

Spectre of Fascism



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SPECTRE OF FASCISM

Over the past quarter century, to put it more precisely, since 1991, the ultra-right in India, represented primarily by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), has gradually risen to dominance in vast areas of culture, society, ideology and economy. With its political wing, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), winning the 2014 Lok Sabha elections with an absolute majority, it is now pursuing its fascist agenda openly, threatening the secular and democratic fabric of the country, both of which are fundamental founding principles of the Indian Republic.

Before we discuss this in greater detail, let us first understand what is fascism.

WHAT IS FASCISM?

Fascism is a type of political movement that first came into prominence in Europe in early 20th century. It originated in Italy after the end of World War I, in 1919, when Benito Mussolini founded the Fasci Italiani di Combattimento in Milan, which became the Partito Nazionale Fascista (National Fascist Party) two years later. The Italian term *fascismo* is derived from the Latin word *fascēs*, which means a bundle of rods tied around an axe. This was originally the symbol of authority of the civic magistrate in ancient Rome. For fascists, this symbol of *fascēs* or bundle of rods symbolised both strength through unity and a strong regime.

After Mussolini in Italy, fascist movements became strong and even exercised power in several European countries during the period between the two World Wars. Some of the prominent fascist leaders of this period include Germany's Adolf Hitler, Spain's Francisco Franco, Portugal's António de Oliveira Salazar, France's Philippe Pétain, Hungary's Miklós Horthy, Romania's Ion Antonescu and Croatia's Ante Pavelic.

Following the defeat of the Nazis and Mussolini's Italy in the Second World War, fascist forces in Western Europe were forced to retreat into the background and hide behind the scenes, without really disappearing. But since the 1980s, more particularly since the 1990s, as the global economy sinks deeper and deeper into crisis, fascist organisations are becoming emboldened to come out from behind the curtain and openly flex their muscles. And this time, they are becoming strong not just in Europe, but across the world, from the

USA and Russia to several countries in Africa and the Middle East to India.

While the diversity of societies where fascist organisations are growing leads to diverse forms of fascism, all fascist organisations have some common characteristics:

- Fascism is not synonymous with an authoritarian police/military regime that rejects parliamentary democracy. On the contrary, fascism bases itself on mass movements and democracy to come to power. And having come to power, it then subverts democracy. In 1923, Mussolini proposed an electoral reform known as the Acerbo Law, that gave two-thirds of the seats in Parliament to the party that received the largest number of votes. Although Mussolini insisted that he wanted to save Parliament rather than undermine it, the Acerbo Law enabled the Fascists to take control of Parliament the following year and impose a dictatorship.
- Fascism is anti-liberal, and negates the ideas of liberty and equality. It believes in a hierarchical society. Fascism seeks to replace the general principles on which democracy is based—recognition for and respect for diversity of opinions, respect for electoral procedures to determine majority opinion/views, guarantee for the rights of minority—by majority authoritarianism. It seeks to impose the will of the majority on the minority by force and promotes violence by the majority without ethical or legal constraints.
- This is almost always accompanied by a return to backward values and backward-looking ideas, such as a return to some 'golden past', or submission to some supposed characteristic of the 'race' or the 'nation'. This provides a kind of legitimacy for assault on democracy.
- Fascists often seeks to mobilise the masses, that is, the majority of the people, in the name of extreme nationalism:
 - certain communities or groups are targeted as being a threat to the country, and nationalistic fervour is then used to mobilise the majority to attack and isolate them;
 - using this artificially created obsession with national security, opponents and critics are labelled as anti-national and traitors;
 - an atmosphere of insecurity, of danger to the nation, is created wherein people become convinced that restrictions on human

rights are needed, and attacks/harsh punishments/even assassinations of opponents of the government are justified.

But while mobilising the masses in the name of an imagined internal enemy, crushing democracy and jailing and murdering opponents, the fascists do not, never, call the fundamental principles of capitalism, including monopoly capitalism, into question. Fascists are unabashedly pro-capitalist and anti-worker, and nakedly run society in a way so as to maximise corporate profits. As Mussolini famously put it: "Fascism should more properly be called corporatism because it is the merger of state and corporate power." After consolidating his hold on power, Mussolini banned trade unions, cut taxes on business, permitted cartel growth, decreed wage reduction, and rescinded the eight-hour-workday law; between 1928 and 1932, real wages in Italy dropped by almost half. Similarly, Hitler too outlawed all free trade unions, and workers were forced to toil for longer hours under reduced wages.

It is important to understand this: there is no conflict between capitalism and fascism. Fascism is actually a particular response of capitalism to deepening capitalist crisis. The capitalist classes support the rise of fascist parties to power when the crisis of capitalism deepens so much that they feel that the fascist solution may be the best way out of this crisis, it may be the best way to manage the society in a way that keeps their profit accumulation afloat.

BJP–RSS AND FASCISM

The BJP is the political front of the RSS. Since the BJP contests elections, it has to function within the overall frame provided by the Constitution. Therefore, even though it proposes several changes in the Constitution, it professes belief in democracy, it claims to uphold the institutions of liberal democracy such as the constitution, judiciary and a free media, and swears by universal franchise, multi-party elections and rule of the law.

In contrast, its parent, the RSS, is a semi-secret, fascist organisation. It was founded ninety years ago, in 1925. While it calls itself a 'cultural' and 'non-political' organisation, its declared intention is to subvert India's democracy and secular structure and transform India culturally, politically and socially into a Hindu Rashtra. According to the Anthropological Society of India, Indian population comprises of more than 4000 distinct communities, marked by differences in customs, language, caste, religious beliefs, cuisine,

location, and what have you.¹ The RSS believes that despite these diversities, 80% of the Indian people are Hindus. And so the RSS has created a network of thousands of front organisations—together called the Sangh Parivar—to cater to as many of these different diversities as possible, with the aim of creating a cultural homogeneity out of this ocean of diversities, and thereby ‘Hinduising’ them. This is the essence of *Hindutva*, the political ideology of the RSS—welding the overwhelming majority of the Indian people together as Hindus, so that they can be mobilised towards transforming secular and democratic India into a *Hindu Rashtra*. Note that *Hindutva* is not identical with Hinduism; the former is a political ideology, the latter a religion.

The ideology and practice of the RSS correspond closely to the definition of fascism given above. Ever since the BJP has come to power, the RSS has come out from behind the curtains and along with the dozens of organisations spawned by it, has launched a vicious offensive to achieve its goals. A spectre of fascism looms over the country.

Let us take a look at the main elements of this offensive launched by the RSS.

1. BJP–RSS and Nationalism

The BJP/RSS have been attempting to portray themselves as the true nationalists, and have been whipping up sentiments against their opponents by portraying them as anti-nationals. From student groups opposed to the BJP and its student wing, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), to intellectuals protesting the assaults on minorities across the country—all are being labelled and attacked as anti-nationals.

Recently, they came up with the call that you must chant *Bharat Mata ki jai* to prove your nationalism. This issue was first raised by RSS patriarch Mohan Bhagwat in early March 2016. He stated: “Now the time has come when we have to tell the new generation to chant ‘Bharat Mata Ki jai’ (Hail Mother India).” It was a deliberate ploy. The RSS is aware that some Muslim groups are opposed to this slogan because it is against their interpretation of Islam. They say that Islam does not recognise any God-Goddess other than Allah, and the words “Bharat Mata” in a way denote India as a mother Goddess. So they are unwilling to chant this slogan. Instead, they are willing to give the slogan *Jai Hind*, and proudly chant it. (Some other Muslims have no problems with the slogan *Bharat Mata ki jai* and chant it, like Javed Akhtar who repeatedly gave this slogan in the Parliament.)

The point is, if some Muslims are not willing to give the slogan *Bharat Mata ki jai*, but are willing to give other slogans to show their love for this country, this clearly proves that they are not anti-national. But the RSS, and a section of the media that is openly pro-BJP, deliberately obfuscated the fact that Muslims are willing to say *Jai Hind*, and only focussed on their unwillingness to say *Bharat Mata ki jai*, and launched a campaign to portray Muslims as anti-national.

RSS and India's Freedom Struggle

The irony of the situation is, these issues of nationalism are being raised by an organisation that did not participate in our freedom struggle! On the contrary, the then leaders of the RSS, K.B. Hedgewar and M.S. Golwalkar, were critical of the Non-Cooperation movement and Quit India movement. Criticising the Non-Cooperation movement, Hedgewar had stated:

As a result of the Non-Co-operation Movement of Mahatma Gandhi . . . the evils in social life which that movement generated were menacingly raising their head. As the tide of national struggle came to ebb, mutual ill-will and jealousies came on the surface. Personal quarrels raged all round. Conflicts between various communities had started. Brahmin-non-Brahmin conflict was nakedly on view. . . . The yavan-snakes [i.e. Muslims] reared on the milk of Non-Cooperation were provoking riots in the nation with their poisonous hissing.²

Golwalkar in his writings comments on these two of the greatest mass movements of the freedom struggle in the following words:

Definitely there are bound to be bad results of struggle. The boys became unruly after the 1920–21 movement. It is not an attempt to throw mud at the leaders. But these are inevitable products after the struggle. The matter is that we could not properly control these results. After 1942, people often started thinking that there was no need to think of the law.³

In other words, Golwalkar wanted Indians to respect the draconian laws of the British. In March 1947, when it was clear to everyone that the British had decided to give independence to India, Golwalkar while addressing the annual day function of the RSS in Delhi, went one step ahead and declared that leaders with narrow vision were trying to oppose the state power of the British.⁴

The only role played by the RSS during India's struggle for independence was to consistently disrupt the unified struggle of the Indian people against British imperialism by attempting to divide the people along communal lines through slogans like "Hindu–Hindi–Hindustan" or "Hindu Raj Amar Rahe". It is these activities of the RSS that, together with the communal slogans of the Muslim League, contributed to Partition.

Such an organisation is today defining the criteria and setting the contours for what nationalism means!

RSS and the National Flag

Today, the BJP is demanding the unfurling of a big size national flag at all Universities in the name of instilling nationalism in youth. But actually, its parent, the RSS never had any love for our national flag, the Tricolour. In fact, on the eve of independence (August 14, 1947), the RSS organ *Organiser* had in an article openly demanded the unfurling of the *bhagwa jhanda* (saffron flag) on the ramparts of the Red Fort, and had criticised the national flag in the following words:

The people who have come to power by the kick of fate may give in our hands the Tricolour but it will never be respected and owned by Hindus. The word three is in itself an evil, and a flag having three colours will certainly produce a very bad psychological effect and is injurious to a country.⁵

Likewise, Guru Golwalkar, commenting on the national flag in his *Bunch of Thoughts*, writes:

Our leaders have set up a new flag for our country. Why did they do so? It is just a case of drifting and imitating. . . . Ours is an ancient and great nation with a glorious past. Then, had we no flag of our own? Had we no national emblem at all these thousands of years? Undoubtedly we had. Then why this utter void, this utter vacuum in our minds?⁶

RSS's Nationalism: Hindu Rashtra

A genuinely secular society is one where all citizens think of themselves as equal citizens of one nation; all other identities, be they religious, caste, language or region, then become secondary.

Secularism is one of the fundamental pillars of the Indian Constitution. The Constitution guarantees freedom of religion for all citizens, and equal freedom and respect for all citizens. The Supreme

Court too has declared that secularism is a part of the “basic structure” of the Indian Constitution (and according to the Court, the basic structure of the Constitution cannot be altered or destroyed through amendments by the Parliament). Thus, the Indian Constitution directs the State not to discriminate between citizens on the basis of their religious faith. It establishes a single citizenship, meaning that all citizens irrespective of their religion are equal citizens, and all are guaranteed equal enjoyment of legal, social and economic rights.

In contrast to this secular nationalism, the RSS believes in religious nationalism. It upholds the definition of V.D. Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar, who defined citizenship on the basis of ancestry and religion. *They defined Hindus as the primary citizens of India, since both their ancestry and religion were indigenous to India.* On the basis of this definition, while the RSS considers Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs as Hindus as these religions originated in India, it considers Muslims and Christians as foreigners.

On the eve of independence (August 14, 1947), the RSS organ *Organiser* carried the following piece that clearly elucidates the RSS definition of nationalism:

Let us no longer allow ourselves to be influenced by false notions of nationhood. Much of the mental confusion and the present and future troubles can be removed by the ready recognition of the simple fact that in Hindusthan only the Hindus form the nation and the national structure must be built on that safe and sound foundation . . . the nation itself must be built up of Hindus, on Hindu traditions, culture, ideas and aspirations.⁷

The same views have been echoed by Golwalkar in his writings, where he makes it clear that the Indian nation is only for Hindus, and others can only stay on in India as second-grade citizens:

The foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e., of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights.⁸

Such a narrow definition of nationalism clearly stands in opposition to the concept of nationalism espoused by the Indian Constitution that grants equality to all citizens, irrespective of their religion.

Distorting History to Justify Hindus as Primary Citizens

Modern Anthropology, the scientific study of the origin and development of human beings, believes on the basis of genetic and fossil evidence that modern human beings evolved from 'archaic Homo sapiens' around 200,000 to 100,000 years ago, and then began migrating to other parts of the world around 60,000 years ago.

Professional historians researching early Indian history today believe that Aryans migrated to northern India, most probably from the Indo-Iranian borderlands and the Oxus plain, around 1500 BC. The *Rigveda* was composed by them around the period 1500–1000 BC. This theory is based on an unbiased analysis of archaeological and linguistic evidence; an essential requirement of history is the pursuit of truth without religious, racial, regional or national biases.⁹

But both these theories are anathema to the RSS and other Hindu fundamentalists. Because they knock the bottom out of their definition of Hindus being the original inhabitants of India, and Muslims / Christians being foreigners. And so, the RSS is manufacturing history to prove that the Aryans never came to India from outside but originated in India.

