capture total state power not through frontal seizure—as was once customary for revolutions of the left as well as the right—but through patiently engineered and legally legitimate takeover of the liberal institutions by its personnel from within, while keeping the institutions intact.

We shall come to some factual details shortly. Suffice it to say here that a power bloc has undoubtedly become dominant in India in whose ideology a religio-cultural definition of nationhood functions very much the way theories of race used to function in the Nazi ideology; and that the powerful backing in word and deed that Narendra Modi, the present prime minister, received during his bid for power by virtually the whole of the corporate apex, does remind one of Mussolini's famous definition of fascism as a form of state in which government and corporations become one. The question of fascism in this context will be addressed briefly in a later section of this essay. It is worth

remarking, though, that unlike all the interwar ideologies of the European irrationalist, extreme right—whether Nazi or fascist or merely militarist and unlike their Islamist counterparts—the Hindutva extreme right has fashioned no comparable discourse of rejection of or contempt for liberal democracy as such. The phrase 'extreme right' here does not apply to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the current ruling party. The BJP functions as a political party but is, in its essence, a right-wing front of the extreme right that is represented primarily by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Instead they train hundreds of thousands of their cadres to build a well-oiled, invincible electoral machine for contest at the polls. They do propose many significant changes in the Indian constitution. However, there is no rhetoric against constitutional, liberal democratic form as such, in contrast even to the Indian communist left which ritually criticises 'bourgeois democracy' while participating, indeed, giving most of its energy to participating in all its rituals and procedures. This unconditional public commitment to liberal democratic norms contrasts sharply, however, with the self organisation of Hindutva's central organ itself, as we shall see below. In practice, this commitment to liberal democratic form is most pronounced in the arena of electoral politics. In the social life of the country, though, organised mob violence is utilised routinely but always presented as a response to

misconduct by the Muslim and/or Christian minorities. Whether this absence of open opposition to liberal constitutionality is an abiding commitment or a pragmatic decision open to repudiation at a later stage remains unclear.

The intricate, multi-layered networks of this extreme right are spearheaded in today's India by the RSS and, secondarily, by its political front, the BJP, while the RSS also commands, quite literally, thousands of fronts across the country, for every conceivable social category in Indian society, whether defined by caste or profession or language or region or whatever. This organisational form highly centralised in its fundamentals, multi-faceted and flexibly organised in others, responds strategically to the fact that India is by far the most heterogeneous society in the world and welding it all together into a single hegemonic political project would take an enormous act of imagination and organisation that would have to be sustained over an unpredictably long period of time. The objective is not merely to win elections and form governments but to transform Indian society in all domains of culture, religion and civilisation. Acquisition of political power is seen as a means toward that end.

The RSS was founded ninety years ago, in 1925, on an uncannily Gramscian principle that enduring political power can arise only on the basis of a prior cultural transformation and consent, and this broad based

cultural consent to the extreme right's doctrines can only be built through a long historical process, from the bottom up. What follows from this ideological articulation of the long-term strategy is that if the RSS succeeds in constituting a certain sort of social subjectivity for the great majority of Hindus in India who are said to constitute some 80 per cent of the Indian population (we shall come later to this claim) and if they can all be unified, positively, in pursuit of a civilisational mission, and, negatively, in permanent opposition to a fancied enemy (Muslim and Christian minorities in the countries), as the Nazis sought to unite the German nation against the Jews, then the demographic majority can be turned into a permanent political majority. In that case, what the left might designate as the extreme right could rule comfortably through the institutions of liberal democracy in India that have already adjusted themselves to low-intensity but punctual use of violence against religious minorities.

There is no analogue for this particular structure of thinking in the irrationalist authoritarianisms in the Euro-American zones during the interwar years or after. The only approximate example I can think of is that of certain, not by any means all, but some strands in the Islamist political right. The idea is, in essentials, the same: secure religio-cultural ideological dominance first, taking advantage of the fact that liberal institutions do not necessarily obstruct the power of the extreme right. And build enduring political power over time by combining religio-cultural conservatism and majoritarian violence with neoliberal capitalism within the belly of imperialism, as well as

liberal democratic institutions of governance domestically.

II

We can pick up the story with the general elections of 2014 and then trace it backwards. For those elections were in significant respects unique but their true significance can emerge only if we understand their context, not just immediate political context but their place in the larger historical process. The victorious party, the BJP, is not a normal right-wing party, like the British Tories or even the US Republicans. Its uniqueness in the general configuration of right-wing parties in the world is that it is not an independent party at all but only a mass political front of a seasoned and semi-secret organisation, the RSS, which describes itself as "cultural" and "non-political" but whose declared intention is to altogether transform India's political, social, religious life, from the bottom up, and which has at its disposal, if we take into account all the front organisation it has spawned, what is easily the largest political force in the world of liberal democracies. And it has displayed a remarkable degree of what one can only call Olympian patience. It has pursued its objectives single-mindedly for ninety years and is still in no hurry.

From that standpoint, victory in one election is just one episode among others. Let us look at this episode and then assemble the necessary fragments of a deeper analysis.

In 2014, the BJP swept to power with a complete majority, winning 282 seats, up from 116 in the outgoing parliament and ten more than required to form a government all on its own. It had gone into the

elections as part of an alliance of diverse political parties, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), and chose to form a coalition government with insignificant partners that it does not need.

An interesting feature of the new parliament was that the average asset value of individual members of parliament has risen to \$2.3 million, almost three times as much as was the case in the previous parliament (\$850,000). In a country where the majority lives on less than \$2 dollars a day, this is overwhelmingly a parliament of the rich.

Central to this configuration, as symbol and as chief actor, is the unique figure of the current prime minister, Narendra Modi. At least three aspects of this phenomenon can be isolated at this point. As the main accused in the pogrom-like ethnic cleansing of Muslims in Gujarat during 2002 when he was chief minister there, Modi is the most aggressive symbol of the extremist ethno-religious violence in India.

The second major aspect of Modi's irresistible rise to power has been the fact that never in the country's history has the fraternity of leading corporate CEOs united so strongly and volubly to promote a single politician to prime ministership as they did for Modi. Gujarat is the most industrialised state in India (and Gujarat's poor among its most wretched), and the magnates of Gujarati capital are deeply connected with their counterparts in Bombay, India's financial hub and home to some its leading industrialists, as well as with capitalists of Indian origin living in the UK, US and elsewhere. As chief minister of Gujarat for a decade and a half, Modi did as much as

he could to turn the state into a fief for crony capitalists, from inside Gujarat and elsewhere, eventually receiving enormous financial and other kinds of support from them. This helped greatly in transforming his image in the corporate media, electronic and print alike, from that of a bloodthirsty extremist to that of an economic genius who had single-handedly led the state of Gujarat from rags to riches, a veritable Development Man (Vikaas Purush in Hindi) whose firm and visionary leadership India needed in this decisive moment of opportunity on the global stage.

This corporate support also helped him spend on his electoral campaign roughly the same amount as Obama had spent on his, while not a fraction of it was available to his opponents. With such resources Modi's campaign went presidential on the model of the US electoral system; it all became an affair of electing one unique man, in what was until then a very different campaign style, more in keeping with the parliamentary system.

