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In its internal structure, meanwhile, the destruction of the masjid has all the characteristics of a fascist spectacle, coming on top of many preparatory spectacles, carefully calibrated over the years. It displayed the familiar fascistic relationship between the parliamentary front and extra-parliamentary wings; that same chain running from leaders to trained cadres to the mot) – bound together by a carefully choreographed hysteria and exhortations to violence; replete with appeals to masculine virility, national pride, racial redemption, contempt for law and civility – so that the liberal Mr. Vajpayee, the patrician Mr. Advani, the deliberately shrieking Uma Bharati, and those goons of Bajrang Dal who had come to believe that they were, quite literally, monkeys in the army of Hanuman, the servants of Ram and the eventual protectors of Hindu female chastity, were joined together in a public ritual that was expected to propel the *Sangh*, through its parliamentary arm but with the muscle power of its non-parliamentary wings, to unassailable state power. As if the event itself was not enough, video cassettes not only of the event but of many subsequent acts of violence, including the actual rape of Muslim women by goons in Surat, were then distributed throughout the country, so that they could be re-lived, over and over again, vicariously, by a whole host of men throughout the land, as so many moments of re-gained Hindu virility, as re-defined by the *parivar*. This is, I would contend, fascist masculinism with a vengeance.

But we could go behind the destruction of the mosque and the ensuing communal orgy, to the self-organisation of the *parivar* itself – and, I shall be brief, since I am saying only the obvious. The image of the family is crucial here, because of its patriarchal resonance, even though the strictly all-male RSS is referred to by fronts of the *parivar* as *mata*. At the head we have a semi-secret, non-parliamentary organisation, the *sangh* itself, led by a handful of men, mostly of the Brahmin caste, bound by no norms of democratic representation even in principle, whose methods of internal organisation, promotion, decision-making, lists of actual cadres etc, remains

shrouded in secrecy, despite the agreement under which the ban on the *sangh* was lifted in the 50s and which requires legal accountability on these issues. *This* is the organisation which assembles the fascist structure vertically, from the *shakha* upward, with its organisational ethic of cadre-building, loyalty and obedience, and its ideological identification of local community, Hindu culture, and Indian nationhood; and, it organises the structure horizontally, by spawning numerous fronts – perhaps fifty or more, as they claimed last year when the RSS was formally banned – covering such diverse areas as gender, childhood and adolescence, religious subjectivity, parliamentary representation, methodical violence. The *sangh's* obvious public face is that of the BJP, supposedly a political party like the rest, but even the formation of municipal government in Delhi has shown that all the power is wielded by the RSS itself – not to speak of the Advanis, the Vajpayees, the Joshis etc, in the central leadership, all RSS veterans. Alongside that are other semi-public faces: the VHP, the Bajrang Dal, the *dharm sansad*; to assist in parliamentary mobilisation but also for non-parliamentary mobilisation; for the assertion that matters of faith are not subject to law and constitution; to concentrate requisite force to drive that message home, especially to the Muslims but to the country at large. In the vast space that separates – but also connects – Mr Vajpayee and the Bajrang Dal are the intellectuals, the media manipulators, the experts in electronic fabulation, who interpret the daily events for us through newspapers; who lay out the visual images in those same newspapers to manipulate our sensory experience of what we read; who flood the mass market with films and videos. Here too, in this sphere of ideological mobilisation and re-making, there are levels and calibrations: the national network of the in-house publications of the RSS is carefully distinguished from a similarly national network of publications which represent the RSS viewpoint without being formally a part of the authorised network, which is then balanced against methodical penetration of the liberal media itself, reaching up to the upper reaches' of the respectable dailies.