If Aryans represent the original indigenous Indians, then the Harappan civilisation too must have been founded by the Aryans, and the authors of the *Rigveda* must have been the people of the Indus cities. For this, it is necessary that the date of the *Rigveda* be pushed back; with the coming of the Modi Government to power in 2014, Delhi University's Sanskrit Department has now started claiming that the Rigvedic period lasted from 8000 BC to 5000 BC.¹⁰ Even though all evidence points to the fact that the Harappan civilisation and the Rigvedic people are two totally different cultures, the former are a complex urban society, the latter village-based pastoral society. But then RSS historiography has nothing to do with historical evidence; it believes in creating evidence to fit with RSS theory. To establish Harappan civilisation as Vedic, N.S. Rajaram, a Hindutva propagandist, manipulated evidence on a computer to prove the depiction of a unicorn on a broken Harappan seal as a horse (the Indus valley had no horse, while the Rigvedic people had horses). RSS scholars even claim that the Indus script is a form of early Sanskrit.

Even though scholars have convincingly exposed these frauds, it makes no difference to the RSS, their propaganda continues.¹¹ Under the NDA/BJP, official Indian archaeology prefers to refer to the Harappan civilisation by a new name, “Sindhu–Sarasvati”, thereby imposing on the Indus culture a definitely Vedic nomenclature; it matters little that the ‘mighty Sarasvati’ supposedly flowing down to the sea through the desert is a sheer figment of imagination with no support from geography or geology.¹²

In fact, the RSS claims that the Hindus are the original people of the world. During the period of the previous NDA government (1998–2004), Sangh ideologues got the Geological Society of India to release a memoir in 1999 claiming that humankind evolved and diffused from ‘the upper Sarasvati region’, that is, northern Haryana.¹³

2. Manufacturing an Enemy

The most important formula used by the RSS for its project of uniting the Hindus is borrowed from the Nazis—just like the Nazis sought to unite the German nation against the Jews, the RSS is seeking to unite the Hindus against an imagined enemy, the minorities, especially the Muslims and Christians. In case it succeeds in this, then this demographic majority can be converted into a permanent political majority, and the RSS can permanently rule the country by winning state and central elections, and transform India as per its ideological leanings.

To give a theoretical founding to this Goebbelsian propaganda against the Muslims and Christians, the RSS has again resorted to manufacturing history. RSS historians have fabricated an extremely distorted history of medieval India, that is, of the period of the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire. They have dubbed it as a Muslim period and a period of foreign rule, described it as a dark age and attempted to portray Muslims as destructive barbarians and immoral degenerates.

The historians of the Sangh Parivar have proceeded to provide ‘literature’ to substantiate these claims. Thus, K.S. Lal, one of RSS’s favourite historians, in one of his books claimed that the Indian population declined from 190 to 120 million between AD 1200 and 1500, through large-scale massacres of Hindus perpetrated by Muslims. There were no censuses in those days; his own mental agility provided him with the statistics needed to put forth this claim.¹⁴

Another major component of the RSS’s view of medieval India is the supposed temple-destruction orgies indulged in by Muslim kings.

The fact is, destruction of royal temples of enemy kings was an established part of the polity of medieval India, and it was so for centuries before the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate by the Turks in 12th century AD. That is because in those days, royal temples were thoroughly political institutions. The priests of the royal temple endowed the deity in that temple with attributes of supernatural power, and the same deity was understood as having a very special relationship with the king; the king was considered to be deriving his power to rule over his kingdom and people with the blessings of the deity. Therefore, when one king fought and defeated another, to sweep away all vestiges of the authority of the defeated king in the conquered territory, the victorious king often used to loot or destroy the royal temple of the defeated king that legitimised the latter's authority, and the image of the state-deity was often carried away to the victor's capital. Temples that were not so identified and that were therefore not so politically relevant were normally left unharmed.

And so, Indian history from early medieval period onwards abounds in numerous instances of temple desecration and destruction that occurred whenever kings of different dynasties—Pallavas, Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, Pandyas, Cholas, Pratiharas, Candellas, Kalingas, Palas, etc.—fought each other. The same trend continued after the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate by the Turks, and later, the founding of the Mughal Empire. They too desecrated royal temples for precisely the same reason—it was considered a normal means for severing the authority of a former Hindu king from his former kingdom. In addition, sometimes temples were desecrated when the Hindu patrons of prominent temples committed an act of treason against the “Muslim” kings they served. During this latter period, the so-called Muslim period, though it is not possible to arrive at an exact figure, from contemporary literary and epigraphic sources of that period historians have estimated that around 80 temples were desecrated in a period spanning roughly five centuries. On the other hand, the list of temples built and reconstructed with grants from the Mughal emperors is a very long one. While RSS propagandists are silent about this, they have conjured up a figure of 60,000 temples having been destroyed by Muslim kings!¹⁵

One difficulty that RSS historians face while describing Muslim kings as barbarians is to reconcile this with beautiful monuments left behind by them that indicate a high level of art. For this, RSS 'scholars' have come up with a facile explanation—these were all built earlier by Hindus, and were later simply misappropriated by Muslims. Almost

every 'Muslim' monument now has such a 'history' attached to it. For instance, in 1989, Indian newspapers reported a claim made by a US-based Sangh 'scholar' of a carbon-14 date obtained for a door of the Taj Mahal that put it 200 years earlier than Shahjahan's time, thereby suggesting a pre-17th century 'Hindu' construction. Since then, nearly three decades have passed; till today, the laboratory, the number of the sample and the source which provided the piece of wood has not been divulged.¹⁶

One additional, but important fact, before we close this discussion about the so-called barbarism of the Muslim kings. Sangh ideologues describe this period as one wherein Muslims exploited the wealth and surplus of Hindus. The absurdity of this claim becomes obvious from a study of the detailed locality-wise enumeration of zamindar castes in the great Mughal survey, the *Ain-i Akbari* (around 1595 AD): the bulk of the zamindar class comprised Hindu upper castes. Moreover, it was the Hindu Banya merchants and bankers who controlled much of the trade during the Mughal period. A significant portion of the military chieftains were also Hindus; it has been estimated that even during Aurangzeb's time, around 30% of his commanders were Hindus—mainly Rajputs and Marathas.¹⁷ So, to describe this period as 'foreign rule' or 'Muslim period' is ridiculous.

This also explains why, in 1857, during the first Indian War of Independence, Hindus and Muslims fought together against the British. The revolt began in Meerut with the Bengal Army, in which Brahmin soldiers constituted the largest number; over 100,000 soldiers of the army revolted, marched to Delhi, and proclaimed Bahadur Shah Zafar as the Emperor of Hindustan. The same declaration was made by numerous other regional potentates. Whether it be Hindu and Muslim sipahis, or whether it be Rani Laxmibai, Naha Saheb, General Bakht Khan (the revolutionary commander of Delhi), Ferozshah and Moulvi Fazal Haq, or whether it be Maulana Ameer Ali (a famous Maulvi of Ayodhya) and Baba Ramcharan Das (the priest of Hanuman Garhi) of Ayodhya (who together organised the revolutionary army in Ayodhya, and were hanged together by the British), all fought together, making no distinction amongst themselves on the basis of their religion, for a common cause—against the brutal exploitation of the English 'firangees'.

Colonial Historiography

Ironically, the historiography of the RSS is essentially a colonial construct, first propagated by the British historian James Mill in his

The History of India published in 1818–23. He divided the history of India into Hindu, Muslim and British periods. The first period was described as a golden period that lasted for 2000 years; during the second period of 800 years, Hindus had suffered under Muslim despotism; and the third, British, period had liberated the Hindus from this tyranny and modernised the country.¹⁸ It was a deliberate construct, to justify British colonialists as liberators. As the freedom struggle intensified, the British colonialists also found this theory very suitable to divide Indians along communal lines and thereby weaken the freedom struggle. Rather than question this colonial interpretation of Indian history that was crafted to weaken the nation, the 'nationalist' RSS believes in it!

This construct of Indian history was based on a European perception of religion. In Europe, religion was generally monolithic. And so, the British colonialists assumed that the units of Indian society too were monolithic religious communities—primarily the Hindus and the Muslims—which were mutually hostile. On the basis of this understanding, they carried out the Census of 1872, and came to the conclusion that Hindus were the majority community, and Muslims and others were minority communities!¹⁹

Brahmanas and Shramanas

The fact is, in pre-Islamic times, that is, before 12th and 13th century AD, the literature of that period does not have any mention of the word 'Hinduism'! There is only reference to two broad categories of sects, called the Brahmanas and the Shramanas. The former referred to sects that believed in brahmanical beliefs and rituals, and the latter to the Buddhist, Jain and other monks of the so-called heterodox orders. These two broad categories too were not monolithic groups, but rather were a collection of diverse sects. Then, apart from sect, there was also another important identity, of caste. There was also another category, those whom we call the Dalit today, who were found in every religion under different names, even in those sects that claimed equality of all in the eyes of God. The hierarchy of castes, together with the multiplicity of sects, and their variations from region to region, together created a very complex social structure. Today, as a consequence of British colonial historiography, we call all of them together as 'Hindus'. But in those days, they did not identify themselves as such; they in fact had no common term by which they identified themselves, because they did not see themselves as belonging to a single religious community!²⁰

The word *Hindu* is of Persian (Farsi) origin, and originally was a geographical term; it was only later that it acquired a religious connotation. The Iranians and other West Asians used this word to refer to the inhabitants living in the land beyond the river Sindhu (in Farsi, Sindhu is pronounced as Hindu). Similar is the origin of the word *Hindusthan*. This too is Persian; in Persian, the word 'sthan' is used as a suffix while referring to a region (in contrast, in Sanskrit 'sthan' means a particular place). The use of the word *Hindusthan* is seen in the inscriptions of the Sasanid Empire in the 4th century AD, and refers to the region east of River Sindhu.²¹ The Hindutvawadis, who consider all people other than Hindus as foreigners, apparently have no problem with the fact that the very word they use for themselves, *Hindu*, is of foreign origin!

With the arrival of Islam and more so with the presence of the Sufis, the exploration of religious ideas—orthodox and heterodox—expanded, as did the number of sects. Some took orthodox positions, others held out mixed beliefs and worship. A particularly notable development was the rise of the various Bhakti cults across the country, including the Shaiva and Vaishnava Alvars and Nayannars of the Tamil speaking region, the Lingayats in Karnataka, the teachings of Namdeo, Jnaneshvara and Tukaram in Maharashtra, of Kabir, Suradas, Mira and Tulsidas in what are today called the Hindi speaking areas, of Chaitanya and Shankaradeva in eastern India and of Lalla in Kashmir, and so many others. The various Bhakti sects were to varying degrees inheritors of the Shramanic tradition. This was also the period that saw the resurgence of the Shakta sects and Tantric rituals. With so many new developments, the RSS version of history, that this period saw massive persecution of Hindus by Muslims, simply does not hold water.²²

The 'Hindu' view of the 'Muslims' was also not expressed in religious terms, but in ethnic, geographical and cultural identities. Thus, the Turks were referred to as 'Turushkas', while the Greeks and others from West Asia were called 'Yavanas' and 'Shakas'. Initially, the term Musalman or Muslim was not used; and the term Mohammadan came to be used much later, during colonial times.²³

Of course, all must not have been very peaceful in those days; there must have been tensions, persecutions, violence. The interaction between what we call Hinduism and Islam today must have also led to confrontations and conflicts. But they were not purely religious conflicts; there was a strong aspect of politics also involved. Furthermore, such conflicts were not new to India. In an earlier

period, Patanjali likened the enmity between the Brahmanas and Shramanas to that between the snake and the mongoose; and then in the late first millennium and early second millennium AD, there is evidence of persecution of Jains in the south, including desecration of Jain temples and beheading of Jain monks, particularly by the Shaiva sects.²⁴

The point we are trying to make is, the RSS portrayal of medieval Indian history as a period when Hindus and Muslims were continually at war with each other is a complete fabrication. The fact of the matter is, Hindus and Muslims did not see themselves as belonging to two distinct unified religious communities. Therefore the question of they being continually at war with each other, as RSS historians make them out to be, simply does not arise! It is a deliberate falsification of history, so as to use this to divide people along communal lines today.

RSS and the Shramana Tradition

RSS historiography does not accept this beautifully diverse and pluralistic history of India. It believes in a unitary Hindu identity having its origin in the Vedas. It considers only Vedic civilisation, that is, the Brahmana tradition, to constitute Indian history. Therefore, it does not recognise cultural or philosophical or religious strands that have their origins outside the Vedic corpus; it in fact does not even recognise the existence of the Shramana tradition.

And so, the RSS does not recognise the contributions of Buddhism and Jainism, more so because they were critical of Brahmin priesthood and emphasised Prakrit more than Sanskrit. RSS textbooks do not acclaim Emperor Ashok for his religious tolerance, as he was a strong supporter of Buddhism. The RSS does not acknowledge the contributions of Dravidians or Adivasis or Dalits to the development of a composite Indian culture. For instance, linguistics specialists have found some Dravidian linguistic elements in Vedic Sanskrit. This discovery opens up the fascinating possibility that there probably existed other cultures too during the Rigvedic period. However, for RSS historians, this has created a big headache, as they believe in an exclusive Aryan past to Indian history. So, they have been cooking up all kinds of theories to explain away the presence of Dravidian words in the *Rigveda*!²⁵ Similarly, the RSS has also been dismissive of movements like the Bhakti movement, as they are severely critical of Brahmanical religious practices and superstitions.