The third truly notable aspect of Modi's rise to power is that this is the first time that a man who had spent most of his adult life as a fulltime organiser/preacher (pracharak) in the shadowy wings of the RSS, a semi-secret organisation to start with, has become the country's chief executive. A.B. Vajpayee, who headed a previous government of the BJP, was also a member of the RSS, as are virtually all the key leaders of the BJP. However, Vajpayee and others of his kind were mere members while they led other public or professional lives and went into politics early in their youth to become part of the rough and tumble of parliamentary life. Not so Modi.

We know that he joined the RSS as an adolescent but we know little else about the first thirty years or so of his life; and what we know comes only from him. By the time he came fully into public view, as an RSS organiser in and out of BJP offices, he was close to forty. When he was parachuted into Gujarat as chief minister, on RSS direction, he had had no career in electoral politics. He has become prime minister without any prior experience in parliament. His closest crony in the national capital, Amit Shah, is his closest crony from Gujarat, a sinister fellow generally credited with many a murder.

Who does Modi represent ? The simple answer is: the RSS and the corporate elite. But he is also filled to the brim with immense, megalomaniac self-love. Who will serve whom is yet to be seen.

III

What, then, about the "Long March" of the RSS ? We will first address issues related its original formation and ideological articulations, followed by comment on its organisational innovations in the next section.

At the broadest level, the RSS arose in 1925 as part of a wider proliferation of such organisations across many countries during the interwar years, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, that were part of a global offensive of the right in response to the Bolshevik Revolution, as well as a wider upsurge in workers' movements and communist parties. We don't have space here to trace the fascinating parallels between the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Indian RSS. Both subscribed to variants of religious majoritarianism

and religio-cultural revivalism. Both found the Nazi ideology deeply attractive for its definition of nationalism in terms of race and religion, in opposition to the definition of nationhood descended from the French Revolution and based on the idea of equal citizenship for all regardless of race, religion, etc. Some of the leaders of Hindu nationalism said openly that the German "solution" for the Jews could be fruitfully applied to Indian Muslims. From Mussolini, they learned the political uses of the golden classical past; and from Nazis and fascists alike, they learned the strategic uses of force, violence, militias and spectacular public rituals in the creation of a new, hysterical kind of political will. And they imbibed the cult of the leader, a politics of mass obedience as well as contempt for the democratic form in their own organisation.

The career of the RSS is remarkable in this regard: it reserves the classically Nazi organisational form of extreme centralised authoritarianism for itself, uses a variety of other fronts for exercise of violence and defiance of constitutionality whenever it so desires, even as it allows and organises obedience to constitutional norms for its political front, the BJP, the currently ruling party of India. There are moments when the BJP itself deviates from legality but, once the fruits of deviation have been reaped, it is brought back to the norm. In playing this game of a central cadre-based formation answerable to none, a political front that functions very much like a normal party in the Indian liberal-democratic milieu, and a plethora of other fronts that function at various levels of legality and illegality, the

RSS has honed the "good cop, bad cop" technique to sinister perfection. We shall return to this point.

The RSS arose not as a unique expression of what came to be known as "Hindu nationalism" (as contrasted to the canonical "secular nationalism" of Gandhi, Nehru, etc.), but as one of many. Founded in 1913, some twelve years before the RSS, the Hindu Mahasabha remained by far the larger organisation of that kind well into the 1950s when it began to decay and many of its members got assimilated into the RSS and its affiliates. Ironically, the Mahasabha continued to function from inside the professedly "secular" Indian National Congress until 1938; and after Independence, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, one of its illustrious leaders, resurfaced as a minister in the cabinet of none other than Nehru himself. Certain strands of Hindu extremism and conservatism were thus not entirely alien to what I have called India's canonical nationalism and which never tires of asserting its purportedly pristine secularism.

In its original formation, leaders of the RSS had hardly any ideology of their own and borrowed most of their beliefs from V.D. Savarkar, a fascinating and rather enigmatic character, certainly fascistoid in his thinking but also a one-time anti-colonial nationalist who had fallen out with Gandhi on the question of the legitimacy of violence and was inspired, rather, by methods of the "revolutionary terrorists" of Bengal. Even though he published *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*, pretty much the Bible of the Hindu right, in 1923, just two years before the RSS was founded, and then lived on until 1966, Savarkar never in fact joined the RSS and preferred to take over

the presidency of the Mahasabha before gradually withdrawing from politics altogether. Overlaps and alignments were, however, so close that while the RSS was banned in response to Gandhi's assassination, Savarkar was tried in court for involvement in that conspiracy; it so happens that Savarkar was acquitted and the ban on RSS was lifted quite soon. Founders and early leaders of the RSS, Hedgewar and Golwalker in particular, borrowed and reframed his idea for their own organisation, and it is only after the RSS emerged as the united church of Hindu nationalism, from the 1960s onward, that Savarkar came to be seen increasingly as its own chief ideologue. Parenthetically, we should note that even today the RSS is by far the most important organisation of the Hindu right but by no means has any exclusive monopoly of it. There are many outside its own umbrella (or family—*parivar*—as its fronts like to be called). The most notable is the Shiv Sena, but countless small groups of the most violent sort keep cropping up all the time, and it is not always possible to know which of them are covertly RSS outfits and which are not.

Hindu nationalist ideology during its formative phase inherited from the British a colonialist reading of India's history, already canonised by James Mill in his iconic six-volume *The History of British India* that started appearing in 1817. This delineated Indian history as comprising three historical periods: that of the Hindu Golden Age; that of the defeat and fall of Hindu civilisation at the hands of Muslim tyranny; and the then-dawning phase for which the British were represented as liberators of Hindus from that tyranny. The

latter element accounts for the great ambivalence of Hindu nationalism toward colonialism and imperialism. When *Hindutva* ideologues speak of the Hindus having suffered under "foreign rule", they routinely refer to the period of the Muslim dynasties, not to the British. And although they would like to claim some anti-colonial lineage, there is scant evidence of their actually having participated much in those struggles. Thanks to these powerful ideological legacies, their nationalism of today is remarkably devoid of any anti-imperialist positions and, thanks to the neoliberal consensus, devoid even of the sort of ideologies of self-reliance that Gandhian / Nehruvian variant of nationalism had envisioned for the development of Indian capitalism.

While the leaders of the Congress declared themselves "secular" with varying degrees of commitment or conviction, by the same token, the hostility of Hindu nationalism to this "secular" nationalism was boundless. Savarkar, the chief ideologue in the whole spectrum of Hindu nationalism, drew a sharp and enduring distinction: Gandhi's was a "territorial nationalism" which debased the idea of the nation by associating it with mere territory, whereas his own was a "cultural nationalism" of the "Hindu Race" for which culture was synonymous with the whole way of Hindu life, including politics, society, civilisational heritage, family structures, form of government, etc. a primordial, all-encompassing Being of the "Race", as it were.

IV

For the first quarter century of its existence the RSS displayed no tendency toward innovation and

concentrated on self-preservation and expansion, with the distinct novelty that it concentrated on recruiting as many young boys into its local branches (shakhas) as possible, in keeping with the view that cultural transformation can be deep-rooted only if a corps of cadres are indoctrinated into its protocols from an early age. Strikingly, it stipulates that any boy who comes to its shakha must do so with the prior consent and daily knowledge of elders in his family, assuming that there are countless families in the country who would welcome such an opportunity for their son and who will then get directly involved in the social life of the organisation. During this first phase, the RSS seems to have wanted to shelter itself under state patronage, while it carried out its more or less clandestine work under the banner of "culture". It repeatedly proposed mutual cooperation with the British colonial authorities in opposition to the Congress and the communists. Soon after Independence, and even after it was briefly banned following Gandhi's assassination, it proposed cooperation with the Congress against the communists who had emerged fleetingly as the main opposition in parliament.