What I am suggesting is that in its staging of spectacles, in its techniques of mobilisations, in the multiplicity of its fronts, in the shadowy traffic between its parliamentary and non-parliamentary organs, in the seamless interplay of form and content in its ideological interpellations, in the connection it asserts between a resurgent national tradition and the regaining of masculinist virility, in its simultaneous claims to legality and extra-legality, in its construction of a mythic history which authorises it to be above history, and in its organisation of a *dharm sansad* that authorises it to be above the

civil parliament whenever it so chooses, the *sangh parivar* is a classically fascist force – with large Indian twists of course, as every fascism must always take a specifically national form. Because of features such as these, the *sangh* represents not only a communalism, in the ordinary sense, even though minorities in general and Muslims in particular are its special victims. The true object of its desire is not mere Muslim submission but state power and the re-making of India as a whole – politically, ideologically, historically; and, true to form, this project of re-making India in its own image involves a great deal of un-making, both through selective appropriation as well as outright rejection of very large parts of our past and present histories. This process of unmaking and re-making involves the rejection of our secular-nationalist and communist histories; the re-domestication and redefinition of what little independence some women in this country have been able to achieve; to slow down the upsurge of the dominated castes; to control the pluralities of our intellectual and cultural productions; to club the regional minorities into submission to a centralised, authoritarian state; and to bestow upon a backward bourgeoisie nostalgias of an imperial past, dreams of nuclear power, hallucinations of regional dominance. Communalism, in other words, is only a cutting edge, even though this edge is quite capable of causing bloodbaths time and again.

The *sangh* foregrounds the issues of what it calls ‘pseudo-secularism’ and ‘the appeasement of minorities’ because it finds these issues strategically important in its bid to build a national consensus around a whole series of real and imagined resentments, but the object of this consensus is not merely the minority but, most centrally, that majority which we provisionally call Hindu, hence also the even more powerful project of re-defining and re-ordering Hinduism itself, in a syndicated, monolithic, telegenic, aggressive form – part Brahminical, part electronic, part plebeian. In other words, the *sangh* claims and has always claimed to be a *nationalism* – at once the *cultural* nationalism of the Hindu community, and, because the *community* is said to be co-terminus with the nation itself, the *political* nationalism of the Indian people as such. The history of this claim – part communitarian, part nationalist claim – is of some interest.

We have, first, Golwalker’s famous distinction, as he phrased it, between his own *cultural* nationalism and the *territorial* nationalism of the Congress as led by Gandhi *et al.* In this formulation, cultural nationalism is the nationalism specifically of *Hindus*, whereas territorial nationalism is by definition secular in the sense that it includes non-Hindus as well and does not demand of them that they adopt what Golwalker would define as Hindu culture. By this definition, it might appear that he recognises secular nationalism as having a wider scope and the flexibility to represent all Indians, irrespective of religious affiliation, while he himself aspires to represent only

the Hindus. But that is not what Golwalker means. He turns immediately and takes recourse to an ideological identification between two essentially discursive categories, namely *pitribhumi* (fatherland) and *punyabhumi* (spiritual homeland), worthy of German Romanticism itself, invoking the quasi-Hegelian idea of a National Spirit and asserting that the idea of citizenship be derived from one's origin and active participation in the working of that Spirit. Being born an Indian is thus not enough to qualify for true citizenship because 'India' designates only a territory; the *Spirit* of India resides, generally, in religions that arose within India and, quintessentially, in Hinduism, so that to be a true Indian one had to be a Hindu as well. In other words, Hindus were true citizens of India *prima fade* by having spontaneous recourse to that national Spirit by the very fact of birth in a Hindu household, but non-Hindus could *become* citizens by acquiring – that is to say, submitting to – that Spirit – not as *equal* citizens, since nothing could compensate for the taint of inferior birth, but as protected minority, or as wards of the state as it were. Golwalker of course cited Nazi Germany as his model for this racialistic definition of citizenship, but what is also striking about this definition is that the purported distinction between cultural nationalism and territorial nationalism is dissolved as soon as it is made, since the entire population residing in the territory of *Bharat Varsha* is thereby required to either accept the cultural nationalism as defined by *Hindutva* or to leave the territory altogether; the cultural nationalist, in any case, would not let go of even an inch of that territory. In the more extreme versions, it is said to be the historic mission of militarised Hinduism and the *Hindutva* state that it would set out to recapture the territories that Greater India has lost to other states of the sub-continent, Pakistan in particular but also Bangladesh. Purification of the existing territory, expansion into the adjacent territories of other states is thus part of the design.