Social–Cultural–Economic Development in Medieval India

In contrast to the description by RSS historians of the medieval period as being a dark age in which Hindus were persecuted by Muslims, during this period the diverse indigenous culture of the Indian subcontinent intermingled with Islamic culture, and a new syncretic culture was born, resulting in great advances in the realms of art, literature, music, architecture, painting and the crafts. An important contributing factor was the policy of religious tolerance pursued by the kings of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Emperors. With Akbar and his vizier Abul Fazl in particular, the perception of India as home to different traditions interacting and adjusting with each other received an enormous reinforcement. All this created the conditions for Indian society to continually advance culturally–socially–economically during the medieval period. This was further helped by unification of large parts of India achieved first under the Delhi Sultanate and later the Mughal Empire. In his famous book *The Influence of Islam on Indian Culture* written in 1928, Dr. Tarachand, one of India's foremost historians, emphatically states that this helped "to create a political uniformity and a sense of larger allegiance".²⁶

This created the conditions for the first stirrings of nationalism. Strangely, there is no writing in Sanskrit in ancient India that expresses love for Bharat or India. The first writing, which can be called nationalist writing or patriotic writing, which expresses love for India and sings paens to this land, is a long poem in Persian written by the renowned court poet Amir Khusrau in 1318 AD, called *Nuh Sipihri*. Here he favourably compares India and its people to other countries. He glorifies India's natural beauty, climate, Brahmanical scholarship, the excellence of its languages (particularly Sanskrit), and the contributions made by Indians to the world, namely the tales of *Panchatantra*, chess and the decimal placement of numerals. After this, in the subsequent decades and centuries, several other poets wrote patriotic poems, many of them again in Persian.²⁷ If this period was indeed one of 'foreign rule', these were very strange writings!

This socio-cultural development was paralleled by considerable economic progress. Indian society, by the 17th century, had achieved "an unprecedented level of industrial and commercial prosperity, reflected in general urbanisational growth. There was an intensification, expansion and multiplication of crafts, and of both internal and international trade."²⁸ It is estimated that in 1750, India accounted for almost a quarter of the world manufacturing output.²⁹ A

British Royal Industrial Commission of 1916–1918 recalled that Indian industrial development was “not inferior to that of the more advanced European nations” when “merchant adventurers from the West” arrived in India; other British studies indicate that it may even be “that the industries of India were far more advanced than those of the West up to the advent of the industrial revolution.”³⁰

So much so for medieval India being a dark age!

3. Subverting Democracy

The British colonised India, systematically looted and plundered the country, destroyed its vibrant industry and agriculture, and turned its cities into ruins. With the objective of dividing the people of our country in the name of religion to facilitate their rule, they distorted Indian history and came up with a fraudulent theory that projected medieval India as being under the despotic rule of Muslim kings who subjected Hindus to immense persecution. This then served as a justification for British colonialism—that they had come to liberate the Hindus from Muslim tyranny. The RSS has appropriated this distorted colonial history and shamelessly propagates it, as it helps to create the social conditions for implementing its fascist agenda.

It is amazing how many people believe in this rubbish propagated by the RSS as history. But it has been doing so for nearly 90 years now; and as its idol, Goebbels, stated,

If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.

Apart from demonising the Muslims as 'historical enemies' of Hindus, the RSS for decades has been spreading malicious propaganda about the Muslims, such as that they have four wives and a dozen children, because of which their population is rapidly increasing and they are conspiring to ultimately become the majority in the country and take it over and make it a Islamic country. This propaganda has been going on for so many decades that it has become established as a kind of social common sense—most Hindus believe this. The reality is quite the opposite, and has been brought out in several surveys. The 1961 Census was the last one to look at marriages by religion and community. That survey found that incidence of polygamy was the least among Muslims, with just 5.7% of the community likely to practice it. Hindus actually had a higher incidence rate of polygamy, at 5.8%. Subsequent data also confirm this. A survey carried out by the government in 1974 put the

polygamy figure at 5.6% among Muslims, and 5.8% for upper-caste Hindus. Research by Mallika B. Mistry of the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics in Pune in 1993 also concluded that “there is no evidence that the percentage of polygamous marriage (among Muslims) is larger than for Hindus.”³¹

As regards population growth rates, Census data show that while the share of Hindus in the total population has marginally decreased from 80.5% to 79.8% over the decade 2001–11, the share of Muslims has marginally increased from 13.4% to 14.2%. But what is more important is that not only is the decadal growth rate of both communities declining, the decline has been sharper among Muslims than Hindus over the last three decades! As shown in Table 1, the decline in the growth rate for Muslims—4.9 percentage points—is greater than that for Hindus—3.1 percentage points—as compared to the last decade. While the Muslim population is still growing at a faster rate, the gap between the two growth rates is decreasing and the two rates are beginning to converge over time.³²

Table 1: Decadal Growth Rate³³ (%)

	1991–2001	2001–11
Hindus	19.9	16.8
Muslims	29.3	24.6
Christians	22.5	15.5

But Census data also reveal that there is nothing like a “Hindu growth rate” and a “Muslim growth rate”; it is nothing but fundamentalist propaganda. Fertility rates vary from region to region, depending upon factors like female education, availability of health care, and employment opportunities. Thus, Bihar has 15% Muslim population while Kerala has 25% Muslim population. Yet, in 2001–2011, Bihar’s overall population grew by 25% while Kerala’s population grew by 5%—that is, despite the fact that there are more Muslims in Kerala, the overall population growth rate of Bihar was five times the growth rate of Kerala.³⁴

Post-independence, the RSS has also been targeting Christians as enemies, and claiming that Christian missionaries are converting innocent Hindus to Christianity in large numbers. The census figures convincingly debunk RSS propaganda. The Christian population has remained constant in the country at 2.3% during the past two decades.³⁵

The doctoring of mass consciousness that the RSS has been doing for the last so many decades through its innumerable fronts and tens of thousands of activists has enabled it to polarise the communities. It has made them think of themselves first as Hindus, Muslims or Christians rather than as citizens of a secular country, and has established in the minds of Hindus that Muslims and Christians are their enemies and have been so for centuries.

With the coming to power of the BJP, the RSS and the various fronts spawned by it have intensified the spread of their communal propaganda with great speed.

Post-2014: RSS Intensifying Communalisation

Ever since the BJP has come to power with a majority of its own, all kinds of Sadhus and Sadhvis and Yogis have been spitting poison on Muslims and Christians; and despite strong laws in this country against communal speeches, not one such leader has gone to jail. Sakshi Maharaj called upon Hindu women to produce four children, as Muslims are overtaking the Hindu population; not to be left behind, Sadhvi Prachi prescribed eight children for Hindu women. Yogi Adityanath, another rabble rouser, called all mosques dens of pigs, and stated that if one Hindu girl is converted, then 100 Muslim girls should be converted to Hinduism. Sadhvi Niranjana Jyoti, a minister in the Modi government, stated that all those who are non-Hindus are *haramzade* (illegitimate); while Giriraj Singh, another minister, before his elevation to the Cabinet, stated that those not voting for Modi should go to Pakistan.³⁶

The Hindu fundamentalists have launched new hate campaigns to deepen the communal divide. In one such campaign, Hindutva activists have been going from house to house, warning Hindu families to protect their daughters from the evil intentions of Muslim youth, who they claim have launched a *love-jihad* to win over Hindu girls. In several localities, they have even put up communal hate-filled posters on this issue.

In several parts of the country, fundamentalist goons have attacked young people from different communities for fraternising or partying. Right-wing youth activists have attacked coffee shops objecting to boys and girls from different religions sitting together and having coffee, and have stopped boys and girls from different communities for riding together on two-wheelers.

More recently, in UP, the BJP went to town alleging that Muslims in Kairana had forced more than 300 Hindu families to leave their

homes and migrate; the allegation later turned out to be completely false. With state elections approaching, the BJP has been resorting to more and more such gimmicks in the hope that this will polarise the electorate and lead to a rich harvest of votes.³⁷

Another issue in whose name Muslims are being terrorised across the country is beef eating. In several states, laws have existed on the statute books for years banning cow slaughter and the sale of beef. But with the coming to power of the BJP at the Centre and in several states, Hindutva goons have been attacking, and even lynching-killing Muslim youth, alleging that they are slaughtering cows! This, when it is not just Muslims, but also Christians and large numbers of tribals, Dalits and Backward Castes who eat beef. Beef is actually the most important source of protein for the poor in India.³⁸ This ban is therefore nothing but 'food fascism', imposing the dietary choice of upper caste Hindus, especially the Brahmins, on the rest of the population. And even as far as Brahmins are concerned, Swami Vivekananda himself points out:

There was a time in this very India when, without eating beef, no Brahmin could remain a Brahmin; you read in the Vedas how, when a Sannyasin, a king, or a great man came into a house, the best bullock was killed . . .³⁹

It is true that after the coming of BJP to power in 2014, there have been no large scale killings, like that of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 and Christians in Kandhamal in 2007–08. But that is not because the BJP–RSS have become less communal than before. It appears that the international outrage and widespread condemnation across the country that followed the genocides in Gujarat and Kandhamal have made the RSS change its strategy towards riots. The new strategy is not to kill the minorities in large numbers, but attack their religious places, burn down their property and cause extensive damage to their livelihoods. In other words, the new strategy is to indulge in low-key but sustained micro-violence against Muslims and Christians—and thus keep communal pot boiling on low intensity flames. The RSS hopes that this will keep the Hindus united behind the BJP and enable it to consolidate its hold over the country in the coming elections to the states and the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.⁴⁰

And so, in just the first year of the Modi Government, there have been over 600 incidents of violence against religious minorities across the country.⁴¹ The pattern is the same everywhere: Hindu organisations cook up local disputes—over land for masjids and

graveyards, an offending loudspeaker in a mosque, an accusation that a Muslim boy has eloped with a Hindu girl (*love-jihad*), or that a Muslim youth has butchered a cow—and very soon, the local Hindu population is mobilised to attack the local Muslim population, desecrate their religious places, burn down their homes and shops . . .

Attacking Opponents by Branding them Anti-Nationals

The Sangh Parivar has launched a brutal offensive to silence all opposition, labelling all opponents of the regime as anti-nationals, hounding them through sections of the media who have abandoned all media ethics and have become stooges of the ruling party, getting a docile police force to arrest them under false charges of sedition . . . It is getting uncannily similar to the tactics used by the Nazis.

One of the important targets of this Hindutva offensive is our universities. In democracies, universities are meant to be places that kindle concern for the oppressed, defend the idea of pluralism, and foster tolerance and respect for diversity of views. If universities are to be reduced to factories producing mindless automatons in the service of a mind-numbing, virulent Hindu nationalism, then this very idea of a university needs to be destroyed. And so, the BJP has launched a violent assault on our universities, blatantly interfering in their functioning, and targeting independent-minded teachers and students. Thus, in May 2015, under pressure from the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), IIT Madras banned a student group, Ambedkar–Periyar Study Circle (APSC), for sowing disaffection against the Prime Minister and ‘the Hindus’. In August 2015, the ABVP got the Hyderabad Central University to suspend five activists of the Ambedkar Students Association, that eventually pushed one of them, Rohith Vemula, to commit suicide in January 2016. In February 2016, the ABVP hatched a plan to target the progressive and left student groups in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). It got the police to enter the campus and arrest JNU students’ union president Kanhaiya Kumar on the charge of sedition accusing him of shouting anti-India slogans on the basis of a doctored video! And then the pro-BJP TV channels launched a campaign to malign the university as a hotbed of anti-nationals. It is not that earlier regimes did not interfere in the functioning of universities; but it is the first time (with the exception of the Emergency) that a party in power at the Centre has launched such a widespread campaign against the freedoms enjoyed by universities, even organised violent onslaughts by vigilante groups, and attempted to silence all deviant voices.

Intellectuals speaking out against the growing climate of intolerance in the country are being attacked. After Mohammed Akhlaq was lynched in Dadri (Uttar Pradesh) by a mob on the mere rumour that he and his family had stored beef in their house, hundreds of intellectuals from across the disciplines, including novelists, essayists, playwrights, poets, filmmakers, artists, historians and scientists, returned national awards given by the country's most prestigious institutions. Instead of listening to their concerns, the BJP attacked them for their "ideological intolerance", while the RSS denounced them as suffering from "disease of secularism"; BJP 'intellectuals' even organised a rally against them! Nivedita Menon, professor of political thought at the JNU and a feminist writer, was viciously attacked for a lecture on nationalism. Zee News, a TV channel that has become infamous for its proximity to the BJP, selectively plucked out quotes from a speech delivered by her to students at JNU, and repeatedly aired them to brand Prof. Menon as an anti-national, after which organisations linked to the BJP filed cases against her in Delhi and Kanpur. Soon after, the same TV channel went after scientist and well-known Urdu poet Gauhar Raza. Although his poem, recited on March 5, 2016 at the 51st Shankar–Shad Mushaira—a prestigious platform for Urdu poets of India and Pakistan—had no mention of terrorism or Afzal Guru, the channel branded him as a member of *Afzal premi gang* and therefore a *desh drohi*.⁴²

Even more serious, divisive, and promoting hatred are the pronouncements by BJP leaders and Hindutva goons valorising people like Dhananjay Desai who is in jail for instigating people to murder a Muslim youth in Pune, and Nathuram Godse, the killer of Mahatma Gandhi.

Undoubtedly, it is this atmosphere of hatred and intolerance being created by the BJP–RSS that has given birth to the fascist goons who have murdered Dr. Dabholkar, Comrade Govind Pansare and Prof. M.M. Kalburgi.

4. Subverting Education to Spread Communal Poison

Ever since its formation in 1925, the RSS has been following the principle that enduring political power can only be built if it is able to culturally win over the vast majority to its ideology of Hindutva. And that can only be a long historical process.