It floated its first front organisation under duress for women, in 1936 to protect its own all-male character and to ward off pressure from some particularly enthusiastic and vocal women who wanted membership to be offered to women as well. No membership in the masculinist fraternity, the RSS declared, but you can have an organisation (a Samiti) for yourself under our guidance. Then a lukewarm attempt was made in 1948–49 to float a students' front during the period when the

RSS itself had been banned, but that attempt went nowhere and the students' front got going seriously only a decade later. Today, that front plausibly claims to be the largest students' organisation in the country.

The real turning point came in 1951, on the eve of the first general elections, when a political front was floated in the shape of a brand new political party to participate in the polls, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), which was then dissolved in 1977 to be immediately reincarnated as the BJP. The BJS won three seats in 1951 but as many as 35 seats in 1967, with 9.41 per cent of the vote, having united much of the Hindu right under its umbrella by then. But the majority of the Indian capitalists continued to support the Congress, at times grumbling and sullen, and the minority of investors and traders who did not support it worked through other parties such as the short-lived Swatantra Party. The RSS itself did not grow much between Gandhi's assassination in 1948 and Nehru's death in 1962; the aura of the Congress as the unrivalled leading light of the anti-colonial movement still held. After that the RSS grew steadily and at times rapidly, even though some of the aura around the Congress lasted through the Indira Gandhi years and collapsed only after she had abrogated civil rights and declared a State of Emergency in the country in 1975.

Other fronts followed thereafter. The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) for the working class, floated in 1955, has, by now, become the single largest central trade union organisation in India, claiming a membership of over ten million workers and affiliation of over four thousand trade unions. The Vishva

Hindu Parishad (VHP) came in 1964, with the purported aim of propagating Hindu culture abroad, and remained in the shadows for two decades when, in 1984, this particular front was selected to spearhead the vast machinery of violence and rabid ideological hysteria that rolled across the country over the next decade and which brought the BJP to power in Delhi, for 13 days in 1996 and then, at the head of a broad based coalition of political parties, for six consecutive years from 1998 to 2004. BJP leaders have asserted time and again that its ability to rise from an isolated minority fringe in 1984 to secure governmental power by 1998 was owed very significantly to the mass mobilisations and the periodic pogroms that reached a particular intensity between 1989 and 1992, culminating in the spectacular destruction of the Babri Masjid, that the Supreme Court had sought to protect through agencies of the Indian government. The reaping of such rich electoral dividends from years of violence by the RSS and its affiliates, and the fact that so many large and influential political parties have joined the coalition led by the BJP means that something very fundamental has changed in the very fabric of the Republic.

It was during those two years that Modi, the current prime minister, saw what was there for all to see: that communal killings, images of Hindus killing members of Christian and Muslim minorities, are good for winning elections. Since staging his own ethnic cleansing in 2002 he has not looked back. He increased his majority in the state assembly by a solid 10 per cent in the aftermath of those killings, won two more state assembly elections, and then led his party to spectacular victory in the

recent national elections. The RSS plays its fronts like pawns on the chessboard of Indian politics, mixing legality and illegality, electoral politics and machineries of violence, in full view of agencies of law and organs of civil society. This is rather a sinister variant on the famous formula: "hegemony = consent + coercion". And coercion has had and will continue to have a specific form: small doses, steadily dispensed; no gas ovens, just a handful of storm troopers, here and there, appearing and disappearing; and a permanent fear that corrodes the souls of the wretched of the land, while the liberal democratic machinery rolls on without any formal suspension of civil liberties!

That, then, is the first innovation; a large inventory of very different kinds of fronts, to perform very different kinds of functions, at different times and in different spheres of society, to see if violence that is required for a revolution (from the extreme right) can be practiced alongside the pursuit of legitimacy through parliamentary elections as capitalist legality and subjectivity require. Second is the issue of the relationship between political parties and affiliated organisations (fronts, in common parlance). It is normal in India for large political parties to have fronts for different sections of society: women, students, workers, peasants and so on. The Congress has them, as do the parliamentary communists. By contrast, the innovation here is that the RSS, which floats and controls the fronts, is not a political party but intervenes comprehensively in all aspects of political and social life without taking any responsibility for what it does through its fronts; that the political party, the BJP, is not, strictly

speaking, a political party but only a front in which virtually all the key leaders and organisers are drawn from the RSS. Moreover, all the other fronts are also fronts of the RSS, an extra-parliamentary entity; the BJP, being a front itself, has no control over those fronts. Fourth innovation: none of it is secret, as all is public and comprehensively documented, time and again just a normal part of liberal democratic freedom. Fifth, intricacies of law and constitution are carefully sifted through to determine exactly to what extent the RSS itself can function in the public domain as a legally constituted entity without having to reveal much of what it is and what it does. As a self-styled "cultural" organisation it is exempt from the kind of accountability that is required of political parties. Liberal protections are thus utilised for secretive authoritarian purpose. In all this there are two distinct claims which the RSS throws around as if they were identical. It emphatically claims to be a purely "cultural" organisation, uninvolved in politics and, therefore, exempt from requirements imposed on political parties, such as revealing its membership or keeping accounts for public scrutiny. Simultaneously, it claims that it has a right to guide in all aspects of politics because, far from being an autonomous sphere, politics in Hindu society is one area of "culture", just as "culture" itself is an all-encompassing expression of the religion of the Race. The two claims are of course incompatible. Not for nothing did Mussolini declare that "we fascists are super-relativists".

And the final, most far-reaching innovation: the sheer number of fronts, running surely into the

hundreds, possibly thousands—no one knows. The Anthropological Survey of India holds that the Indian population is comprised of thousands of distinct communities, sociologically so defined by custom, speech, location, cuisine, spiritual belief, caste, sub-caste, occupation, what have you. The RSS is the only organisation in India which has the ambition to have fronts for as many of these diversities as possible and does indeed go on creating more and more of them. In this sense, it is a spectacular missionary organisation, and the mission is religious, cultural, social, economic, educational and of course political. The heart of this problem for the RSS is that even though the word "Hindu" is used by all as if the word referred to some homogeneous religious community or a unified social category, the reality is that all these diversities—even immense differences of custom and religious belief—exist among precisely the 80 per cent of the Indians who are considered "Hindu". Contrary to this reality, the RSS has fairly precise ideas of what it means to be a Hindu, based on its own doctrine that being a Hindu is not merely a religious category, divorced from other kinds of subjectivity or conduct, but an entire way of life, from cradle to grave. It wants to make sure that the ideal type it has invented becomes the normative standard among that 80 per cent. Its commitment to creating a cultural homogeneity out of this ocean of diversities, and to translate that cultural homogeneity into a unified political will, means that it wishes to become both church and state simultaneously. That ambition is at the heart of its fight against secular civility and the specific content of its authoritarianism. That

so comprehensive a civilisational project would wholly succeed appears implausible. The undertaking is audacious, however, and the success so far, although partial, is also undeniably impressive.

