

GUJARAT:**LABORATORY OF THE INDIAN COMMUNAL-FASCISTS**

We are all too familiar of the rise of fascism on the path of Nazism in the first half of this century. The shrewd manipulators armed with Goebbles' propaganda machine spread the poison of ethnic supremacy under the garb of nationalism, erected concentration camps and gas chambers for imperialist ambitions.... as if the entire humankind had invited horrifying destruction for about a decade! Even today, we are faced with a similar shrewd manipulative and well-planned disciplined propaganda in our society, the cunning manipulators forcing a back-door entry in our country and spreading the ethnic supremacy poison called "hindutva-ism." Disseminated in the name of nationalism, this 'ism' should be recognised as fascism and fought with an explicit agenda. However, we notice the secular forces hesitating to launch an organised anti-fascist struggle? Why?

There are several reasons, which will be dealt later. The fascism earlier in this century was unmasked very soon and its real anti-human face was exposed. This took place due to the following reasons:

Fascism grew out of the inner contradictions of capitalism: the barbaric limits of imperialist nature of capitalist system threatened the very existence of capitalism.

The Bolshevik revolution successfully accomplished in Russia gave a vision to the entire human society to realise the dream of creating a just society free from exploitation and oppression. It posed a powerful challenge and seriously undermined the very existence of capitalism and imperialism.

During this period, the freedom struggle was picking up to liberate our enslaved country from the yoke of imperialism. The successful Russian revolution gave an impetus and concrete direction to the revolutionary forces in India and other countries engaged in freedom struggles.

It is fairly clear that fascism, which bought about the clash between revolutionary socialism and institutionalised capitalism, had to die out. It did.

But, during the last one-two decades in third world countries like ours, fascism is almost raising its ugly head by spitting the poison of communalism, nationalism, and casteist supremacy. Unfortunately, many are unable to recognise it. Surprisingly, efforts are being made to analyse it within the terrain of communalism, casteism and/or caste system. Why this questioning again?

Is it because our social thinkers, activists and intellectuals cannot comprehend it? Or is it that there is no grave threat to capitalism right now? Is it so?

It is possible that these questions and doubts may seem too far-fetched or appear prejudiced: because we are Gujaratis. Whenever any revolutionary school has taken roots anytime, our Gujarat armed with "peaceful co-existence and non-violence" propaganda has either banished these revolutionaries and revolutionary thought outside the region or co-opted them, or else forced them into bankruptcy and auctioned out. Glancing at the history of Gujarat for the last 150 years, nothing else comes to mind.

Friends, may I pose a straight question? Don't the prreviewent "notions" of 'acceptable and established developmental path', 'peace', 'non-violence' (ahimsa), 'civilised behaviour' and 'culture' in Gujarat disturb and shiver you? Don't you ever feel the desire to totally transform these "notions" right from the roots? What we see happening to our Gujarat during the last two decades - has it any direct relation to these "notions"? Don't you feel so? What does the treatment meted out to the dalits and oppressed class during this period prove?

Let us look at the crystal clear reality. In the last two decades, our Gujarati dalits, minorities and adivasis have been converted into frogs and rats and dissected in the laboratory of fascism. At the same time the eyes and wings of our intellectuals and middle class were flying in the jazzy skies of liberalisation and

globalisation, with its feet entrenched in the marshes of obscurantism and traditions. On the one hand, our students and youth believe that 'politics' is 'dirty' and 'untouchable'; while on the other hand, they are actively engaged in anti-reservation agitation, communal riots, Ram rath yatras, and mass meetings and demonstrations for Hindutva mobilisation.

Let us now focus our attention to the most important question: why did the Indian communal fascist forces choose Gujarat as their laboratory?