To propagate its ideology of Hindutva at the grassroots, one of the important methods it has been pursuing is to indoctrinate children

with its ideology in the guise of education, and poison their minds with hatred and distrust about minorities, especially the Christians and Muslims. The formation of governments in several states by the BJP in the 1990s, and at the Centre in 1998, has enabled it to use State patronage to spread its educational network. The net consequence is that the RSS has been able to create a mindboggling network of educational institutions across the country. By 2012–13, its school network had expanded to 13,465 schools, 31.2 lakh students, 1.3 lakh teachers, and 49 colleges and training schools. It has also opened thousands of schools for providing informal education to children unable to attend formal schools, pre-school centres, schools and hostels for Adivasi children, and so on.⁴³

In these schools, in order to indoctrinate students in Hindutva ideological values, much attention is focused on everyday rituals that punctuate the school day. Thus, Sanskrit terms are used to address teachers (*Acharya*); classrooms are named after Hindu sages; birthdays of Shivaji and Jijabai, Vivekananda, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya and Savarkar are celebrated as special days; during the morning prayers and at the end of the school day, children chant Brahmanical shlokas in Sanskrit such as the *Gayatri Mantra*; and so on.⁴⁴

A key component of the curriculum in these schools is to indoctrinate students with the distorted, communalised history propagated by the RSS. Way back in 1993–94, a National Steering Committee on Textbook Evaluation set up by the National Council of Research and Training (NCERT), consisting of widely respected eminent scholars, conducted an evaluation of school textbooks prescribed in Vidya Bharti schools, and made the alarming diagnosis that:

(many of these textbooks were) designed to promote bigotry and religious fanaticism in the name of inculcating knowledge of culture in the young generation.⁴⁵

Communalisation of the Government School System

With the coming to power of the BJP at the Centre in 1998, the RSS got a golden opportunity to spread its ideology within the government school network. As the first step, it replaced heads and key personnel of all institutions that had anything to do with education, such as the NCERT, University Grants Commission (UGC), Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR) and the Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR), with people who were willing

to implement the saffron agenda.⁴⁶

It next trashed the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), which provides the framework for making syllabi, textbooks and teaching practices within the school education programmes in India. In 2000, the HRD Ministry released a new NCF-2000, which had a strong inject of the texts taught in RSS schools that propagate hatred towards minorities, and also introduced Brahmanical religious education in the name of value education. Based on this new NCF, new textbooks were introduced in the 2002–03 academic session. Most notably, the existing history books written by some of India's best known and internationally acclaimed historians were withdrawn altogether, and replaced by books written by people whose chief qualification was their closeness to the Sangh ideology.⁴⁷

The BJP ruled states moved quickly to implement the new NCF-2000, and revised their textbooks to incorporate the Hindu nationalist framework. They also introduced additional textbooks written by RSS ideologues as supplementary reading in schools. Thus, in Gujarat, where the BJP has been in power since 1998, the state government has prescribed nine textbooks on the importance of Bharatiya Sanskriti (Indian culture) and the 'Hindu' code of conduct as supplementary reading for primary and secondary schools in the state. Eight of these books have been written by Dinanath Batra, a long-time RSS activist. These books contain anecdotes like the story of a king who was unable to have children and was advised to worship cows, after which he was blessed with several children. Some of his gems on science are: *Pushpak Viman*, a flying chariot used by Rama, was the first aeroplane in the world; and that Rishis (sages) were scientists whose inventions in the fields of technology, medicine and science have been appropriated by the West. The ninth book, *Tejomay Bharat*, is equally bizarre. It claims that stem cell research originated in India thousands of years ago, and as proof for this, gives the story of the birth of one hundred Kauravas from the aborted flesh of Gandhari. It also claims that what we know as the motor car existed during the Vedic period.⁴⁸

The BJP lost the 2004 Parliamentary elections and the Congress-led UPA came to power in May 2004. It moved quickly to draft a new NCF-2005 to replace the BJP's communal NCF. However, the BJP ruled states refused to implement the new NCF-2005, and continued to use their own communal textbooks.

With the BJP sweeping to power again in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, one of the first steps it has taken is to begin the process of drafting a new NCF to replace the UPA's NCF-2005.⁴⁹

Saffronising Educational, Cultural, Research Institutions

The aim of the fascists is not just communalising school education; they want to communalise the entire educational and cultural atmosphere of the country. And so, the RSS is systematically and brazenly replacing the heads of all important academic, cultural and research institutions with individuals from the parochial Hindutva stable. It does not matter if these individuals are not suitably qualified to head these important institutions; they must be capable enough to transform these institutions into vehicles for saffron propaganda.

Y. Sudershan Rao, a RSS historian notorious for his anti-Muslim views and support for the Hindu caste system, has been appointed chief of the prestigious Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR); the Central Advisory Board of Education has been reconstituted and filled with yoga teachers, Sanskrit scholars and even actors; Lokesh Chandra, an 87 year old man who claims that Modi is "an incarnation of God" has been appointed head of the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR); Baldev Sharma, former editor of the RSS mouthpiece *Panchjanya* has been appointed Chairman of the National Book Trust; Pahlaj Nihalani, who crafted the BJP's election slogan "Har Ghar Modi, Ghar Ghar Modi", has been appointed chairperson of the Central Board of Film Certification; and so on. Amongst the most doozy of these appointments is the choice of Gajendra Chauhan, a C-grade actor with no inclination to arts and aesthetics, to head India's premier institution of film and television, the Film and Television Institute of India. Equally wacky is the appointment of former cricketer and two-time BJP MP Chetan Chauhan as the chief of the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT). RSS men are being appointed as Vice Chancellors of universities across the country—from Allahabad University to Hyderabad Central University to the JNU.⁵⁰

Even India's best science and technology institutions are not being spared. In December 2014, the Director of IIT Delhi, Dr. R.K. Shevgaonkar, put in his papers, in all probability because of the growing interference of the RSS in the institution. Two months later, nuclear scientist Anil Kakodkar resigned as chairman of the Board of Governors, IIT Bombay, accusing the HRD Ministry of a casual approach and "wrongdoing" in the selection of IIT Directors.⁵¹

It is not that there was no interference by previous regimes in the cultural and intellectual life of the nation. But what is new with the purges being effected by the Modi Government is their systematic, organised, communally driven and ruthless character.

5. RSS and the Constitution

Secularism and democracy are intertwined. If secularism goes, democracy goes too. And so it is that our Constitution considers both secularism and democracy to be core principles.

The RSS does not believe in secularism. It is seeking to transform secular India into a Hindu Rashtra, where minorities will have to live under the dominance of the majority Hindu community.

The RSS does not believe in democracy too. While its political arm, the BJP, claims to believe in democracy and the principle of 'one person, one vote', democracy means much more than this. It means respecting and guaranteeing the rights of minorities; it means equal dignity for all, including minorities. Ever since the BJP has come to power, the Sangh Parivar has organised innumerable attacks on minorities, which have even led to several deaths, and in most cases, the law and order machinery has remained a mute spectator to this violence.

Neither does the RSS believe in equality. On the contrary, it believes in resurrecting all the traditional hierarchies of the past, sanctioned by the infamous law book of ancient India, the *Manusmriti*.

- The RSS does not believe in equality of men and women. It is in fact a very patriarchal organisation, and its membership is open to men only. It floated a front organisation for women, called the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti, in 1936, in response to pressure from some very vocal and enthusiastic women who wanted to join the RSS. No membership in the masculinist fraternity, the RSS declared, but you can have a separate organisation for yourself. The views of the RSS towards women are obvious from the name given to its women's wing. While the men are called 'volunteers' (*swayamsevaks*), the women are called *sevikas*, that is, they are expected to give humble service.
- The RSS is a firm believer in the caste system. Its second Sarsanghchalak (Supreme Leader), Guru Golwalkar, in his *Bunch of Thoughts* upholds the *Purush Sukta* of the *Rigveda* (wherein for the first time in Vedic literature the four varnas are mentioned and justified) that says: Brahmin is the head, King the hands, Vaishya the thighs and Shudra the feet. He goes on to write that "the people who have this fourfold arrangement, i.e., the Hindu People, is our God. This supreme vision of Godhead is the very core of our concept of 'nation' and has permeated our thinking and given rise to various unique concepts of our cultural heritage."⁵² Ever since the BJP has come to power, realising that

winning Dalit votes is crucial if it is to consolidate its hold on power, it has been seeking to appropriate Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. It is today claiming that his teachings are very close to the RSS ideology. But Dr. Ambedkar was a firm believer in the abolition of the caste system, and wrote a brilliant treatise *Annihilation of Caste*. The RSS being a fundamentalist Hindu organisation cannot of course profess this. And so, in a deliberate subterfuge, to show its closeness to Dr. Ambedkar, the RSS has floated an organisation, the 'Samajik Samrasta Manch' (Social Harmony Forum), which works for bringing harmony among castes (without challenging the existence of caste).

And so, unsurprisingly, four days after the Indian Constitution was adopted by the Constituent Assembly on November 26, 1949, an editorial in the RSS organ *Organiser* complained:

In our constitution there is no mention of the unique constitutional development in ancient Bharat. Manu's Laws were written long before Lycurgus of Sparta or Solon of Persia. To this day his laws as enunciated in the Manusmriti excite the admiration of the world and elicit spontaneous obedience and conformity. But to our constitutional pundits that means nothing.⁵³

On January 25, 1950, a day before India was declared a republic, a retired high court judge by the name of Sankar Subbha Aiyar wrote an article "Manu Rules Our Hearts" in the *Organiser* affirming loyalty towards Manu's codes:

Even though Dr. Ambedkar is reported to have recently stated in Bombay that the days of Manu have ended it is nevertheless a fact that the daily lives of Hindus are even at the present day affected by the principles and injunctions contained in the Manusmriti and other Smrithis.⁵⁴

Golwalkar, who is considered to be amongst the foremost ideologues of the RSS, comments on the Indian Constitution:

Our Constitution too is just a cumbersome and heterogeneous piecing together of various articles from various Constitutions of the Western countries. It has absolutely nothing which can be called our own. Is there a single word of reference in its guiding principles as to what our national mission is and what our keynote in life is? No!⁵⁵

To conclude, the RSS does not believe in secularism, democracy and equality, all core principles of the Indian Constitution. In fact, after coming to power in 2014, the BJP very cleverly initiated a debate on removing the words 'Secular' and 'Socialist' from the Preamble of the Indian Constitution; the backlash was so severe that it had to temporarily drop the move. The RSS upholds the *Manusmriti*, the law code of ancient India, whose fundamental precepts are in direct opposition to the Indian Constitution.

There is little room for doubt. A spectre of fascism looms over the country. The growing strength of the RSS across the country, which is now being considerably facilitated by the coming to power of the BJP at the Centre in 2014, is threatening the very conception of India as a socialist, secular, democratic republic as visualised by our country's founders and enshrined in the Constitution of India.

WHY FASCISM?

What explains the growing power of fascist forces in India? For that, it is necessary to go back to the situation in the country two years ago, at the time of the 2014 Lok Sabha elections.

The policies of globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation (also called neoliberal policies) implemented in the country by successive governments that had come to power at the Centre since 1991 (including the BJP-led NDA during 1998–2004) had pushed the Indian economy into a deep external and internal crisis. They had also led to rising inflation, worsening unemployment, a huge increase in poverty and destitution, and a worsening agricultural crisis which had pushed a quarter-of-a-million farmers into committing suicide over the past decade. Worse, the UPA Government, that had been in power for a decade, was also mired in numerous scams.

Taking advantage of the disillusionment of the people with the UPA, Modi and the BJP launched a slick propaganda campaign, liberally funded by the country's biggest corporate houses, around slogans like development for all (*Sabka Sath – Sabka Vikas*), a corruption-free India, promising the people *Achhe Din*, and swept the elections. However, after coming to power, the BJP has completely reversed its position on every issue, and is implementing the very same policies of the previous UPA Government! The only difference is, it is implementing globalisation policies at a much faster pace.

Actually, it is precisely for this that the country's biggest corporate houses had funded Modi's election campaign—so that

neoliberal policies can be implemented at an accelerated pace. While pushing the country into a deep economic crisis, globalisation policies have also led to a huge increase in corporate profits and a massive increase in the wealth of the country's richie rich. Which is why India's elites—from corporate honchos to management gurus, influential economists, top academicians, leading journalists and celebrities—are all ecstatic about globalisation. But during the last years of the previous UPA government, it had not been able to push ahead with the globalisation agenda at the desired pace. On the other hand, Modi had a very successful record of favouring corporates during his Chief Ministership of Gujarat. At an investor meet in Ahmedabad, Ratan Tata drenched Modi in praise saying that a state would normally take 90 to 180 days to clear a new plant but, “in the Nano case, we had our land and approval in just two days.” Modi's ability to run the economy such that corporate houses can rake in big profits is best exemplified by the rapid rise of Gautam Adani from a small-time Gujarati businessman to one of India's richest corporate honchos in a little over a decade—during the very years Modi was Chief Minister of Gujarat.⁵⁶

And so, as the 2014 Lok Sabha elections approached, India's top corporate houses gradually came to the opinion that Modi should be backed for Prime Ministership. Anil Ambani stated: “Narendrabhai has done good for Gujarat and [imagine] what will happen if he leads the nation.” While his brother Mukesh Ambani gushed, “Gujarat is shining like a lamp of gold and the credit goes to the visionary, effective and passionate leadership provided by Narendra Modi.”⁵⁷ They liberally poured money into Modi's election campaign, making Modi's campaign expenditure the highest ever in India's election history. It was an unprecedented election campaign, what with 3D holographic rallies, extensive use of the social media as never before, and a mesmerising media campaign.

The BJP swept the elections. But in reality it was a victory for India's corporatocracy; they had succeeded in installing their man as the Prime Minister.