V

India's post-Independence history can be broadly conceptualised in terms of three phases. The first lasted from 1947 to 1975. It was premised on four values of the Nehruvian paradigm: secularism, democracy, socialism, non-alignment. The practice did not always correspond to precepts, and the paradigm kept fraying, especially after the India-China War of 1962, and Nehru's death soon thereafter. Even so, a certain degree of liberal-left hegemony did survive and got eroded only gradually. Eventually, the accumulating crises came to a head with the outbreak of massive populist agitation in the mid-1970s and, in response, Indira Gandhi's suspension of civil liberties and Declaration of Emergency.

The end of the first phase and the beginning of the second coincide in the massive ambiguities of that movement famously led by Jayaprakash Narayan (JP), who now forged a far-reaching alliance with the RSS and gathered a whole range of rightist forces as well as youth groups under the slogan of 'Total Revolution', calling upon state apparatuses, including the security agencies, to mutiny. The RSS, with its thousands of cadres, provided the backbone of the anti-Emergency movement and then of the Janata Party government that arose out of the end of the Emergency, when Bharatiya Jana Sangh's share of parliamentary seats rose from 35 in 1967 to 94 in 1977,

with Vajpayee and Advani, veterans of the RSS, rising to occupy key cabinet posts. That outcome of the anti-Emergency agitation leading to the first non-Congress government in the country is still celebrated in the (non-Congress) liberal circles as a moment when the sturdiness of Indian democracy prevailed over Indira Gandhi's dictatorial tendencies. Yet that was precisely the process that served to legitimise the RSS as a respectable force in Indian politics and to confer on its political front a significant place in government for the first time in Indian history. I might add that the RSS made exponential strides between 1977 and 1982, for five years after the Emergency was lifted, owing to its newfound reputation as a defender of democracy against dictatorship.

On the whole, though, that force also got splintered owing to its own contradictions and the phase of relative political crisis of the capitalist state in India continued, in which the older power bloc, led by the Congress, was no longer capable of stable rule but none other had emerged to replace it either.

Momentous changes took place both nationally and internationally in the late 1980s–early 1990s (1989 to 1992, to be more precise). Those years witnessed the historic collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and in southeastern Europe more generally, with the US becoming an unrivalled global hegemon. The whole of the Indian ruling class and its state structures could now openly unite behind this "lone superpower" with no internal friction at all. Inside the country, those same years witnessed the onset of the neoliberal regime with the so-called Rao–Manmohan reforms. These years also

inaugurated a decisive turn in the institutionalisation of communalism in structures of the Indian state, which began with the tacit agreement between the Congress and the VHP at the time of Shila Nyas in 1989 and even more dramatically during the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992. Conditions remained highly unstable for a few years, however.

By 1998 neoliberalism had become a consensual position among the propertied classes and their representatives in various spheres of the national life. At the same time, the far right had made rapid gains and began concentrating on consolidation of its newfound power. Extreme violence of the early 1990s was no longer required. It was much more important now to give the BJP a mildly liberal face so that it could be accepted as a party of capitalist rule and an alternative to the Congress. The coalition government it formed in 1998 lasted for six years, leading then to ten years of a Congress-led government that only ended with the return of the BJP in 2014 with a firm majority in parliament. Remarkably, these changes in government have witnessed no appreciable changes in policy. In this sense India has become a mature liberal democracy in the neoliberal age, like the US and UK, where the two main competing parties or coalitions of parties function as mere factions in a managing committee of the capitalist classes as a whole. At the heart of this new consensus in the Indian ruling class is close alliance with imperialism externally, and the imposition of neoliberal order domestically.

Not that the punctual uses of violence as a strategic imperative have declined. Killing of some members of the religious minorities is a common affair, a couple of

Christians here, five or ten Muslims there; nothing spectacular, just low-intensity and routinised, nothing to disturb the image of a liberal, secular, deeply democratic India. There is no longer a significant political party in the country, with the exception of the communist left, that has not colluded with the BJP at one point or another since 1996 and especially so since 1998. At the time of the ethnic cleansing of Gujarat in 2002 numerous political parties united to prevent even a discussion of it on the floor of the House. Even the Congress colludes when necessary but rather quietly, not overtly because it is, after all, the main electoral adversary. Increasing communalisation of popular consciousness can now proceed from two sides. There is of course the mass work by the RSS and its affiliates which have gained more and more adherents over some eighty years, in what Gramsci called the quotidian, molecular movements in the quality of mass perceptions at the very base of society the creation of a "new common sense". A majority of the liberals no longer know how much they themselves have moved toward the communal, neoliberal right. And now, for many years, these same shifts can also come from the side of the state, its political parties, educational enterprises, repressive apparatuses, often even the judicial branch. As India increasingly becomes a national security state, the bases for an aggressive, masculinist right-wing nationalism are bound to go deeper into society at large.

VI

Where, then, does the question of fascism fit into all this? I must confess that, in the wake of the

spectacular events of 1992, this author was the first to raise this question comprehensively, first in a lengthy lecture delivered in Calcutta and then in another equally lengthy lecture delivered in Hyderabad. Several other prominent scholars, Sumit Sarkar and Prabhat Patnaik in particular, had expressed similar misgivings. There emerged on the left a broadly shared thinking that the RSS, its affiliates and allies had been distinctly influenced by the Nazi/fascist combine at the very moment of their origin, that they had carried many of those sympathies and principles into their own organisations and modes of conduct, and that many of their more recent strategies and practices were distinctly fascistic. The CPI(M), a political party caught up in debates ranging all around it, even adopted the term "communal fascism" to stress a certain degree of fascist content as well as to specify the uniquely Indian twist to that content. I had further argued that the type of politics that we broadly (and sometimes imprecisely) call "fascism" is a feature of the whole of the imperialist epoch. Not for nothing did French "Integral Nationalism", sometimes credited as being the original form of fascism, arise in precisely those closing decades of the nineteenth century, which were, in Lenin's typology, the original moment for the rise of what he called "imperialism".

In short, so long as one was not suggesting that the replication of the German and Italian experiences was at hand, it was perfectly legitimate to place the RSS into a certain typology of political forces that are fairly widespread even inside contemporary Europe itself, from Greece to France and from Austria

to Ukraine. I had also argued, tongue in cheek, that "every country gets the fascism it deserves" in accordance with the "physiognomy" (a favourite metaphor of Gramsci) of its history, society and politics; and, I would now add, the historical phase that the country is going through. In other words, what we have to grasp about every successful movement of the fascist type is not its replication of something else in the past, but its originality in response to the conditions in which it arises. There is no getting away from the materiality of the "here and now". All revivalism is a contemporary rewriting of the past, a radically modern neo-traditionalism. All the contemporary parties of the fascist type respond to their own national milieux and to the broader fact that, with few and only relative exceptions, the working classes are supine globally, beaten back by neoliberal successes in the reorganisation of capital, and that political liberalism has itself made its peace with this extreme capitalism.