This question is complicated, needing deep exhaustive study and research. But a cursory glance at Gujarat's cultural, economic, social and political history gives us several clues. Could you attempt to answer this: why was Mahatma Gandhi born only in Gujarat? Or let us look another way, if Gujarat's cultural tradition was not available to him for his upbringing, would he have still become the 'Mahatma'? From a superficial perspective, this may look 'absurd'. But if we investigate Gujarat's cultural-traditional heritage and ethical moorings, then the question assumes significance. For locating the laboratory of communal fascism, Gujarat's cultural environment emerges out as a key factor, coupled with the culture of "peaceful co-existence and non-violence" not allowing any revolutionary or organised movement to take roots.

All the ages, our capitalist class (rowing the seas and developing commerce within the country and all over the world) was always a patron of the poor, dalits and the working class. This class was in the vanguard welcoming modern capitalism by bringing the first textile mill from the West (imperialists). Labour relations in the textiles were not allowed any to assume class connotations, but subsumed under the co-existence relations (kinship, brotherly relations) inaugurated by Majur Mahajan. And no questions were asked.

What did it lead to: capitalism, profits and technological leaps on the one hand; whereas on the other hand, a poverty of movements for social transformation. Thanks to the merciful benevolence of the imperialist 'sahibs' and charitable outlook of our nagarsheths, education and educational institutions spread far and wide. However, in the name of tradition, culture and peace, even the very idea for a movement consciousness (renaissance) was not allowed to sprout. As a result, our dalits became 'harijan', adivasis migrated out to farms and cities becoming 'mamas' (duds), and the minorities are limping mainly due to poverty, illiteracy, religious fundamentalism and under-employment.

Is there any need to ask: why Gujarat did not produce a Raja Rammohan Roy, Jyotibha Phule, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar or Birsa Munda? It did produce Dayanand Saraswati, but why did his 'Arya Samaj' spread its wings outside Gujarat?

Let us now turn our attention to Gujarat's role in the freedom struggle. You can search with a microscope, but will find hardly any role in the 1857 rebellion. During the beginning of this century, we gave to the whole world the apostle of peace and ahimsa Gandhiji; and we gave to the Congress, the iron-man of Patel politics, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. But the revolutionaries of the freedom struggle like Bhagvatichandra Vora, Madam Cama, Sardar Prithvisinh, Shyamji Krishna Verma are all scattered and submerged in some library stacks, as if they were not Gujaratis!

Looking at the political developments in post-independent Gujarat, only two progressive movements come into view:

Mahagujarat movement: mass movement character assumed by the agitation due to the leadership of PSP and section of the Congress leadership.

Navnirman movement: The internal disputes in Congress coming out in the open and later transforming into a youth movement.

But both these movements did not give any political consciousness and ideology of the modern age to the Gujarati masses, students or youth. Whereas, during this very period in other parts of India, starting from Naxalbari to the peasant movements, labour and dalit movements, and students revolts occupied centrestage with clear directions and organisational visions of the political ideology of the modern age to emancipate the youth, dalits, oppressed and exploited class.

In the opposition to the emergency of 1975-77, several intellectuals from Gujarat did voice protest and even courted arrests. But they had no direct contact with the common masses and their primary agenda was restoration of bourgeois democracy. Their struggle was largely confined to the "individual level." In the course of this struggle, they started seriously contemplating about 'civil liberties' and after the emergency, they formed small groups (associations) of intellectuals on this issue. The activities of these groups are confined to "intellectual debates and discussions" even till today. They even made several half-hearted token efforts to build mass support. Today, after 25 years of emergency, the common masses of Gujarat (in other words, the minorities, dalits and adivasis) hardly consider them as their leaders or guides.