But what about the lynch-mobs looking for beef-eaters, *love jihadis* and anti-nationals? They are much needed, to act as a smokescreen for the corporate houses ruling the country. The Modi Government is running the country solely for the profit maximisation of big business houses. The neoliberal policies have led to a sharp increase in poverty, unemployment and destruction of livelihoods of the common people. Their attention needs to be diverted, so that they don't unite. Their

democratic rights need to be curbed, so that it becomes difficult for them to fight. As the economic crisis intensifies, the fascist onslaught is only going to worsen . . .

To fight fascism, it is therefore important to understand globalisation and the economic crisis gripping the country. Neo-liberalism and fascism are twin brothers; the former creates the ground for the latter, and the latter by its rejection of the principles of democracy, makes it possible for corporate houses to continue with their accelerated profit accumulation despite the worsening economic crisis.

GLOBALISATION

After India won independence in 1947, the economic model implemented in the country by the Nehru Government was essentially a model of autonomous capitalist development. Its most essential features—the mixed economy model, the Industrial Policy Resolutions of 1948 & 1956, and restrictions on foreign capital inflows—closely followed the economic plan proposed by the ‘Post-War Economic Development Committee’ set up by the Indian capitalists in 1942. The committee comprised of eight leading Indian industrialists, including Purshottamdas Thakurdas, J.R.D. Tata, G.D. Birla and Sri Ram. Its proposal, titled *A Plan of Economic Development of India*, popularly came to be known as the Bombay Plan or the Tata–Birla Plan.⁵⁸

Due to many reasons, by the late 1980s, this model was in crisis. One of the consequences of this crisis was that the Indian economy was trapped in an external debt crisis and was on the verge of external account bankruptcy (see Box).

India’s foreign creditors, that is, the USA and other developed countries—also known as the imperialist countries—were looking for just such an opportunity. They had been forced to retreat and grant independence to India and other countries of Asia and Africa due to their powerful independence struggles. Since then, they had always been looking for alternate ways to bring the former colonial world back under their hegemony and ensnare it once again in the imperialist network, so that they could once again control its raw material resources and exploit its markets. They now took advantage of this crisis to pressurise the Government of India to agree to a restructuring of the Indian economy.

By now, the Indian capitalist classes too came to the conclusion that in order to expand their profit accumulation, they must abandon their dream of independent capitalist development.⁵⁹ They decided to

Box: Some Economics

An external debt is different from an internal debt. For a third world country like India, the government can repay its internal debt by, say, increasing taxes on the people. However, an external debt is in international currency, like dollars, and it cannot be repaid in rupees. When for a country like India, its foreign exchange outflows (due to imports, profit repatriation by foreign companies in India, etc.) are more than its foreign exchange earnings (from exports, tourism earnings, remittances by workers abroad, etc.), one way of paying the difference, called the current account deficit, is by taking a dollar loan from abroad. But an interest has to be paid on this foreign debt, which also needs to be paid in dollars. Thus, debt servicing of the external debt leads to still more debt.

accept the conditionalities imposed by the imperialists, dismantle the Nehruvian model, and open up the economy to foreign investment and imports.

And so, in mid-1991, the Indian Government, in return for a huge foreign loan to tide over the foreign exchange crisis, signed an agreement with the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) [international financial institutions that are decisively controlled by the imperialist countries] pledging a thoroughgoing restructuring of the Indian economy. The main elements of this *Structural Adjustment Program* (SAP) accepted by the Government of India were:⁶⁰

- i) **Free Trade:** Removal of all curbs on imports and exports.
- ii) **Free Investment:** Removal of all restrictions on foreign investment in all sectors of the economy.
- iii) **Free Markets:** No government interference in the operation of the market. That means:
 - Ending of all subsidies to the poor, including food, health and education subsidies;
 - Privatisation of the public sector, including essential services like drinking water, health, education, etc.;
 - Removal of all government controls on profiteering, even in essential services.

It is this 'restructuring' of the Indian economy at the behest of the country's foreign creditors that has been given the grandiloquent

name, *globalisation*. This has been accompanied by the propagation of an economic doctrine popularly known as *neoliberalism* that claims that human well-being can best be advanced by free markets, including privatisation, free trade and deregulation.

Since 1991, while governments at the Centre have kept changing, globalisation of the Indian economy has continued unabated. Globalisation is the consensus policy of the entire Indian ruling class.

CONSEQUENCE: HEADING INTO FINANCIAL COLLAPSE

India began globalisation because it was entrapped in an external accounts and foreign exchange crisis. Two decades later, because of the very consequences of opening up the economy to unrestricted inflows of foreign capital and goods, India's external accounts are in a far worse state as compared to 1991. Before we give the statistics, we first need to explain some terms.

Balance of Payments on Current Account

Of a country's financial transactions with the outside world, the balance of payments on current account covers its day-to-day transactions with other nations.

■ **Balance of Payments on Current Account** = Merchandise Trade (i.e., visible trade) Account + Invisibles Account

- **Merchandise trade account:** This is trade in visible commodities—things you can see, such as agricultural goods, petroleum, textiles, motor cars and machinery. India earns less on merchandise exports than it spends on merchandise imports; thus it has a merchandise trade deficit, or, trade deficit for short.
- **Invisibles account:** This includes three other types of current receipts from, and payments to, those abroad:
 - **Services:** This includes components like: receipts from travel to India by foreigners and payments for travel abroad by Indians; or, earnings on IT-enabled services such as software and call centres, and payments for import of software.
 - **Remittances:** Remittances to India by Indian workers abroad and remittances out of India by foreign individuals in India.
 - **Investment income:** This includes receipts on Indian investment (including loans) abroad and payments on foreign investments (including debt) in India.

Because these three types of receipts/payments are not for visible commodities, they are all part of the 'invisibles' account. India receives much more on the invisibles account than it pays out, due to its earnings from export of software and software workers, and remittances from Indian workers working in the Gulf countries. Hence, in the net, India enjoys an invisibles account surplus.

For India, its merchandise trade deficit is much larger than its invisibles surplus, hence India runs what is called a current account deficit (CAD).

Some Statistics

(i) Trade Deficit

Import liberalisation has led to a sharp rise in our trade deficit. Even though the government has made desperate attempts to promote exports—because of which our exports have shot up from \$18 billion in 1991–92 to more than \$300 billion in 2012–13—due to a huge rise in imports, our trade deficit has zoomed: from \$2.8 billion in 1991–92, it shot up to \$190 billion in 2012–13, a rise of 60 times in just two decades. Since then, for various reasons, such as fall in oil prices, the trade deficit has declined, to \$130.1 billion in 2015–16.⁶¹

(ii) Current Account Deficit

The sharp rise in trade deficit for 2012–13 saw our CAD zooming to \$87.8 billion in 2012–13, from \$1.2 billion in 1991–92. India's CAD to GDP ratio was 4.8% in 2012–13, the highest ever, even more than its value in 1990–91 when it was 3%. Reduction in our oil import bill due to fall in global oil prices led to a contraction in the trade deficit, and hence the CAD too has eased to \$22.1 billion or 1.1% of the GDP for the financial year 2015–16. It is expected to widen again in 2016–17.⁶²

What Next?

When a country like India runs up a current account deficit, it needs to attract foreign capital inflows to bridge the deficit. These can be either in the form of capital investment flows, or more external borrowings.

- **Capital Investment Flows:** These investment flows can be of two types: (a) FDI (foreign direct investment) flows: these are investments in setting up new companies, or investments in existing companies of at least 10% of the paid up capital of a company; (b) FII (foreign institutional investment) or FPI

(Foreign Portfolio Investment) flows: investment in securities, that is, shares, bonds, debentures, options, etc. in the primary and secondary markets.

- **External Debt:** With India running up historically unprecedented current account deficits, we have been borrowing hugely, and so our external debt has gone through the roof! It stood at an astronomical \$485 billion in end-March 2016, up by nearly six times from \$83.8 billion in end-March 1991!⁶³

The problem is:

- Capital investment flows result in profit outflows. The more the FDI, the more the profit outflows in the coming years. To give an example of the rapid increase in dollar outflows on account of FDI, just the royalty payment from Maruti to its Japanese parent Suzuki had risen from Rs 495 crore in 2007–08 to Rs 2,454 crore in 2012–13, a rise of five times in five years!⁶⁴
- And, an interest has to be paid on external debt!

Both these therefore lead to a rise in CAD in the subsequent years, implying that in the coming years, the country will need even more capital investment inflows, or more external borrowings. It is a kind of debt trap!

But What About Our Foreign Exchange Reserves?

Despite our astronomical external debt, our finance ministers and official economists are telling us not to worry, as the country's external accounts situation is much better than it was in 1991. Their argument for this is that we have much more foreign exchange reserves than in 1990–91, and that they are at a comfortable level.

However, foreign exchange reserves do not represent foreign exchange earnings of a country, they include all the foreign capital inflows that have come into the country too. Therefore, to get an idea of the safety buffer provided by a country's foreign exchange reserves, they should be compared to the country's short-notice foreign exchange liabilities, that is, foreign capital that has come into the country that can leave very quickly. While it is true that our forex reserves are presently more than \$360 billion,⁶⁵ as we have shown elsewhere, these are much less than our total short-term liabilities.⁶⁶ This means that if the foreign investors decide to pull out their money, our foreign exchange reserves are not sufficient to prevent the economy from once again plunging into foreign exchange bankruptcy, similar to what had happened in 1990–91.

This make nonsense of the claim of our finance minister that our external accounts situation is robust. On the contrary, our economy is worse off than in 1991 when we began globalisation, because of our worsening external accounts crisis—our external debt is now nearly six times that of 1991.

INDIA ON 'SALE'

All this makes nonsense of the claim of our political leaders and establishment intellectuals that India is on its way to becoming an 'economic superpower'. The reality is the exact opposite. India's rulers have brought the Indian economy to the brink of an economic collapse. All that the international speculators have to do is start withdrawing their investments in India—which they can do at the tap of a computer key—and this 'superpower' will meltdown.

This is the reason why India's Prime Ministers, from Manmohan Singh to Narendra Modi now, have been travelling to the capitals of the developed countries with a begging bowl—to entice foreign investors to invest in India, and promising them all kinds of incentives and concessions.

And so, in the last one year, the government has twice announced huge liberalisation of FDI rules for foreign investors, in November 2015 and June 2016.⁶⁷

- permitting 100% FDI in several key sectors via the automatic route, that is, without being subject to government approval, such as defence, civil aviation, pharmaceuticals, cable networks, DTH, Mobile TV, and trading through e-commerce in food products manufactured in India;
- relaxing conditions imposed in several sectors such as waiving 30% local sourcing norm for single brand retail, waiving the minimum limit of 20,000 sq.m. for foreign investors in construction development projects, waiving the "controlled conditions" clause in FDI in animal husbandry and aquaculture, etc.

The government proudly declared that these reforms have made the country the most open in the world!⁶⁸

1. Grovelling Before the USA

Delhi's new emperors are attempting to address all concerns raised by US corporations in order to speedup US FDI flows into India. Immediately after coming to power, throwing all democratic

norms to the winds, the Modi Government amended the Land Acquisition Act (LAA)—that had been passed by the Parliament just a year ago after much debate and discussion—through an ordinance promulgated on December 31, 2014. The amendment trashed whatever limited protection had been offered by the LAA-2013 to farmers and urban & rural poor communities, making it possible for the government to acquire land for virtually every kind of project without the consent of majority of the affected landholders. It was only a powerful movement by farmers' organisations across the country that forced the government to backtrack and let the ordinance lapse.

The Modi Government is bending over backwards to meet US objections to India's nuclear liability law, so that giant US corporations can set up nuclear power plants in India without having to worry about paying indemnities in case of design defects causing a nuclear accident. This basically means they are being encouraged to supply risky equipment, which is nothing but an invitation to disaster!⁶⁹ A major nuclear accident can destroy a nation, as the radioactive contamination from the accident remains in the environment for thousands of years—the impact of this radiation on the human body is deathly. The Chernobyl catastrophe has caused nearly 10 lakh additional deaths over the period 1986–2004; and these deaths will continue to take place in the coming decades and centuries.⁷⁰ The Fukushima accident has similarly condemned the Japanese people to suffer epidemics of cancer, leukemia and genetic defects for the rest of time.⁷¹ If a major nuclear accident occurs in Kovvada (in Andhra Pradesh), where GE is to supply nuclear reactors, in the minimum, Andhra Pradesh will be radioactively contaminated. For 20–30 thousand years. Its consequences will cripple India for It is because of these dangers that even countries like Germany and Switzerland that had significant nuclear power programs have decided to completely phase out all their nuclear power plants. In its bid to appease foreign investors and entice them to bring in their dollars, the Modi Government is putting at risk the very future of the country.

Taking control of the financial sector is crucial to the designs of the foreign corporations and their governments if they are to transform this country into their economic colony. And so, ever since 1991, they have been demanding that the Indian Government end its control over the country's financial sector, in other words, privatise it, and allow foreign investors to enter and take it over. The BJP has got the Insurance Laws Amendment Bill passed by Parliament to increase

FDI inflows into the insurance sector, yet another step towards eventually handing over control of India's insurance sector to foreign insurance corporations. The BJP Government has also taken the first steps to privatise the nationalised banks in its 2015–16 and 2016–17 budgets.

The public sector insurance companies and banks have played a crucial role in India's development plans. They have mobilised the savings of the common people to the tune of hundreds of thousands of crores of rupees, and put them at the disposal of the government for investment in national priorities like agriculture, small industries, development of backward areas, infrastructure, and the like. Once the control of these institutions and funds passes into the hands of the private sector, they will utilise this capital for furthering their interests of profit accumulation rather than for national interests.