In this situation the proper stance is not: watch out, Nazis are coming. The real question is the one that Kalecki posed at the time of Goldwater's bid for the US presidency in the 1960s: what would fascism look like if it came to a democratic industrial country that had no powerful working-class movement to oppose it? That is the general question, and I think it applies with particular force to the India of today: the far right need not abolish the outer shell of the liberal democratic institutions because these institutions can be taken over by its own personnel altogether peacefully and because most others are quite willing to go along with it so long as acts of large-scale violence

remain only sporadic and the more frequent low-intensity violence can be kept out of general view, by media monopoly combined with mutual agreement between liberalism and the far right. Meanwhile, the communists are now too small a force

to be considered even for a ban. Of course, the question of fascism of the classical type may well resurface if a powerful socialist movement were to be re-founded, on whatever new premises and strategic perspectives that may now be necessary for that

act of re-founding and reconstruction.

(Aijaz Ahmad is a renowned political and literary theorist, and is presently professor at University of California, Irvine. He had earlier taught at Jamia Millia University and JNU.)

Why is the Country Which was Agitated on Martyrdom of Soldiers, Silent on Saints Dying for Ganga?

Sandeep Pandey

In 2011, Swami Nigmanand died on the 115th day of his fast against illegal mining in Haridwar. Matri Sadan, the ashram with which he was associated alleges that he was killed by poisoning in the hospital at the behest of a mining mafia. Swami Gokulanand, who sat on the first fast organised by Matri Sadan along with Swami Nigmanand in 1998, was murdered in 2003 in Nainital by mining mafia. In 2014, Baba Nagnath died on 114th day of his fast for conservation of Ganga in Varanasi. Last year Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand, earlier known as Professor Guru Das Agrawal at Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur and who served as the founding member-Secretary of Central Pollution Control Board, died on 11th October, on the 112th day of his sixth fast. Sant Gopal Das, who also started his fast for conservation of Ganga on 24th June, 2018 has been missing since 6th December from Dehradun. 26-year-old Brahmachari Atmabodhanand of Kerala, with a resolve to continue the struggle of Swami Sanand, started his fast on 24th October at the same place where Swami Sanand had fasted. He has now completed more than 135 days of fast. Swami Punyanand,

also of Matri Sadan, has given up food grains and is on fruit diet, ready to go on fast if anything happens to Brahmachari Atmabodhanand.

Brahmachari Atmabodhanand went to the Ardha Kumbh in Prayagraj during his fast for about twenty days with his mentor Swami Shivanand but no government representative thought it fit to meet him. The Uttar Pradesh cabinet meeting took place there, senior ruling party leaders including the Chief Minister went there, but nobody had the time for Brahmachari Atmabodhanand. Meanwhile, the government got the water of Ganga cleaned artificially between 15th January and 4th March, 2019, the period of Ardha Kumbh. Clearly, it was only done for political mileage.

Professor G.D. Agrawal had been demanding an uninterrupted flow and a clean Ganga. He wanted all ongoing and proposed hydroelectric power projects on Ganga to be scrapped and all illegal mining to be halted. After his martyrdom, when the government enquired from Swami Shivanand, the head of Matri Sadan who is leading the struggle of saints and has taken a personal resolve to stake the lives of saints of his ashram one after another, including his own

life, as to what was the 'bottomline' of his demands, he replied that three hydroelectric projects, Singauli Bhatwadi on Mandakini, Tapowan Vishnugad and Vishnugad Pipalkoti on Alaknanda and mining in Ganga must be stopped. Scientists believe that Ganga will not be clean unless a minimum volume of flow is ensured in the river. Dams obstruct this flow.

When soldiers are martyred there is widespread emotional outburst throughout the country. People come out on streets, offer help to families of deceased soldiers or erect their statues. The government has little control over the fate of soldiers. However, it can prevent the martyrdom of saints. Why is the Narendra Modi government not willing to dialogue with these saints? Even the common people seem to be insensitive towards these saints. Especially when the idea of nationalism is being given a religious colour.

People take a public stand on the issue of construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya and for preventing the entry of women in Sabrimala temple of Kerala, which includes the two national parties Bhartiya Janata Party and Congress, but do not sympathise with saints who stake their lives for

Ganga.

It is obvious that the BJP, which came to power on the agenda of Hindutva, whose Prime Ministerial candidate declared that he got a call from mother Ganga before contesting election from Varanasi, and the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, which doesn't leave any opportunity to exploit people's religious sentiments, is actually not concerned about cleaning Ganga. Forty percent of the population of the country, which lives next to the Ganga or one of its tributaries, stands to directly benefit from clean Ganga whereas it is unclear who'll benefit from Ram temple in Ayodhya; yet

RSS-BJP are silent on the issue of fasting saints. This demonstrates that politics of Hindutva is not interested in religious issues unless there is a potential for polarisation of votes in its favour. Hence, for the RSS-BJP, it is not the people but merely political power that matters.

Also, the difference between Hindutva and Hinduism has emerged more clearly because of this. Whereas people believing in Hindutva ideology are not averse to taking lives of others, for example in communal riots, lynching in the name of protection of cows, assassination of intellectuals, etc., saints who truly believe in the

philosophy of Hinduism will stake their own lives instead. Moreover, the saints willing to give up their lives are in favour of uninterrupted flow of rivers, whereas those who condone deaths in the name of politics of Hindutva are interested in damming rivers and stopping rivers going to Pakistan, not realising the consequences, either of their politics or of tampering with rivers. This may explain the indifference of RSS-BJP towards fasting saints.

A foot march has been organised by some people's organisations in support of fasting saints who stake their lives for Ganga from Delhi to Haridwar from 9 to 17 March, 2019.

Mahatma Gandhi and Congress on Bhagat Singh's Martyrdom

Saurav Kumar Rai

There are several 'myths' pertaining to modern Indian history and India's struggle for independence. While some of these myths were created by the colonial state itself to weaken the ongoing independence movement, some of them were constructed out of vested political interests in post-independence India. One such powerful myth is regarding Mahatma Gandhi's alleged silence on martyrdom of Bhagat Singh and comrades. It should be noted that Bhagat Singh and two of his associates Shivaram Rajguru and Sukhdev Thapar were sentenced to death by the colonial state in the Lahore conspiracy case and were hanged on 23 March 1931. Now, it is often alleged that Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress could have possibly averted this execution. At the same time, the silence of prominent Congress

leaders following the death of Bhagat Singh is often cited as a glaring example of Congress's insecurity towards the soaring popularity of Bhagat Singh and his associates. Thus, a binary of Mahatma Gandhi / Congress vs. Bhagat Singh / Revolutionaries has been created over a period of time, the resonance of which can often be heard in various discussions and debates in the public sphere.

However, careful dissection of this alleged 'silence' gives some interesting insights on the whole issue. It should be remembered that the execution of Bhagat Singh and his comrades took place around the same period when the Gandhi-Irwin settlement was in force. Consequent on the conversations that took place between the Viceroy Lord Irwin and Mahatma Gandhi, the Congress agreed to temporarily suspend the ongoing Civil Disobedience

Movement and to participate in the Second Round Table Conference. Subsequent to this, instructions were issued for the guidance of all Congressmen so that there should be no complaint of breach of understanding arrived at between the Congress and the Government. One such instruction stated, 'If any lawful orders are passed, right or wrong, they should not be disobeyed.' Further, 'During the period of truce, [our] speeches should not be an attack on Government. There is now no necessity to show past misdeeds of misgovernment.' Moreover, it was instructed that 'we should not make any approving references to acts of violence; congratulation of bravery and self-sacrifice on the part of persons committing acts of violence are unnecessary and misleading, except when made by persons pledged to non-violence in thought and deed as Gandhiji.' These

instructions explain the unusual silence of prominent Congress leaders over the execution of Bhagat Singh which was ‘a lawful order’ passed by the competent judicial authority. At the same time, bound by the instructions to prevent any breach of understanding, they could not openly criticise the Government for its unforeseen haste in this matter nor could they celebrate the heroics of Bhagat Singh.

