

## **Editor's Note**

The distinguishing feature of the post 2019 Modi government is the aggressive pursuit of the Hindutva communal agenda of the fascistic RSS. Among many other lethal features of this aggressive pursuit is the feverish unfolding of the neo-liberal reforms trajectory that has cemented a corporate-communal nexus. This trajectory has also strengthened India's dependence on global finance capital, reducing India as a subordinate ally of US imperialism in global political, strategic and military spheres.

Crucial to the realization of this fascistic RSS agenda is to control the people's thinking processes and create constructs for generating a 'false consciousness' centering around incendiary campaigns of poisonous hate and violence against religious minorities, particularly Muslims. This, in turn, requires control over media both the traditional and social media. Social media may be distinct from print and electronic media, but is part of the media ecosystem. Technological advances permitted the permeation of digital media, creating conditions for the emergence of a larger media ecosystem covering all these forms.

Controlling such a media and using it to influence people's social consciousness is important for the realisation of the RSS fascistic agenda through the creation of an 'overarching Hindutva identity' amongst the people. With the possibilities of mega profit generation through such a vast network of media the corporates have moved in to reap their profits. Further, the corporate-communal nexus leads to the convergence of corporate and media content objectives of Hindutva communalism. The giant control of media by the corporates in India today with no restrictions of any cross media holding (that is the same corporate can hold digital platforms, electronic media, TV channels and print media simultaneously). As profit maximization is the driving force, the content of what this media churns out for the people to consume is determined by the TRP ratings which form the basis for the quantum of advertisements, the basic source of revenue and profit.

Such a media ecosystem goes beyond the Chomskyian construct of 'manufacturing consent'. In a sense, it is manufacturing consent for the Hindutva fascistic project, but through a network of operations that are much larger and diabolic. The content patronized by such media outlets range from the dissemination of fake news; vicious

campaigns of communal hate targeting the religious minorities, particularly Muslims; the endorsement of patriarchy; sanctioning obscurantism and mysticism; buttressing casteism and caste based social oppression and leading up to the sharpening of communal polarization.

The objective of such a regressive content is to mount an assault on rationality and reason. The more unreasonable and irrational the people get the easier it is to feed them with various constructs of false consciousness and assault scientific temper. The design is to leave people with no other recourse than blind faith. Hindutva communalism feeds on such growth of blind faith.

Simultaneously, for such a project to succeed, it is essential to divert people's attention away from their growing day-to-day miseries of existence and, thus, strengthening the 'overarching Hindutva identity'. This is done by creating what is currently known as 'post-truth' society. Post-truth is defined as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief". The current media landscape promotes the promotion of such emotional appeals and the building up of a personality cult continuously bombarding people with propaganda, falsifying or negating reality, that India is prospering in a hitherto unknown manner and the only obstacle for creating an Indian *El dorado* are the Muslims, Christians and the Communists. Increasingly, the dictum of Goebbels, Hitler's propaganda minister: 'Tell a big enough lie, frequently enough; it becomes the truth' is becoming the norm. Modi government rejects all rankings of international agencies on India's sharply declining status under various parameters and brazenly informs the Parliament on any question that may expose the reality causing it embarrassment that 'there is no data'.

This issue of the Marxist focuses on discussing various such aspects of today's media eco system. **Prabir Purkayastha, P. Sainath** and **Sukumr Muralidharan** discuss these various aspects in their contributions.

Prabir Purkayastha points out how digital media is increasingly taking over our lives and underlines that the key issue is who owns the technology and the instruments of mass production of news/views in print/audio/visual forms. These, today, are essential infrastructure that should be either regulated as public utilities or be publicly owned.

Sukumar Muralidharan discusses various aspects of the Hindutva media ecosystem. He discusses how the agenda is being set and how the mainstream media sees no

way out of their crisis of profitability, than mimicking the loud, obstreperous and intolerant tone that the regime seeks to posture through the social media. Modi's political success and its impact on social fabric cannot be underscored without its core constituencies' use of internet and the new media. He points towards the opportunities to reverse this current tide.

P. Sainath, among many aspects, discusses the 'power of propaganda by silence' of the corporate media. "Today's India is a rule by an alliance of socio-religious fundamentalists and economic market fundamentalists. The bed this happy union co-habits is what we call the corporate media". On the question of regulation of media and the government's own attitude towards media freedom, he shares his direct experience of how the government jettisoned the report of a committee set up by the Union cabinet secretary on press freedom in India when he as a member submitted a note of dissent.

Media today is imprisoned by profit, but increasingly politically imprisoned as well. The return of Indian media towards progressive transformation cannot come without confronting corporate power over media.