Foreign insurance corporations are infamous for their unethical practices. One of the best ways to measure the reliability of an insurance company is its claims settlement record. While the (average) international claim settlement ratio is an abysmal 40%, the figure for public sector Life Insurance Corporation of India for 2011–12 was an incredible 97.42%. A committee of the US House of Representatives that investigated frauds by US insurance corporations dubbed them as “crooks”, “scoundrels” and “fast operators”.⁷²

But an even worse consequence of privatisation would be—that these institutions can collapse. One of the most common practices of private financial corporations (insurance, banks and pension funds) the world over is to invest in the stock markets for quick and high returns. So long as the stock market is booming, the profits are huge and everyone (including the customers) is happy. But sooner or later, the stock market is bound to collapse, and when that happens, the financial companies go broke and people find that their hard-earned savings have vanished overnight. Some of the biggest private sector banks and insurance companies in the developed countries collapsed after the 2008 financial crisis—they were all indulging in speculation with people's savings.⁷³ In India, during the past many years, numerous cooperative sector banks have gone bankrupt because of fraud by their directors, resulting in lakhs of ordinary people losing their hard-earned life savings. However, because of government controls, no public sector bank or insurance company in India has ever closed down. This guarantee will end, once these institutions are privatised. Imagine what will happen if, say, the Bank of Maharashtra declares bankruptcy and downs its shutters all of a sudden one day!

2. 'Make in India'

This is also the real reason for Modi's slogan, *Make in India*—because the country desperately needs FDI, to prevent the economy from sinking into external account bankruptcy. The people have been fooled into believing that FDI will lead to foreign corporations setting up factories in India and creating jobs, and that this will lead to the development of the country. If the foreign corporations are so good, why did we drive them out? Why do we celebrate Independence Day and Republic Day?

To understand the implications of this slogan for the common working people of India, it is necessary to take a look at some aspects of the global economy.

Just like India, several other developing countries had got entrapped in an external debt crisis in the 1980s–90s, and signed agreements with the WB–IMF to implement neoliberal reforms and open up their economies to foreign capital inflows. And just like for India, these reforms have led to a worsening of their foreign exchange crisis. All of them are therefore desperate to invite FDI into their economies, which basically means, inviting foreign corporations of the developed countries, called MNCs or multinational corporations, to invest in their economies.

The labour costs in the developed countries are much more than in the developing countries. And so, the MNCs are keen to shift their production from the developed countries to the developing countries to take advantage of this difference in labour costs and maximise their profits. With all developing countries competing with each other to invite FDI, the MNCs are in a position to dictate terms for investing in the developing countries—they are demanding that the developing countries relax their labour laws and environmental laws, so that goods can be produced in these countries at the lowest possible costs. And the developing countries are bowing before their dictates.

The result is that workers are working in the developing countries for developed country MNCs at dirt wages. In the international garment industry, in which production takes place almost exclusively in the developing countries, direct labour cost per garment is typically around 1–3% of the final retail price! Wage costs for an embroidered logo sweatshirt produced in the Dominican Republic run at around 1.3% of the final retail price in the United States, while the labour cost (including the wages of floor supervisors) of a knit shirt produced in the Philippines is 1.6%. Labour costs in countries such as China, India,

Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Bangladesh are even lower than in the above cases.

To give a different type of example: in 1996, a single Nike shoe consisting of fifty-two components was manufactured by subcontractors in five different Asian countries—South Korea, China, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam. The entire direct labour cost for the production of a pair of Nike basketball shoes retailing for \$149.50 in the United States in the late 1990s was 1% of this, or \$1.50.⁷⁴

Chinese Model of Development

India's political and business leaders never tire of comparing India and China, and are seeking to make India replace China as the global manufacturing hub. Let us therefore take a look at the reality of China.

Since the 1980s, after Deng Tsiao-Ping consolidated his hold over power in China, he implemented market reforms and opened up China to foreign, especially US MNCs. Simultaneously, privatisation of public sector enterprises and destruction of collective farming and village enterprises led to massive destruction of livelihoods. Around 30 to 40 million workers were rendered unemployed due to privatisation of state-owned enterprises, and dissolution of communes and village-level enterprises led to forced migration of more than 120 million peasants to the cities in search of work.⁷⁵ This has provided MNCs with a huge pool of cheap labour. Wages in China are only 4% of the wages in the USA, and 3% of the wages in the European Union.⁷⁶ And so, corporations have shifted production from the developed countries to China in a big way, and from here, export to the world. Thus, what we know as exports from China are essentially goods made by foreign MNCs based in China. For instance, China is the world's biggest supplier of information and communications technology goods. But MNCs accounted for about 87% of China's high-tech exports at the beginning of 2006.⁷⁷

Secondly, MNCs are careful not to concentrate their entire manufacturing in one country. They manufacture different parts of a product in different countries, depending upon which part can be produced at the cheapest rate in which country. In the complex global supply lines of MNCs, China primarily occupies the role of final assembler of manufactured goods to be sold in the rich economies. The different parts and components are produced in different countries, imported into China where the final assembly is done, and then the final commodity is shipped from China to the developed

economies. In this global supply-chain system, China is more the world-assembly hub than the world factory.⁷⁸

To give an example: Apple subcontracts the production of the component parts of its iPhones in a number of countries. The parts are shipped to the Shenzhen, China plants of Foxconn (a Taipei based company) for final assembly and export to the United States. Here, in this factory, 300,000 to 400,000 workers eat, work and sleep under horrendous conditions, with workers, who are compelled to do rapid hand movements for long hours for months on end, finding themselves twitching constantly at night. Despite the massive labour input of Chinese workers in assembling the final product, wages in the factory are so low that their work amounts to only 3.6% of the total manufacturing cost of the iPhone. In 2009, it cost Apple about \$179 to produce an iPhone, which sold in the United States for about \$500. Of this \$179, \$172.50 was the total cost of parts produced in other countries, and \$6.50 was the assembly cost in China.⁷⁹

This global supply chain has terrible consequences for working conditions of workers, as the threat of the factory shifting production to a neighbouring country is always hanging over their heads. Consider the example of Meitai Plastics and Electronics Factory in Dongguan City, Guangdong in China. There, two thousand workers, mostly women, assemble keyboards and computer equipment for Microsoft, IBM, Hewlett-Packard, and Dell. The young workers, mostly under thirty, toil while sitting on hard stools as computer keyboards move down the assembly line, one every 7.2 seconds, 500 an hour. A worker is given just 1.1 seconds to snap each separate key into place, continuing the operation 3,250 times every hour, 35,750 times a day, 250,250 times a week, and more than a million times a month. Workers work twelve hour shifts seven days a week, and only get two days off in a month. Chatting with other workers during work hours can result in the loss of half a day's pay.

Meitai workers are locked in the factory compound four days of each week and are not allowed to take a walk. The food consists of thin, watery rice gruel in the morning, while on Fridays they are given a chicken leg and foot as a special treat. Fourteen workers share each dorm room, sleeping on narrow bunk beds. They are given small plastic buckets to haul hot water up several flights of stairs for a sponge bath. They do mandatory unpaid overtime cleaning of the factory and the dorm. For such food and room, 35% of the wages are deducted.⁸⁰

The enormously long hours worked under hazardous conditions

in China takes its toll in terms of industrial accidents. According to official data, there were 363,383 serious work-related accidents in China in 2010, which included 79,552 deaths.⁸¹

Beneficiaries of the Chinese Model of Development

The biggest beneficiaries of this octopus-like global system of production are the giant corporations of the developed countries. Since the 1970s, taking advantage of the debt crisis of the developing countries, the developed countries have forced them to open up their markets to investments by developed country corporations. This has enabled these corporations to expand their international operations, because of which they started being called multinational corporations (MNCs). They have now become giant behemoths straddling the world. Of the world's 200 largest multinational corporations, 96% have their headquarters in only eight countries. Their revenues have gone up from 25% of the world GDP in 1983 to 27.5% in 1999 and 29.3% in 2005.⁸²

The secondary beneficiaries are the Chinese capitalists, who own the subsidiaries to whom developed country MNCs have subcontracted out their production. The leading Chinese capitalists are closely related to senior government and Communist Party officials. In 2005, China had 250,000 US dollar millionaire households (excluding the value of primary residence), who together held 70% of the country's entire wealth.⁸³

India: Relaxing Labour Laws to Entice MNCs

Through its slogan *Make in India*, the Modi Government is seeking to entice MNCs to invest in the country, promising them conditions in which they can produce in India at cheaper rates than China / Bangladesh / Vietnam, and thus make higher profits. For this, it is demolishing labour laws, so that MNCs can employ contract workers and hire and fire them at will. It is also making it virtually impossible for workers to form unions. This will enable MNCs to pay workers rock bottom wages, increase intensity of work to inhuman levels, and force them to work 10–12–14 hours without paying overtime wages.

And on the other hand, to impart the necessary skills to our youth so that they are ready for employment in the assembly lines of the MNCs as per their needs, it has given the slogan *Skill India*. The aim is not to provide them education, but impart to them the necessary skills so that they can become cogs in the corporate wheel. The Draft National Education Policy 2016 released by the HRD Ministry

promises several initiatives in this direction.

This is going to further worsen an already terrible employment situation in the country.

GLOBALISATION AND IMPACT ON EMPLOYMENT

The net impact of globalisation policies on the employment situation has been disastrous.

MNCs and Employment

MNCs create very few jobs. The reason is simple: they use the latest technologies, and so with a very small workforce, they are able to produce an enormous amount of goods and dominate the global market. This explains why, despite all the high expectations generated by the entry of MNCs into India, they have created very few jobs. Of these, a few are highly paid jobs. The media has been highlighting these extremely few jobs, creating an impression even amongst the common people that globalisation is going to solve our unemployment problem. In 2015, the world's 500 biggest corporations (the Fortune Global 500) generated \$27.6 trillion in revenues, which equalled roughly 38% of the world's GDP. Yet, they employed a mere 67 million people worldwide,⁸⁴ which is just 1.7% of the global workforce. [The global workforce, including those who are actively employed (many precariously employed), the vulnerably employed (the underemployed and the informal sector workers, who are actually unemployed but because there is no unemployment compensation, need to find some or the other work), the part-time employed, the unemployed, and the demoralised or discouraged workers, totals nearly 4 billion people.⁸⁵]

The entry of MNCs into the Indian market is therefore not going to create jobs on the whole. While they will create very few jobs, they will destroy many more jobs than they will create, as their entry is forcing many companies, especially the small companies, to close down, while the big Indian private corporate sector is being forced to restructure its operations—the big Indian business houses are reducing their workforce, and replacing permanent workers with temporary workers.

Additionally, globalisation is also leading to a decline in public sector employment, as one of the conditionalities of globalisation is that the public sector must be privatised, and successive governments are implementing this conditionality dutifully.

The result is, that while the Indian economy has expanded at a rapid growth rate—the Indian economy expanded at a rapid rate of 7.3% per annum during the decade 2000–10—employment growth has slowed down. The employment growth in the economy [compound annual growth rate (CAGR)] decelerated from 2.8% during 1999–2000 to 2004–05 to just 0.5% during 2004–05 to 2011–12.⁸⁶

Actually, employment statistics of the Government of India have little meaning. Official statistics consider any person employed if he/she is engaged in “gainful activities” during the period under study, even if he/she is selling peanuts and does not earn enough to eat two full meals a day. This leads to strange results. Commonsensically, having a job means that a person should be earning enough to be above the poverty line, especially in a country like India where the poverty line is so low that it is a measure of destitution. Now, the Planning Commission estimates that the incidence of poverty in India (even with India’s ridiculously low poverty line) was 21.9% in 2011–12. One would therefore expect at least a similar percentage of the labour force to be unemployed. But according to the *Economic Survey 2015–16*, the all-India unemployment rate was a mere 2.7% according to the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) estimates, and 4.7% according to the Labour Bureau!⁸⁷ Evidently, going by the Government of India’s criteria, one may be earning so little that he/she is considered below the official poverty line (which itself is shamefully low), and yet be considered employed. Such is the worth of the government definition of ‘employment’.

The harsh truth is that in India, people take whatever work they can get, regardless of how low the wages are, for there is no alternative: there is no unemployment allowance for those without jobs.

Organised Sector Jobs

The only meaningful jobs in the country are what are called organised sector jobs. This sector includes all units with 10 or more workers if using power and 20 or more workers if not using power. Despite the massive entry of MNCs into the economy since 1991, organised sector employment in the economy has risen from a mere 54.1 million in 1999–2000 to 72.8 million in 2009–10. The labour force (official statistics) rose from 396.8 million to 460.3 million during the same period.⁸⁸ This means that the total organised sector employment is only around 15% of the total employment in the country.

Table 2: Formal and Informal Employment in Economy⁸⁹ (in million)

	1999–2000	2009–10
Total Labour Force	396.8	460.3
Organised Sector Employment	54.1	72.8
<i>of which:</i>		
<i>Formal Employment (1)</i>	22.7	37.1
<i>Informal Employment (2)</i>	31.4	35.7
Unorganised Sector Employment (3)	342.6	387.4
Formal Employment (1) as % of Total Employment	5.72%	8.06%
Total Informal Employment (2+3)	374	423.1
Total Informal Employment as % of Total Employment	94.3%	91.9%

The actual situation of organised sector employment is actually far worse than that suggested by the above figures. Indian organised sector firms have adopted a systematic policy of replacing permanent staff with contract or temporary workers, and are also subcontracting out work to smaller units in the informal sector who are able to produce goods at much cheaper rates due to low wage costs. Thus, within the organised sector, the number of organised workers (i.e., those who enjoy legal rights such as security of employment, minimum wages, sick leave, compensation for work-related injuries, right to organise, etc.) has fallen and that of unorganised/informal workers has risen during the decade 1999–2000 to 2009–10. Consequently, total formal employment in the organised sector, while it has marginally risen over this period, is actually abysmally low at just 8% of the workforce (Table 2).