Nonetheless, it was not that nobody spoke out against this brutality of the government. In fact, the very person who is charged of feeling insecure because of Bhagat Singh’s popularity and of being guilty of remaining silent in the whole matter, Mahatma Gandhi, spoke on more than one occasion against the hanging of Bhagat Singh and his associates. Mahatma Gandhi, on 23 March 1931, made a final appeal to the Viceroy in the interest of peace to commute the sentence of Bhagat Singh and two others. He emphatically argued that ‘popular opinion rightly or wrongly demands commutation; when there is no principle at stake, it is often a duty to respect it.’ Subsequently, Mahatma Gandhi himself penned a moving yet powerful resolution on Bhagat Singh and comrades adopted by the Indian National Congress on 29 March 1931. The resolution stated as follows:

This Congress, while dissociating itself from and disapproving of political violence in any shape or form, places on record its admiration of the bravery and sacrifice of the late Sardar Bhagat Singh and his comrades Syts. Sukhdev and Rajguru, and mourns with the bereaved families the loss of these lives. The Congress is of opinion that this triple execution is an act of

wanton vengeance and is a deliberate flouting of the unanimous demand of the nation for commutation. This Congress is further of opinion that Government have lost the golden opportunity of promoting goodwill between the two nations, admittedly held to be essential at this juncture, and of winning over to the method of peace the party which, being driven to despair, resorts to political violence.

Thus, contrary to popular myth of ‘unforeseen silence’, Mahatma Gandhi did admire the bravery and sacrifice of revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh. The difference between them was basically over the ‘use of violence’ as a mean to

attain independence. In fact, people today often fail to fathom the depth of the virtues which drove our leaders to struggle for independence. Political opposition and difference of opinions nowhere stripped them of the warmth which they shared among each other at personal level. Hence, binaries such as Gandhi vs Bhagat Singh, Gandhi vs Subhas Chandra Bose, Nehru vs Patel, etc. hardly do justice to the cause for which these towering leaders devoted their lives.

(The author is Senior Research Assistant, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.)

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“The uprising in Sudan is building on decades of protests against the regime”

Pavan Kulkarni

The Sudanese uprising continues to advance with a considerable rise in the number of demonstrations. This is despite the declaration of a state of emergency on February 22, which provided the security forces a freer hand unleash repression, including the use of live ammunition against protesters, baton charges, torture in detention—in the course of which many have died—and mass arrests in an attempt to suppress the demonstrations.

What began as a protest against shortages of essential commodities and rising prices, snowballed into a country-wide uprising with protesters determined to oust president Omar al-Bashir, who has been president for 30 years.

With more and more of his former allies deserting his regime, Bashir imposed the emergency. However, this move has only further intensified the resolve of the protesters.

A crucial role in the broad coalition of forces that are leading the uprising has been played by the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP), a number of whose senior members have been subject to arrests. One such member is the secretary of information bureau, Dr. Fathi Elfad.

The 75-year-old veteran was forced into a car by a group of young masked men while he was on his way to the party office, and driven to the headquarters of the notorious National Intelligence and Security Services. After an interrogation, he was moved to the Shihdi detention center, where he was a prisoner for over a month.

Weeks after his release, People’s Dispatch interviewed him to get a better understanding of the causes, nature and the future course of the uprising.

Peoples Dispatch (PD): It has been widely reported that the Sudanese uprising was triggered by a sharp rise in prices. To what extent has the price rise been a decisive factor? What are the other more systemic grievances mounting among the masses over decades of al-Bashir’s rule?

Fathi Elfad (FE): It is true that to a great extent, what triggered the uprising was the sharp price rise. Incidentally, while I was in detention, I met with a comrade from Atbara, the city where the first demonstration took place. He told me that what sparked that mass protest was the spontaneous slogan raised by a group of workers in the market place when they couldn’t find bread for the second day. They started shouting “bread bread” and all of a sudden, the ten or so protesters turned into hundreds and gradually into thousands. That was December 19. But then, the demonstrations continued for three more days and turned into a mass protest, with a number of marches being held to demand the resignation of the regime. Atbara, the railway city, famous for its working class population, was controlled by the organised masses for three days. Then came the crushing intervention of the security forces. On December 22, the government forces took control again, but by that time,

all the northern cities and towns became centers of mass protest actions, demanding the overthrow of the regime. From thereon, the demonstrations became a country-wide event.

I can safely say that the December 19 actions added to the ongoing protest actions which had engulfed the country since January 2018. So, it was no surprise that it spread so swiftly to all the corners of Sudan. By the time the masses took to the streets in the capital on December 25, the mass actions were recorded in over 70 cities and towns. The demands were the same, the downfall of the regime, and the slogan which rang all over the country was and continues to do so: “Freedom, Peace, Justice, the Revolution is the People’s Choice!”

PD: Mass protests have been more or less a persistent phenomenon throughout the almost 30 years of al-Bashir’s rule. What, in your assessment, are the peculiarities of the contemporary political environment in Sudan?

FE: It is difficult to recall a year during the last 20 years which did not witness a number of protest actions against the dictatorial regime. Suffice it to say that the regime is waging war in the three western regions of the country since 2003. The main change in the situation [this time] is the hard work and efforts by the Sudanese Communist Party to build the broadest possible alliance of political parties, armed groups, mass democratic organisations, professional unions, workers’ and

peasants' movements, as well as students' and women's unions. This hard work resulted in the establishment, by mid-December, of a national coordinating body which is leading the present struggle.

I may also add that the activities of the opposition political parties, including our party, have helped to organise and mobilise the masses, as well as prepare them for confrontation with the regime. Despite the fact that this alliance is still not that strong—with some differences here and there—it is still holding, especially on the ground level. I think it is a great achievement so far, but much work is needed to maintain and develop this unity of action, especially taking into consideration the attempts by imperialist and reactionary forces, both internal and regional, to abort the revolution and impose a compromise solution that would rescue part of the regime and keep the interests of these forces protected.

PD: More and more reports are emerging about deaths and hospitalisation of protesters after being tortured in detention. There have also been reports of doctors and medics being arrested and tortured to death. How widespread is the use of torture by the security forces? What record has the government had with regards to this before the current uprising began?

FE: The use of excessive force and torture has been a common practice of the dictatorial regime since its early days. Following the coup of 1989, the regime established hidden centers known among the opposition as "Ghost Houses". Thousands of political detainees were tortured in these centers. Over a hundred people were tortured to death. Among those who lost

their lives are Dr. Ali Fadl and Abd Almoniem Salaman, both leading cadres of the SCP. Khomeini's Iran took the lead in training the thugs of the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood in torture and other techniques to obtain information.

Torture is being used both in interrogation and as a punitive measure to strike terror among young detainees. It is not only directed against doctors and medics but also against all detainees, especially known activists. Till now, three doctors have lost their lives while treating injured demonstrators in the makeshift centers in the streets, while scores of doctors have been beaten for performing their duties in hospitals. The wrath of the regime is directed against the medical staff because of their traditional role in support of progressive causes.

