

India: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s Real Agenda

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WITH the dissolution of the 11 th Lok Sabha on December 4, 1997 the Indian media, almost as a body, have launched a concerted propaganda barrage to overwhelm the public with three meticulously manufactured Impressions. One, now the only issue before the Indian electorate is the stability of the next government, no matter what policies this government might try to follow (in any case, everybody would pursue much the same policies). Two, the BJP's [1] politics has taken a decisive turn towards moderation, no matter how weak, contradictory and confusing the evidence of this is. Three, the inevitability of Atal Behari Vajpayee becoming the next prime minister, no matter how he conjures up the required majority.

What, however, is even more disconcerting is that the stray dissenting voices, exposing the essential hollowness of this campaign, have not only remained almost inaudibly feeble, but also by and large extremely inadequate in exposing the true meaning and import of the BJP's politics at the present juncture. Despite cursory references to the 'BJP's umbilical cord with the RSS' and the 'fascist' nature of the Sangh parivar, neither of these two propositions is consistently and seriously explored. Even the pieces carried in the pages of this journal are no exceptions.

Against this very specific background, an alternative view of the BJP's politics and its grave implications for India is presented below.

It is necessary to highlight here that the BJP is only one, the mass political/ parliamentary wing and arguably the most crucial, of the many fronts floated by the RSS, the mother organisation. This fact has been well and elaborately documented by a number of analysts and researchers of widely varying ideological shades.

The RSS, in the guise of a cultural organisation, was and is a closed religio-communal fascist organisation committed to the (political) goal of establishment of a Hindu rashtra (i e, a Hindu nation state) based on the negation of the Indian nation state, which came into being through the process and as the culmination of a popular struggle led by a section of the Indian elite with an ever-widening support base, directed against the British colonial rule and, in the main, infused with the modernistic and forward-looking ideals of western liberalism and at the same time deeply rooted in the indigenous traditions of (syncretic and eclectic) pluralism.

The RSS, founded in 1925, had nothing to do with this epic struggle nor did (or does) it accept the evolving concept of pluralistic nationalism that inspired and informed the Indian independence movement. Its project of establishment of the Hindu rashtra is essentially based on the (redefinition - and thereby (re)construction - of the 'Hindu', not so much with reference to itself but more as contrasted with "the evil and the threatening 'other' situated outside" and consequent building up of an ambience of mass frenzy and civil war, which is so very necessary to mobilise the amorphous masses of the Hindu as 'Hindu' in a country where they not only constitute the overwhelming numerical majority but also occupy the commanding heights in all walks of life. And this is carried out with the tacit (or, if possible, explicit) patronage of the state machinery. In fact the RSS has evolved and pursues an elaborate programme to infiltrate/ permeate into and influence/manipulate

the various organs of the state, e g, the bureaucracy, the judiciary, the police, and the army apart from the elected legislative (and executive) bodies (and also vital segments of the civil society). And as regards the 'vil other', contrary to the common perceptions, the Muslims, though the most convenient and common target, do not hold the exclusive right to be so constructed/ considered. Any section(s) of religious, linguistic and ethnic minorities, the dalits, the tribals, the poor, the homeless, the liberals, the socialists, the communists, the feminists - all are fit candidates to be enlisted as the 'other', depending on the specific circumstances.

Here it needs to be highlighted that though the RSS puts religion to extensive and intensive instrumentalist use, it is not a fundamentalist organisation in the strictest sense of the term and hence enjoys wide flexibility in terms of the tactics deployed and programmes pursued. This is symbolically reflected in the seemingly weird marriage between the khaki shorts and the saffron flags.

Then again, despite periodic oscillations (between moderation/accommodation and aggression/exclusion) in their tactical line as manifested in the type of programme or agenda taken up by any or all of its various wings, the central agenda of the RSS has remained unchanged over the years.

It is worth recalling that in the late 1970s the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (the then political wing of the RSS) went even to the extent of dissolving itself in the Janata Party (the centrist conglomeration formed as the major challenger to the then ruling Congress), apparently with the twin goals of gaining substantially increased access to the levers of state power (through this innovative shortcut) and eventually capturing the Janata Party itself and thereby decisive command of state power.

Capturing state power, however, as has been proclaimed time and again by various functionaries of the RSS, including the sarsanghachalak, is only a means to attain the ultimate goal of national reconstruction (i e. establishment of the Hindu rashtra). And that is precisely why the erstwhile Janasanghis walked out of the Janata Party (and the government led by it) when pressurised to sever their ties with the RSS (a self-proclaimed cultural organisation) by the other constituents.

One also needs to recall that the BJP was launched (in April 1980) with 'Gandhian socialism' as its professed creed. Then it changed to 'integral humanism'. And by the mid-1980s switched over to hard hindutva (labelled as "cultural nationalism") with the concomitant elaborate campaign of murder and mayhem.

While aggression/exclusion is crucial, and in fact indispensable, for expanding (and even retaining) the support base, particularly amongst the lower stratum of the social pyramid, the moderation/accommodation phase constitutes the interregnum necessary for stabilisation during retreat and/or respite (primarily on account of lack of state patronage). This, however, is gainfully utilised to reassure the supporters from amongst the upper castes/classes, who look upon the BJP mainly as a bulwark against Mandal and the promoter of a 'strong' state considered essential for implementing the liberalisation/globalisation agenda but do not have the stomach for the prolonged turmoil, and also to pick up allies and accomplices from within the centrist political spectrum. Then again one has to keep in mind that the level and extent of state patronage is a critical determinant for the success of the confrontationist programme taken up by the RSS and its affiliates. While the cow protection movements in the early 1950s and the late 1960s failed to gather momentum as these were nipped in the bud by the rather hostile Congress governments in power, the Ayodhya movement picked up when the same Congress Party, heading the central government, opted for substantial weakening of its secularist plank. And L K Advani could launch the infamous rath yatra when the central government headed by V P Singh was critically dependent on BJP support for its survival. And the Babri masjid could be finally pulled down, in brazen violation of the

public commitments made by top BJP leaders at various forums, including the Supreme Court and the National Integration Council, only when there was a BJP government in UP backed by a central government headed by P V Narasimha Rao, widely perceived to be an RSS mole (as is now the case with Deve Gowda, Jitendra Prasada and others) in the Congress.

Viewed against its past track record, it becomes abundantly clear that the latest phase of doubtful moderation on the pan of the BJP is nothing but a case of the proverbial wolf presenting itself in sheep's clothing to lure the gullible.

Once they gain radically increased access to the levers of state power the real game will start. Not only will Ayodhya, Kashi and Mathura start picking up new momentum, it is quite possible, or rather likely, that from their bag of tricks even more unorthodox ones will start popping out. From that point onwards, the script would be pretty predictable. Passions will be aroused. Khaki shorts and black caps will be out on the streets. The armed might of the state will back them up to the hilt. The BJP juggernaut will roll on, unstoppable. National 'reconstruction', RSS style, will commence. And the death warrant for the concept, the dream, called India, which was shaped out of one of the most gigantic anti-imperial popular struggles of the 20th century, will be issued.

This piece seeks to be a small contribution to the large and growing body of efforts to confront the monster, scuttle the scary prospect and turn itself into a self-falsifying prophecy.

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* From the Economic and Political Weekly, February 7 1998.

Footnotes

[1] BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party or Indian People's Party.