Total factory employment is a subset of total organised sector employment. Despite the massive entry of MNCs into the economy since 1991, the total employment (workers plus sales and supervisory and managerial staff) in all of India's registered factories (both small and large scale industries combined) has increased from 8.58 million in 1998–1999 (figures for 1999–2000 are not available) to only 11.72 million in 2009–10.⁹⁰ In 1999–2000, total factory employment was just around 2.5% of the total workforce.

The bulk of the workforce is employed as informal workers, and comprises 92% of the workforce. These are jobs without any job security or social security.

Where are the Industrial Jobs?

Let us now take a look at the type of jobs created during the decade 1999–2000 to 2009–10. During this decade, a total of 63.5 million jobs were created (see Table 2). In which sectors were these jobs created?

Conventionally, the economy is divided into three sectors: agriculture, industry and services. ‘Industry’ is divided into manufacturing, mining, and electricity, gas and water supply. ‘Services’ is divided into: trade, hotels, transport and communication; financing, insurance, real estate and business services; and community, social and personal services. ‘Construction’ is sometimes grouped under industry, sometimes under services.

The agricultural sector saw the creation of 7.2 million jobs during this decade, 11.3% of the total jobs created. This is a sector in deep crisis; more than 3 lakh farmers have committed suicide in the last two decades. As has been pointed out by several economists, this increase in employment is primarily because of increased participation of women in agricultural activities to supplement the falling incomes of their families due to the terrible agrarian distress. In other words, this is essentially forced employment.⁹¹

A total of 6.6 million jobs were created in manufacturing sector. This sector conjures up the image of a modern sector with relatively high labour productivity and high wages. However, the manufacturing sector in India is divided into the factory sector and the non-factory sector (or the unorganised sector). As we can see from Table 3, of the jobs created in the manufacturing sector:

- Only 2.9 million jobs (4.6% of the total jobs created in this decade) were created in the organised or factory sector.
- And of these jobs, from the statistics given earlier regarding proportion of formal and informal jobs in the organised sector, we can assume that roughly 40% or 1.2 million jobs would be formal jobs. This constitutes only 1.9% of the total jobs created during this decade. The remaining 1.7 million jobs would be informal jobs in the factory sector.
- The unorganised manufacturing sector employs nearly 70% of the manufacturing workforce. However, as this sector is being

decimated due to globalisation policies such as ending of reservations for small units and decline of low interest bank credit for the small sector, the increase in employment in this sector has also slowed down. In this non-factory sector, 3.7 million jobs (5.8% of total jobs created) were created during this decade. These jobs are in tiny units or home-based manufacturing, such as workers making papads or rolling bidis in their own homes—in the diction of the Government of India, these jobs are also called 'manufacturing jobs'.

Table 3: Share of Employment in Various Sectors⁹² (in million)

Sector	1999–2000			2009–10		
	Total	Org.	Unorg.	Total	Org.	Unorg.
Agriculture	237.7	5.5	232.2	244.9	2.7	242.1
Manufacturing	44.1	13.1	30.9	50.7	16.0	34.7
Mining & quarrying	2.2	1.3	0.9	3.0	1.9	1.1
Electricity, gas & water supply	1.1	1.0	0.1	1.3	1.1	0.1
Construction	17.5	4.6	12.9	44.1	13.0	31.1
Trade, hotels & restaurants	41.3	2.9	38.4	49.7	3.9	45.8
Transport, storage & communications	14.6	4.2	10.4	20.0	4.9	15.1
Finance, insurance, real estate & business activities	4.9	2.4	2.5	9.6	5.3	4.2
Public admn. & defence	10.5	9.7	0.8	9.5	9.5	0.0
Community, social and personal services	21.1	9.1	12.0	27.7	12.6	15.1
Total Services	94.2	28.6	65.6	116.3	36.2	80.2
Total	396.8	54.1	342.6	460.3	72.8	387.4

The largest number of jobs was created in the construction sector, 26.6 million or 42% of the total jobs created. These are nearly all unorganised sector jobs. Unorganised sector construction labour is dangerous and mainly migrant employment, and is devoid of medical facilities, disability compensation, education for children and decent housing.

Another sector where a large number of jobs were created was that of 'trade, hotels and restaurants', which yielded an additional 8.4 million jobs, 13% of all jobs created. Under globalisation, this sector has become a larger employer than manufacturing. 'Trade' includes all sorts of petty vendors; 'hotels' includes horribly low-paid jobs in tiny tea shops and eateries.

But what about the Information Technology (IT) sector? This is the sector that is supposed to be creating millions of jobs, and that too, well-paid jobs. But that is only media hype. The Information Technology or IT sector is composed of two parts: the software sector and the information technology enabled services (ITES)—this latter also includes the business process outsourcing (BPO) industry. The total number of people employed in this sector in 2009–10 was a mere 2.3 million—a mere 0.5% of the country's workforce in that year.⁹³

The IT sector comes under services, in the category 'Finance, Insurance, Real Estate and Business Activities'. This category also includes the sectors of media and entertainment. While this category has created decent or high-paid salaried jobs during the decade 1999–2000 to 2009–10, the total number of jobs created in this entire category, including the IT sector, was only 4.7 million—7.4% of the total jobs created during this decade.

On the whole then, of the 63.5 million jobs created during the decade 1999–2000 to 2009–10, the overwhelming number of jobs created were informal sector jobs, in construction, trade, hotels and restaurants, and tiny home-based manufacturing units, or were distress jobs in agriculture. Calling them jobs is actually shameful.

The actual employment situation is worse than that suggested by the above figures. That is because the government has deliberately kept the labour force figures at a lower level than actual, by excluding a large number of persons desirous of work from its labour force statistics. Thus, according to one estimate, during the decade 1999–2000 to 2009–10, while the economy created 63.5 million jobs, the working age population (between 15 to 59 years) must have expanded by around 159 million, implying that only 40% of the new entrants into the labour market during this decade got employment of any type

whatsoever.⁹⁴

Make in India is only going to worsen this employment situation. The job security of the organised sector workers is going to be destroyed, and they will have to compete with the workers working in factories in China, Bangladesh, Philippines and Malaysia to retain their jobs—it is going to be a race to the bottom in wage and labour standards.

FREE MARKET AND IMPACT ON PEOPLE

The upshot of the third conditionality—‘free markets’—imposed by the World Bank on India is that successive governments that have come to power at the Centre (and the states too) have been running the economy solely for the profit maximisation of giant foreign corporations and their collaborators, the big Indian business houses:

- On the one hand, Union Finance Ministers have been doling out lakhs of crores of rupees as ‘incentives’ to these business houses in the name of promoting growth–development–entrepreneurism. To justify this, they have come up with an economic theory—‘supply-side economics’—which claims that tax-breaks and other such incentives to the wealthy help boost investment.
- And on the other hand, they have been slashing the government’s already low social sector expenditures, meant to provide essential services—such as education, health, food and even drinking water—to the poor at affordable rates, and transferring the savings to the rich. And the World Bank and the economists sitting in Washington have come up with an economic theory to justify this too, the so-called ‘fiscal deficit reduction theory’. According to this, government budgets must be balanced, and hence welfare expenditures need to be cut. It is another matter that Keynes had debunked this theory way back in the 1930s. He had in fact castigated economists for arguing against increasing government spending to reduce unemployment and poverty in the name of fiscal deficit reduction—he called it “humbug of finance”.⁹⁵

Of course, the World Bank, and our finance ministers—from Arun Jaitley to P. Chidambaram and Manmohan Singh—are aware that the fiscal deficit reduction theory is fraudulent. This is obvious from the way they have been handling the various components of the government’s expenditures and revenues. The fiscal deficit is the

excess of the government's expenditures over receipts. Even a cursory look at the policies being pursued by the Government of India reveals that it is giving away lakhs of crores of rupees as subsidies to the rich. Had our finance ministers really been concerned about the fiscal deficit, they could have easily reduced these mind-boggling giveaways! But in the new economic lexicon preached by the High Priests in Washington, these concessions are called 'incentives' and are considered essential for 'growth'. Simultaneously, the already low social welfare expenditures on the poor are being cut, in the name of containing the fiscal deficit.

Sounds unbelievable, but is absolutely true. Read on . . .

1. Subsidies to the Rich

i) Tax Concessions for the Wealthy

Every year, for the past several years, the budget documents have included a statement on the estimated revenue forgone by the government due to exemptions in major taxes levied by the Centre. This year, it has been given a new name, "Revenue Impact of Tax Incentives." The 2016–17 budget documents reveal that in 2015–16, the Modi Government gave away Rs 5.51 lakh crore⁹⁶ in tax exemptions/ deductions/ incentives to the very rich. These major write-offs are in corporate income tax, customs duties and excise duties. To put this amount in perspective, these tax concessions to the country's rich equal nearly one-third of the Union Budget outlay.

These tax concessions actually exceed our fiscal deficit for 2015–16 of Rs 5.35 lakh crore! Had Jaitley really been concerned about reducing the fiscal deficit, he could have reduced these concessions given to India's richie rich.⁹⁷

Successive governments at the Centre have been doling out these concessions to the 'corporate needy and the undernourished rich' for the last several years, ever since the economic reforms began. Union budget documents reveal that over the 11-year period 2005–06 to 2015–16, the tax write-offs given by the government to the super-rich totalled a mind-boggling Rs 47.6 lakh crore!⁹⁸ To give an idea of the immensity of this figure, this is one-third of our 2015–16 GDP.

India's Tax–GDP Ratio: Lowest in the World

It is because of these huge tax giveaways to India's uber wealthy that India's combined tax-to-GDP ratio for the Centre and states put together is among the lowest in the world. The *Economic Survey 2015–*

16 admits that India's tax–GDP ratio, at around 16.6% of the GDP, is far below not only the developed countries of the OECD⁹⁹ (34.2%), but also its 'emerging market' peers Brazil (35.6%) and South Africa (28.8%). Even the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, considered to be one of the poorest regions in the world, have a tax–GDP ratio of 27%.¹⁰⁰

The international credit rating agencies, the IMF and the World Bank, the economic czars occupying prestigious chairs in the universities in New York and London, all of whom lecture us every day on the importance of reducing our subsidies to the poor—none of them ever talk of our low tax–GDP ratio and the need to increase it to at least the level of the sub-Saharan African countries by reducing the subsidies given to our super-rich.

ii) Transferring Mineral Wealth to Corporations

The government has been handing over control of our immense natural resources to corporate houses virtually for free, for them to exploit and mint super-profits—when there was no need to do so, our public sector corporations have all the necessary technology and expertise needed to exploit these resources. This huge 'scam' has resulted in a transfer of several lakh crore rupees of public funds to the private sector. Two examples:

- a. **KG Gas Basin Scam:** In 2000, the Government of India handed over exploration of gas reserves in D-6 block of the Krishna Godavari basin to Reliance Industries Limited (RIL). These gas fields had been identified by the public sector Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, which also has the necessary technology and expertise needed to explore and develop these gas fields. RIL, in naked collusion with the government, through a series of manipulations, has indulged in absolutely mind-boggling plunder of the country's natural gas wealth, resulting in a total loss to the exchequer of more than Rs 2 lakh crore!¹⁰¹
- b. **Mindblowing Mining Scam:** During the last two decades, governments have handed over mineral resources of the country to corporate houses on payment of very low royalty rates to the government, resulting in colossal losses to the national exchequer. Recently, the Supreme Court directed the government to adopt a fair, transparent and non-discriminatory procedure, such as auctioning, in the allotment of natural resources. To circumvent this order, the BJP Government in 2015 got the

Parliament to pass the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act that legitimises the majority of the leases already in existence, even if they have been granted through questionable procedures! The total loss to the national exchequer due to this exemption granted to existing leases is staggering. There are presently more than 11,000 active leases in the country. In the case of just one mineral, iron ore (total 774 leases in the country), in just one state (Chhattisgarh), the value of exempted deposits could amount to at least Rs 1.71 lakh crore and the losses to the national exchequer could come to at least Rs 1.22 lakh crore.¹⁰²

iii) Direct Subsidies to Corporations

State governments are competing with each other to give thousands of crores of rupees as subsidies to private corporations for setting up projects in their states. To give two examples of the kind of concessions being offered:

- After Tata Motors was forced to move out of Singur by a determined people's movement, Modi rolled out the red carpet to welcome Ratan Tata to Gujarat. The concessions given to the Tatas to set up the Nano car project in Gujarat include: allotment of land at discounted prices; a soft loan of Rs 9,500 crore (for a project whose total cost is estimated to be just Rs 2,200 crore) at an interest rate of 0.10% per annum, with repayment deferred for 20 years; providing 220 kv and 66 kv substations at the plant's doorstep for free; and so on. The total cost to the Gujarat exchequer—Rs 33,000 crore over the next 20 years!
- Tens of thousands of acres of land is being handed over to private corporations virtually for free to set up their projects. For instance, the Gujarat Government has allotted 580 lakh sq meters of land in Kutch (whose market price was anywhere between Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,500 per sq metre) to the Adani Group, for less than Rs 10 per sq metre; and 8 lakh sq metres of prime land in the industrial zone of Hazira in Surat to Larsen and Toubro at Re 1 per sq metre!¹⁰³

iv) Public-Private-Partnership

This is another 'innovative' way in which huge public funds are being transferred to the private sector. Under this, the government invites the private sector to invest in infrastructure, provides the

private investor a direct subsidy of up to 40% of the project cost, gives it land and other resources at concessional rates, guarantees the private partner a minimum rate of return on its investment (for instance, in the case of highways, the private investor is allowed to collect toll charges from the users), and as if this was not enough, even the investment money is also often provided by the government in the form of long term loans at concessional rates. What a partnership!