Before embarking upon the post-emergency political dynamics, one moot point needs to be underlined. After the post-Emergency rout of Indira Gandhi all over the country, several calculative Congress leaders from Gujarat organised for Indira Gandhi massive public meetings to express their solidarity with her. These very leaders also opened the doors of the political arena to the communal fascists to garner mass support - thanks to the KHAM (kshatriya, harijan, adivasi, Muslim) theory. The politics of converting dalits and minorities into a "votebank" gave the Congress a thumping majority, but it unleashed the wildfire of the anti-reservation agitation. Ditching away the mask of 'peaceful co-existence', the communal fundamentalist forces jumped in the arena with fire and brutally bashed the dalits. These 'offerings (prasaad)' from their 'patrons' of the mahajan culture bewildered our 'harijans.' Many educated dalits took up the task of organising the dalits, but they could not gain much headway due to lack of concrete ideology, history of movement, experience and consciousness. In addition, intercaste rivalries within dalits compounded it.

Consequently, Congress again contested the 1985 state elections on the KHAM platform and came to power with a massive majority. This time the communal fundamentalist forces launched their planned bloody program. Dalit screams and cries for help from widespread terror and bloodshed halted the Congress at a crisis point. They took the shelter of communalism and the anti-reservation riots changed gears into communal riots, giving a master key of 'Hindu votebank', 'dominant caste (savarna) politics' and 'nationalist politics' to the communal fundamentalists. Henceforth, these forces continued on their uphill march and transformed Gujarat into a laboratory for communal fascism.

From 1985 to the post Babri demolition barbaric riots of 1992, these forces sunk their political roots deep in the educated, youth and intellectual section of Gujarati society. Advani's rath yatra from Somnath, communal riots, anti Mandal agitation, etc. all spilled beyond the cities and towns into the rural and tribal areas spreading communal and Hindutva nationalist venom.

And the results were there - they had to come by. These forces swept the 1995 elections and, for the first time captured power in Gujarat with a comfortable majority. Now their eyes were set on the national government in Delhi. They started giving a fascist character to their communal and nationalist experiments tested in Gujarat. They soon tasted victory. In the next elections, they were in both seats of power, Gandhinagar and Delhi.

On assuming power, they successfully experimented their strategy - "first Muslims (butchers), then Christians," that too in the rural and tribal hinterland of Gujarat. They then exported this strategy and plan of action to other regions in India and reaped great results. Even though they could not garner a

majority in the national government, they have been speedily implementing their agenda: nuclear adventure in the name of national security, spraying casteist-communal venom in education, shrewd propagation and spread of 'hindutva-ism' under the garb of nationalism, Kargil war, etc. They have managed to engage the attention of the nation's educated and intellectual class in discussions and debates on their agendas, while cornering the minorities to shiver in terror and fear. They have started skilfully infringing upon our civil rights, while laying the ground for fascism under the veil of nationalism.

Friends! Gujarat is even today a laboratory of these forces. Today, before our very own eyes, experiments are going on to give final touches to the bloodthirsty communal-fascist dragon. How long will we go on watching as mute spectators? With this question let me sum up this note by quoting some stanzas from the poem on fascism by young Hindi poet Kumar Ambuj:

Then will come cruelty – first it will be in the hearts but faces will not reveal anything then it will transform into the language of the scriptures then into history and futurology then it will become an ideal for the masses.

It will come as a culture without facing any protest it will always try to ensure that it is seen as cultured and historical.

It is almost likely that – it will come and we will not be aware for a very long time of its arrival.

*Translated by Wilfred from an original Gujarati article by Hiren Gandhi.

"Gandhi regarded Majur Mahajan as a model to be followed elsewhere in India but, as the Royal Commission on Labour in India noted in 1931, its success in Ahmedabad depended very largely on unique circumstances. The employers and employees *were alike Gujaratis*, and Mahatma Gandhi enjoyed such prestige in the city that both had immense confidence in his sense of fairness and sympathy towards them. It could be added that the Majur Mahajan had carried on the traditions of the mahajans of old Ahmedabad, and it is not in the least remarkable to anyone familiar with the history of the city and Gujarat that *she should have evolved a unique and highly successful system of industrial arbitration and that she should have nurtured Mahatma Gandhi.*"

GILLION Kenneth L. (1968) AHMEDABAD: a study in urban history. (Univ. of California Press, LA) p. 159, emphasis added.