As regards the making of that particular form of Hinduism which the RSS presents as the cultural nationalism of the Indian people, two parallel process of syndication are striking. The first is the familiar one for which Romila Thapar initially used the term 'syndication', whereby *diverse* and even conflicting practices are sought to be taken over from very different traditions and incorporated into a single, pan-Indian religiosity – for which Ram is said to be the unique, uniform godhead. This is an *invented* tradition, if there ever was one! But something else, and in its own way perhaps even more alarming, is that the RSS has emerged as the unique successor and a point of intersection for great many revivalist currents that India has inherited from many quite distinct Hindu reform movements of the

nineteenth century and diverse, even conflicting, political movements of the earlier decades of the present century. Vivekananda has been a staple of their invocations now for decades, and VHP's special claim to his legacy is so elaborate and strident that the forces of the liberal-Left which think that they can unproblematically claim Vivekanand for a more decent formulation of the Hindu cultural ethos need to think of the consequences of that prior claim very seriously. Meanwhile, such things as the convergence between Golwalker and Savarkar, and the latter co-operation of Shyama Prasad Mukherjee and the RSS in founding the Jan Sangh, have meant that the RSS has simply inherited the legacy of what was once the Hindu Mahasabha. Even the old confrontation between Arya Samajis and the Sanatan Dharmis has also largely lapsed into a somewhat syndicated Rightwing Hinduism and, therefore, into a more or less singular constituency for the *Sangh*. Large chunks of Bankim and Aurobindo are simply rehearsed as precursors of modernday *Hindutva*. Gandhi's tactic of keeping such individuals as Hedgewar and such organisations as the Mahasabha inside the Congress for as long as it remained at all possible, not to speak of the subsequent history of cooperation extended to the RSS by such diverse individuals as- Vinoba Bhave and Jayprakash Narayan during the *bhoodan* campaign and the anti-Indira agitation respectively, has made it all the more possible for the RSS to assert anti-colonial, reformist, even anti-authoritarian credentials. One of the notable features of this bid for building an alternative national hegemony is that the RSS lays claim, *in the religious sphere*, to the *whole* of the Hindu tradition, from the highest kind of Brahminism to the most plebeian and ecumenical kind of *bhakti*, as well as to the more modern kinds of revisionist Hinduism; and, in the socio-political sphere, it lays claim to the whole range of Hindu reform movements as well as to virtually every major figure in nationalist history, including Gandhi – with very few exceptions, notably Nehru. Let me note, parenthetically, that the ability of the RSS to partially coopt the rhetoric of Gandhian socialism, Gandhian Swadeshi, Gandhian *Ram *rajya*, and their unmitigated hostility toward Nehru should give some pause to that section of our secular intelligentsia, notably our Subalternist historians, whose personal secularism is beyond question but who then find it so much easier to be partial toward Gandhi but would themselves be quite as hostile toward Nehru as the RSS itself. I do not mean that the priorities should simply be reversed, or that we should now set up some fundamental preference for Nehru over Gandhi in our narratives of canonical nationalism; simple reversals in such matters usually do more harm than good. What I do mean is that we need a far more careful look at those positions – frequently overlapping positions – that Gandhi and Nehru have represented within that history, even though the fashion these days, on the Right certainly but also in some sections of the radical intelligentsia, is to pitch them as opposites.

Be that as it may. Let me explore a bit further my proposition that the remarkable capacity of the RSS to set its own agenda and to register a gradual but remarkably consistent expansion over a period of sixty years or more, is certainly a tribute to its own organisational genius, but this genius has met with such success because of its ability to draw upon large number of legacies which have been an enduring feature of diverse reform movements and nationalist articulations throughout the history of modern India. The idea of uniform Hindu victimisation over a thousand years is as old as Indian modernity itself, and we can find it there already in Rammohun, who was otherwise also the author of *Tuhfat al Muwahideen*, a book deeply imbued with concepts of Islamic rationalism, and a pleader of the Mughal king's case in the court of the company. For Rammohun, of course, those were fleeting assertions, by no means a substantial part of his social or historical vision. But such ideas begin to get articulated far more systematically by the last quarter of the 19th century, with enough of it getting played out subsequently during the Swadeshi movement for Tagore to specifically warn against the tendency. The pursuit of a revamped, reformed but also monolithic and even aggressive Hinduism that presents itself as the *real* tradition; the invention of a past, anti-Muslim nationalism in the form of the sagas of Maratha and Rajput warriors; the idea that the kshatriya ideal of manhood is the proper ideal for Hindu manhood in general; the emphasis on physical culture and the building of the male body as a key to Hindu redemption; the figure of the heroic Sadhvi leading Hindu men in acts of redemption of the national honour – all these, and much besides, the RSS has inherited from the fictions, the zealotries, the reform movements of the 19th century and the twentieth, from Bengal to Maharashtra to Punjab. Its unique achievement is that ideological elements that had in the past remained discrete are now integrated into a singular, all-encompassing ideological position and are given not only a far more vicious form but, most crucially, linked now to uniquely new forms of organisation and mobilisation. Even the image of the RSS as an all-male club of reformers who know best – and that of the swamikas as both objects and agents of that reform, at once released and restrained by the reformer, active, above all, in the proper Hindu household, and then in carefully orchestrated family-to-family, neighbourhood-to-neighbourhood networks, and only very selectively on the national scene, whenever the directive agency of the reformer so desires – all this recalls, on a much grander scale of course, the quintessential relationship between the 19th century reformer and the object of his reform – usually the wife, the daughter, the sister-in-law. Needless to add, there is much in our secular-nationalist histories that also took over those same ideas, those same models. The secular-nationalist versions had remained essentially paternalistic and condescending, in the