PD: Apart from the mass arrests and torture by security forces, there are also a large number of reports about masked men attacking protesters. Who are these masked men? What is their method of operation? What is the reason for their existence considering the fact that the security forces have no qualms in using violent force?

FE: This method of using masked men to attack, and shoot to kill, goes back to the September 2013 uprising. During that period, over 200 demonstrators lost their lives. Many court cases are still being pursued, but to no avail. This time, the security forces have learned their lesson—they are trying to cover up their brutal methods. They stage snipers on high buildings from where they can spot and shoot from a distance. The police, as well as the security forces, have denied using live ammunition. But the evidence obtained proves beyond

any doubt that security men, masked and dressed in civilian clothes, are the culprit of such crimes. They belong to a special unit within the security apparatus.

(Pavan Kulkarni is author at People's Dispatch.)

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Appeal to Non-BJP Opposition Parties Regarding 2019 Elections

The coming 2019 may prove to be a watershed in India's political history, as were the 1977 elections forty-two years ago. In 1977, elections were held after a declared Emergency, during which the Constitution was suspended, political activity disallowed and opposition leaders and activists imprisoned. The success of non-Congress parties in those elections strengthened the electoral system in Indian democracy. Since then all ruling parties losing elections have demitted office gracefully, rather than attempting to subvert the popular mandate.

However, since 2014, the Modi government has attacked democracy in more insidious, thoroughgoing and indirect ways. This attack is aimed at weakening the institutional and popular foundations of democracy in India. It should be stressed that the regime has functioned in close proximity with its parent body, the RSS. Its policies are designed in pursuance of the RSS goal of militarising the political culture and creating an atmosphere of perpetual communal conflict. These are some of the elements of this strategy:

1. The Modi regime has devalued constitutional institutions, subverted the separation of powers, and used executive power for sectarian and corrupt purposes. It has diminished the legislative authority of the parliament, hidden information from parliamentary committees, and used it as a platform for political abuse. The use of CBI against political opponents, meddling in its functioning—including subverting its internal structure with the help of hand-picked officials—is one of its

infamous deeds. It has lied to the judiciary, and interfered in judicial appointments with mala-fide intentions. Governors appointed by it in states ruled by opposition parties have acted shamelessly as its agents.

2. The Cabinet system is in shambles, the principle of collective responsibility thrown to the winds. The PMO and a clutch of favoured officials and non-constitutional authorities such as the NSA have usurped the power to make major decisions. This has been exposed most clearly in the Rafale deal.
3. The Modi regime has tried to subvert the federal structure of the Union to concentrate central power. Agencies such as the CBI, NIA, ED have been used opportunistically for this purpose.
4. The Modi regime has shamelessly subverted India's criminal justice system. The use of sedition law and the NSA against students, journalists and activists who question it has become pervasive. Prosecution trials of Hindutva activists accused of terrorist acts have been wrecked from within. Upright officials have been victimised, and even judges threatened discreetly. The file containing evidence on Aseemanand's involvement in the (Malegaon blast case) disappeared. Crucial evidence on the death of Judge Loya and two of his friends was apparently ignored and the case was subject to an indecent burial—the manner in which this was done has brought disrepute to our judiciary.
5. In states like UP, police have unleashed a reign of fake

encounters to eliminate and threaten opposition party workers. In scores of incidents involving public lynching of poor people transporting cows, the so-called cow-vigilantes filmed themselves carrying out these brutal acts, indicating their confidence that they would be protected. In sum, the BJP/RSS regime has openly enabled hooliganism and violence. With what face can it confront Maoist and jihadi violence?

6. The Modi regime has tried to destroy the autonomy of important institutions of governance, which are necessary to maintain impartiality, professionalism and transparency. This became obvious in the case of the RBI, NSSO and CBI. The autonomy of institutions such as the Election Commission, Central Information Commission, etc has been sought to be compromised. Even more sinister is the attempt to drag the military and security organs into their political campaign.
7. The Modi regime has used state power to advance the totalitarian programme of the RSS and its affiliates. Marginalised communities have suffered the most from this policy. Religious minorities have been threatened and attempts made to erode their political representation and constitutionally protected rights. There have been a series of attacks on Dalits who question the caste system; and Adivasis trying to assert their autonomy. It tried to pass a communalised Citizenship Amendment bill which makes a mockery of the secular Constitution, and would have destroyed the delicate fabric

of community relationships in North-East India.

8. The Modi regime has tried to criminalise India's political culture and reduce it to gutter politics. The Prime Minister and BJP President have lied in public rallies and used offensive language against their political opponents. Its armies on social media have systematically circulated rumours and fake claims, and trolled critics of the government with hate messages in foul language including threats of rape and molestation. Organised groups have attacked and threatened ordinary citizens in the name of patriotism.
9. In the aftermath of the Pulwama suicide bombing, RSS fronts (ABVP, VHP, Bajrang Dal) have attacked innocent Kashmiri students and traders in places like Dehra Dun, thus further undermining social integrity, which depends on the impartial rule of law. This propaganda campaign was so poisonous that the CRP command had to run a programme to counter the communal poison being spread on social media by the so-called patriots. Senior retired Armed Forces officers have denounced these attempts at politicising the Services. It is now clear that anyone who differs from the RSS/BJP runs the risk of being attacked as 'anti-national'

All these are taking India towards a totalitarian and violent mass culture, which will be a threat to everyone who do not come out to support the regime. Any successes of BJP in the coming elections will deepen the hollowing out of Indian democracy. All non-BJP political parties, irrespective of their programmes, and regardless of the social groups they represent, will be victims of the implosion of

democracy under BJP/RSS rule.

We appeal to all opposition political parties to realise and confront the gravity of the threat to democracy. It is a time to rise above political competition. Political parties can function only in a democratic institutional structure and popular culture. If Modi, the BJP and the RSS succeed in their plans, our democratic institutions will be destroyed, and political parties will become irrelevant.

Besides an operational and effective electoral understanding, it is essential that parties project a minimum programme to undo the most insidious actions of the Modi regime. This should include the following:

1. The law for electoral bonds passed by the Modi government, allowing anonymous corporate contributions should be scrapped. All contributions to political parties should be transparent.
2. The colonial law on sedition should be scrapped.
3. We need a public commitment to strengthen citizens' rights by not allowing misuse of draconian laws like the NSA, and further strengthen the right to information (RTI). A charter of citizen's rights should be brought out.
4. Strengthen rights-based social welfare programmes like the MNREGA.
5. Laws are needed against social media abuse, particularly ones directed at women, in the light of threats of sexual violence received by many women activists, writers and journalists.

(Petition drafted by People's Alliance for Democracy and Secularism (PADS); endorsed by over 100 intellectuals and activists from all over the country.)

Letter to Editor

Mediation Committee for Ayodhya Dispute

Chandrabhal Tripathi

The move of the Supreme Court to let a mediation effort being made by a three-member committee of negotiators is welcome but already doubts are being expressed about the neutral nature of the mediation committee, openly naming Sri Sri Ravi Shankar of Art of Living fame as an unsuitable member of the committee. The views expressed by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar some time ago on the Ayodhya dispute are well known. How is it that the present CJI Gogoi, who has so far acquitted himself well in matters of transparency, took this decision? The people at large consider Sri Sri Ravi Shankar as representing the Hindutva point of view. One of the two remaining members is an internationally known expert on mediation. The only member left who is also the Chairman of the committee is a retired Judge of the Supreme Court of India. I hope that the Hindutva forces will not treat him as representing the Muslim point of view. That will be the end of the three-member team. The efforts of this team are bound to fail because of the inclusion of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. There are many other Hindu leaders including spiritual leaders whose services could have been requisitioned for this noble cause.

Has anybody cared to ascertain the views and feelings of the local Hindu population? They are definitely against this dispute, a creation of the colonial administration, otherwise a communist could not have been elected from Ayodhya to the State Vidhan Sabha in the recent past. Why is it that the Ram temple movement is organised and led by Hindutva forces from Maharashtra and Gujarat? I don't wish to prolong this submission and leave it to the good sense of my friends to form their own opinion in the national interest. As the General Election 2019 gets nearer and nearer the voice of the rabble rousers is likely to become more deafening but let us not forget that we have a Constitution of India to guide us.

Humanitarian Crisis in America: It's Time for the US to Invade itself

Under the guise of 'humanitarian aid' and the struggle for 'democracy', the United States has justified dozens of military and political interventions in the world during the 20th and 21st centuries. In their most recent campaign they have focused on Venezuela as part of a strategy to undermine progressive governments in the region.

With coordinated media manipulation, economic blockade and diplomatic pressure, the imperialist offensive on the Latin American nation has been going on for more than a decade. They have branded the Venezuelan government a "dictatorship", presenting it as a "failed state" plunged into social chaos, with high rates of poverty, malnutrition, and insecurity; arguing that the cause is the progressive model and not exogenous factors such as international discrediting or blockade.

For the United States, and much of the West, these are sufficient grounds to justify political and diplomatic intervention, which would even be military. But if these are triggers for intervention, it is actually time for the United States to take the initiative to invade its own country—in defense of human rights and democracy of the people of the United States.

The American situation is highly worrying and qualifies the nation to be a suitable recipient of 'humanitarian aid' made in the USA. According to a report by Philip Alston, special rapporteur of the United Nations (UN) on extreme poverty and human rights,

it was revealed that by 2018, 40 million people in the United States live in poverty, 18.5 million live in extreme poverty and more than five million live in conditions of absolute poverty.

The country has the highest youth poverty rate in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the highest infant mortality rate among comparable states in this group. Not surprisingly, Alston described the country as the most unequal society in the developed world.

No wonder the United States can no longer be called a "first world" nation. According to a study by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), for the majority of its citizens, approximately 80% of the population, the United States is a nation comparable to the "Third World".

To arrive at this conclusion, economists applied the model of Arthur Lewis, Nobel laureate in economics (1979), which was designed to identify the factors on the basis of which a country could be classified as a developing country.

According to Peter Temin, co-author of the study, America can be called a developing country on the basis of this model: it is a dual economy (a huge gap between a small part of the population that is enormously rich and the vast majority that lives in poverty) in which the poor have little influence over public policy; the rich keeps wages of the working people low so that they can benefit from cheap

labour; societal control is used to prevent the low-wage sector from challenging policies that favour the high-income sector; high rates of incarceration; the tax system is oriented towards keeping taxes on the rich low; and it is a society where social and economic mobility is low.

This is especially relevant when one of the main arguments for aggressions by the USA on other countries is the supposed 'welfare' and human rights of citizens. Americans should first turn their gaze back on themselves.

According to a 11-country analysis of the Commonwealth Fund (2017), the United States, for the sixth consecutive time, had the worst health system amongst the wealthy nations. Despite having the most expensive health care system on the planet, with an annual expenditure of three trillion dollars, its performance is the lowest on measures of health system equity, access, administrative efficiency, care delivery, and health care outcomes.

Meanwhile, life expectancy in the United States declined for the third consecutive year to 78.6 years, the longest sustained decline since 1915–18, when the first world war and the 1918 Spanish influenza pandemic were among the causes of death. In comparison, Cuba, which according to John Bolton (National Security Advisor of the USA) is a part of the 'Troika of Tyranny,' has a life expectancy of 79.74 years (in 2018).

And as regards education, over the years 1990 to 2016, the United States' ranking plummeted from

6 to 27 in the world, making it's education system one of the worst in the 'developed' world. Public spending on education in the US fell between 2010 and 2014 by 4% (per student), while education spending, on average, rose 5% per student across the 35 countries in the OECD.

Falling life expectancy, an expensive and inequitable health system and an education system that is one of the worst among developed nations—if this is not enough justification for the US government and the rest of the West to intervene in the USA, then constant human rights violations must be enough cause for mobilising troops to the border and initiating a military intervention.

The United States has systematically directed or influenced interventions in Latin America and the rest of the global South. It has assigned to itself a 'license to kill' anywhere in the world, as evidenced in the recent covert operations, ethnic wars and military invasions that it has conducted / fuelled in countries around the world.

Prisons where human rights are grossly violated such as Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib are of course well-known examples of the impunity with which the USA violates human rights. People such as Gina Haspel, who was deeply involved in the US government's torture program, have risen to powerful positions such as director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

But the most glaring instance of the contempt the United States has for human rights is its withdrawal from the UN Human Rights Council, an international body charged with ensuring that such violations do not happen. This

decision came days after the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights denounced the Trump administration's practice of forcibly separating migrant children from their parents and imprisoning them in what can only be called modern concentration camps.

Domestically, police accountability for the use of excessive force has declined, especially in black and Latino communities. According to a Boston University study, the systematic killing of black men in the United States by use of excessive force reflects an underlying structural racism in American society, which is also reflected in a biased justice system against black communities. "If the police patrolled the white areas as they do poor black neighborhoods, there would be a revolution," says Paul Butler, author of *Chokehold: Policing Black Men*, which recounts what it means to be a black man in the United States.

Such human rights violations are the daily reality for ethnic minorities and historically discriminated groups. This is coupled with the strengthening of fascist-leaning groups, which have the direct and indirect support of central and local government in several states—a worrying scenario for millions of black, Latino and other ethnic citizens.

Instead of intervening in its own country to resolve these human rights issues and social welfare issues, the US has shown false 'concern' for welfare and human rights in Venezuela, Libya, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan and Ukraine and under that pretext, launched invasions and aggressions on these countries. Behind these illegal

actions are an ulterior motive, that is revealed by another indicator—the US is ranked number one in the world in military spending. As of 2019, the United States has a military budget of over 680 billion dollars, more than the combined military spending of the next seven nations with the largest military budgets: China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, India, France, the United Kingdom and Japan.

The US is not the world leader in economic freedom—it ranks 12th in the Index of Economic Freedom published annually by the Heritage Foundation; nor is it the world leader in GDP growth, where it is ranked 147 out of 224 countries. The United States is a military empire, its economy is based on war, and no action taken in the name of 'humanitarian aid' is meaningful when its government's interest is to promote chaos for its own benefit.

Against this background, what the world is experiencing is a drowning kick from a declining superpower. That is why it is trying so desperately to cling to its last remaining bastion of influence in the world—Latin America—ergo its fixation with Venezuela and other nations in the region. For if the US was really interested in helping, it is time for it to seriously consider intervening, with the same intensity, in its own country.

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