way of much 19th century liberalism, but they have unwittingly contributed to the more aggressively masculinist versions of the RSS type.

In other words, by the time the RSS takes over such ideas, they have gathered to themselves the density of very powerful histories, no less historical for being so thoroughly modern. What I am suggesting, first, is that the difference between the so-called Hindu nationalism of the *sangh parivar* and the secular nationalism of its bourgeois opponents cannot be conceptualised in the binary terms of Tradition and Modernity; the *parivar* itself draws upon a number of very modern traditions, and it is at least arguable that those who have choreographed its fascist spectacles, from the *rath yatra* onwards, know more about modernity than many of our avant-garde artists and historians. But I am also suggesting, second, that the strategists of the *parivar* know perfectly well that many of their ideas resonate strongly with a certain kind of widespread 'common sense' that has been prepared for them already, by other movements, social practices, intellectual productions, all of which they can now selectively incorporate, by re-writing, into their own history as so many precursors of modernday *Hindutva*. This is by no means the only common sense available in modern India, and it is much to be doubted that the majority of Indians subscribe to the sum of those ideas or even find them relevant. But the confidence that there is a large enough pool of consent is also visibly there, in numerous RSS practices, as for example in the stipulation that every boy who ever comes to any of the *shakhas* must come with prior consent and daily knowledge of elders in the family; the presumption is that the consent would already be there or can be both obtained and sustained relatively easily. Consent of course comes all the more easily not only because of prior patterns of socialization but also because the RSS, through the *shakha*, is able to offer facilities {such as organised sports) and particular kinds of feelings (such as pride, group bonding, social ambition) that are scarce for the majority of the children caught in the urban vortex.

But there are other kinds of consents, other kinds of violences as well, that potentially contribute to the making of a fascist project. Notable among these is the normalisation of the practice of violence as a way of satisfying acquisitive desire and of imposing the will of the powerful on the powerless. An urban middle class that habitually sets its women afire because the dowry they bring does not satisfy the greed of the men of that class; because they are not sufficiently submissive; or because they are suspected of sexual infidelity, normalises the idea of violence as normative in gender relations. The agrarian upper castes that periodically set fire to the households of the menial castes normalise the idea of extreme violence in class and caste relations, as much as does the ruling party which carries out a pogrom in an entire community to avenge the assassination of its Prime Minister by her

bodyguard. The men who congregate around their video cassettes to watch *Hindutva* goons raping Muslim women are certainly communal men, but this particular form of communal bonding between the rapist and the voyeur stems from older and wider histories which have connected patriarchal households, caste-divided local communities and the so-called national culture in great many complex ways. Communalism is by no means the only – and, in quantitative terms, not even the largest – structure of routine violence in our society, and there are times when a communal kind of violence comes so easily to so many men, and gets exercised against even peaceful neighbours, precisely because this particular form of violence draws upon so many other kinds of aggressions. In contemporary India communalism is certainly, as I said earlier, the cutting edge for a fascist project as a whole, but those other violences – of caste, class and gender – are always there to *form* the kind of authoritarian personality upon which the fascist project eventually rests.

NOTE

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