In the Union Budget 2016–17, the finance minister has allocated Rs 55,000 crore for construction of roads and highways in partnership with the private sector under the PPP model—implying that this is the amount that is going to be given as subsidy to the private sector to build roads and highways in the coming financial year!¹⁰⁴

The budget also promises new initiatives to reinvigorate PPP projects in the infrastructure sector, including a bill for resolution of disputes in infrastructure-related PPP contracts, and new guidelines for renegotiation of PPP concession agreements. This jargon basically implies that the government is going to give yet more concessions to the private sector in case the latter is not satisfied with the rate of return on its investment. In other words, the government is not only guaranteeing the private sector risk-free investment, it is also guaranteeing it a satisfactory rate of return on this investment! And yet they call it ‘free market capitalism’.

v) Robbing Banks: Mother of All Scams

As if giving them tax concessions, control over the nation's natural resources, free land, subsidised loans / water / electricity etc. was not enough, the government is allowing private sector corporations to siphon off public sector bank funds too! It is the mother of all scams.

Small time bank robbers are put in jail (if caught); ordinary people defaulting on bank loans have their house / scooter / other assets seized; farmers are driven to suicide for not being able to pay the instalments on their bank loans. But when the super-rich default on their (public sector) bank loans, nothing happens to them, they go scot free, even their names are not disclosed; they continue to enjoy their heated swimming pools, rooftop helipads, foreign homes and fast cars. The banks simply write off their loans. According to figures provided by the Reserve Bank of India, over the 12-year period 2004–15, Indian public sector banks have written off a whopping Rs 2.11 lakh crore of bad loans! Of this, a quarter, or Rs 52,542 crore, has been written off during the first year of the Modi Government (2014–15).¹⁰⁵

Loan write-offs, however, make bad news, both for corporate houses and banks/government. So public sector banks are adopting a new stratagem to provide succour to these 'helpless' rich—they 'restructure' their loans. That's the buzz word today, 'Corporate Debt Restructuring' (CDR). Under its name, the payback period may be extended, interest may be waived, and/or a part of the loan may be converted into equity; the corporation is even given another loan to tide over its 'crisis'. Private corporations whose loans have been approved for restructuring include some of India's most well-known names. Public sector banks have cumulatively rescheduled/restructured loans worth Rs 4.03 lakh crore under the CDR scheme till March 2015.¹⁰⁶

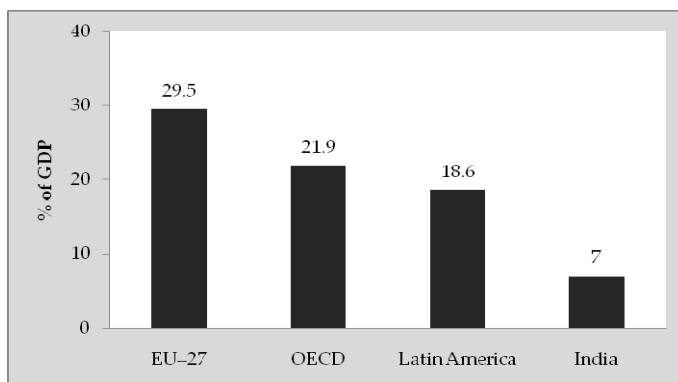
2. Withdrawal of 'Subsidies' to the Poor

After giving away lakhs of crores of rupees in subsidies to the rich every year, obviously, the government has no money to spend on the poor. And so it has been slashing government spending on subsidies to the poor. How has it been able to get away with it, without causing an uproar across the country? By a simple trick! In a deft use of language, while the breathtaking subsidies given to the rich are labelled as 'incentives' and are declared to be essential for 'growth', social sector expenditures of the government—whose purpose is to provide the bare means of sustenance to the poor at affordable rates—are condemned as 'subsidies', as wasteful, inefficient, promoting parasitism, benefiting the middle classes rather than the poor, and so on. This then creates the theoretical justification for cutting them.

India: Already at the Bottom

Most developed countries have a very elaborate social security network for their citizens, including unemployment allowance, universal health coverage, free school education and free or cheap university education, old age pension, maternity benefits, disability benefits, family allowances such as child care allowance, allowances for those too poor to make a living, and much more. Governments spend substantial sums for providing these social services to their people. The average public social sector expenditure of the 34 countries of the OECD is around 20% of GDP, and for the EU-27 is even higher at around 30% of GDP. The average public social sector expenditure for the 21 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean has risen significantly over the past decade and is presently 18.6% (in 2009–10).¹⁰⁷

Chart 1: Public Social Sector Expenditures of Developed Countries and India, 2010
(% of GDP)



In contrast, the social sector expenditure of the government of India is very low! Jaitley and his predecessors in the finance ministry and the 'Chicago boys' who are their economic advisors are all blithely lying when they claim that the subsidies to the poor are very high! The total social sector expenditure of the Government (Centre and states combined) of India is barely 7% of GDP (see Chart 1).¹⁰⁸

And Yet, More Cuts . . .

Despite this awfully low level of social sector spending, the WB–IMF and the foreign corporate houses and their concubine governments are pressurising the Government of India to further reduce it, and Delhi's Badshahs are slavishly implementing their dictates. In the three budgets presented by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley so far, he has made steep cuts in the government's already low spending on social services.

The neoliberal policies, and their acceleration since 2014 after the Modi Government assumed power at the Centre, have had calamitous consequences on our social sectors. Our education and health systems are in shambles. There have been huge cuts in government expenditures directed at improving the conditions of our historically marginalised sections, the Dalits, Adivasis and women. Most importantly, the WB imposed conditionalities have absolutely devastated Indian agriculture. Let us first take a look at what is happening to our agricultural sector, on which two-thirds of the people depend for their livelihoods.

Impact on Agriculture

Probably the sector that is the worst affected by the neoliberal reforms is the agricultural sector. One of the most important conditionalities imposed by the World Bank on India as a part of the SAP is 'freeing the market' and eliminating subsidies. One of its implications is that the Indian Government must reduce its capital investment in the agricultural sector, and also eliminate subsidies to agriculture, and allow the 'free market' to operate. Successive governments that have come to power at the Centre since 1991 have dutifully implemented these dictates. As a result:

- (i) Except for a brief period during the UPA-I Government, public investment in agriculture has consistently fallen during the past more than 2 decades. It fell from around 3–4% of the GDP in the 1980s to as low as 1.35% in 1998–99, then rose to around 1.94% during the initial UPA-I years (2003–04 to 2005–06), before falling again to 1.48% in 2009–10.¹⁰⁹ Public investment is critical for agricultural growth, as in a country dominated by small scale farming, it is only the government that can invest in improving agricultural infrastructure, such as irrigation, improvement of soil fertility, etc.
- (ii) The decline in public investment has particularly affected two important areas that are crucial for agricultural growth: agricultural research and extension. The growth rate of public spending on agricultural research fell from 6.3% in the 1980s to 4.8% in the 1990s and 2000s. The corresponding figure for agriculture extension was 7% in the 1980s and 2% in the 1990s and 2000s. This has played a key role in worsening the agrarian crisis during the past two decades. Thus, a government commission in the state of Andhra Pradesh noted that "the collapse of public agricultural extension services has been one of the most important contributory factors to the generalised agrarian crisis" in the state. The decline in the quality of extension system and the weakening of the State Seed Corporation led to a sharp rise in the quantity of spurious seeds sold. Unscrupulous traders, who sold spurious seeds to farmers, were also doubling up as moneylenders; the cost of seeds was considered a loan at high rates of interest.¹¹⁰
- (iii) As if this was not enough, the government has also been cutting subsidies on major inputs given to the agriculture sector, such as fertiliser, electricity and irrigation subsidies. It has led to a sharp

increase in costs of cultivation. Additionally, the government has also absolved itself of the responsibility of producing, procuring and distributing these inputs to farmers. The private sector has taken advantage of this to further push up prices. Because of this, according to one estimate, the nominal cost of cultivation of wheat increased three times faster during the period 1991–2005 as compared to the 1980s.¹¹¹

- (iv) Further worsening the situation for farmers is the implementation of the World Bank dictated financial sector reforms, which call for phasing out of subsidised credit to small farmers. Not only has this made it difficult for farmers to access bank loans, banks now charge them interest rates of as much as 15–18%, instead of the 4.5% earlier. With institutional credit becoming difficult to obtain, farmers have once again been pushed into the clutches of moneylenders and traders. They are being forced to take loans from traders against promise to sell their harvest to them (and traders take advantage of this to buy their harvest at below market prices), or from moneylenders at exorbitant rates of interest. During the period 1992–2003, the share of moneylenders in total debt of farmers almost doubled from 10.5% to 19.6%.¹¹² Because of this, the debt of farmer households as a percentage of their annual income has sharply risen during the past two decades.¹¹³

The pro-rich orientation of neoliberal reforms becomes obvious from the fact that while commercial bank lending to small farmers at subsidised interest rates has declined, banks have been more than willing to give large loans to agribusiness corporations for export-oriented and capital intensive agriculture—credit flows to this sector have increased in the 2000s.¹¹⁴ The World Bank has no problems when banks write-off or restructure their loans to these big agribusiness corporations when the latter default on their loans.

- (v) The final nail in the coffin of small farmers is the gradual elimination of the system of public procurement (and public distribution). This output support provided to farmers—even though it had its weaknesses such as that it was only for a handful of crops like rice and wheat—has played a key role in protecting farmers from the vicissitudes of the market and enabled them to take up cultivation in a predictably stable price environment. Production of crops like wheat and rice—for which there is public procurement—has grown steadily over the

past three decades, while per capita availability of pulses—for which there is no public procurement—has fallen despite large scale imports.¹¹⁵ Apart from ending input subsidy support and credit support, the government is now eliminating this output support too. On the one hand, the government is deliberately keeping Minimum Support Prices (MSP) low, and on the other hand, there is a decline in procurement by the government and closure of procurement centres.¹¹⁶

The net result of these anti-small farmer policies is that for nearly 70% of Indian farmers who have land holdings of less than 1 hectare, total income from all sources (cultivation, farming of animals, non-farm business and wages) has fallen to less than consumption expenditure (Table 4).

Table 4: Small Farmer Households, All India, 2012–13: Average Monthly Income and Expenditure¹¹⁷ (in Rs)

<i>Size Class of Land Possessed</i>	<i>Number of Households as % of Total Farmer Households</i>	<i>Total Income from All Sources</i>	<i>Total Consumption Expenditure</i>
<0.01 ha	2.6%	4,561	5,108
0.01 – 0.40 ha	31.9%	4,152	5,401
0.41 – 1.00 ha	34.9%	5,247	6,020

This has led to a huge increase in rural indebtedness. The most extensive survey of farm households to date conducted by the NSSO in 2012–13 found 52% of the total agricultural households in the country to be in debt. The average debt is Rs 47,000 per agricultural household, in a country where the yearly income from cultivation per household is Rs 36,972.¹¹⁸

Consequences

This multi-pronged onslaught launched by imperialist capital on Indian agriculture has pushed this sector into deep crisis.

In all important indicators that measure the performance of the agricultural sector, whether it be area, or production, or yield, of foodgrains or non-foodgrains, the contrast between pre-globalisation and post-globalisation is quite stark (Table 5).

Table 5: Average Growth Rates of Area, Production & Yield Under Foodgrains, Non-foodgrains & All Crops¹¹⁹

	<i>Foodgrains</i>			<i>Non-foodgrains</i>			<i>All crops</i>		
	<i>Area</i>	<i>Production</i>	<i>Yield</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Production</i>	<i>Yield</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Production</i>	<i>Yield</i>
1950–51 to 1989–90	0.61	2.61	1.60	1.22	2.97	1.08	0.79	2.66	1.37
1990–91 to 2004–05	-0.07	1.64	1.27	1.03	2.81	1.39	0.25	1.96	1.29

The result is that India's foodgrain production has increased very slowly since the beginning of the reforms. The poor performance of Indian agriculture becomes evident from a comparison with China. Total foodgrain production of China in 2013 was 602 million tonnes; in comparison, India's foodgrain production was 257 million tonnes in 2012–13.¹²⁰ This, despite the fact that India's arable land is more than that of China!¹²¹

The neoliberal reforms have reversed three decades of efforts to raise per capita foodgrain output and availability. Per capita foodgrain output in 2013–14, the last year of the UPA Government, was more or less the same as that for 1990–91 (215 kg compared with 212).¹²² And per capita foodgrain availability (sum of domestic output, net imports and change in stock) actually fell from about 177 kg in the triennium ending in 1992 to 163 kg in the triennium ending in 2012 (Table 6).¹²³

Table 6: Per capita Foodgrain Availability (kg/yr)

1945–46	1989–90 to 1991–92	2009–10 to 2011–12
137	177	163

Two decades of battering by hostile policies have pushed the hardy Indian peasants into such despair that they are being driven to commit suicides in record numbers. The total number of farmer suicides in the country since 1995 crossed the 300,000 mark in 2014.¹²⁴ It is the largest recorded wave of such deaths in history.

Modi Government: Worsening the Crisis

Budget 2016–17 has been hailed by the media as a pro-farmer budget. Jaitley in his budget speech in the Lok Sabha mentioned

word 'farmer' 32 times. He declared that the government would reorient its interventions in the farm and non-farm sectors to double the income of farmers by 2022, that is, in five years. The PM too repeated this statement some days later.

But all these declarations are a farce. A member of the NITI Aayog, Bibek Debroy, clarified in a television interview that the doubling was meant in nominal, not real, terms, i.e., not after discounting for inflation. In such terms incomes could double anyway, even without “aiming”!¹²⁵

If the government was at all serious about addressing the agricultural crisis, at the minimum, it should have announced significant increases in MSP, lowered input prices by increasing subsidies on fertilisers, electricity, water, etc., and raised government expenditure on agriculture substantially. The government has done the exact opposite on all these issues. There is no mention of providing farmers remunerative prices in the budget. In mid-2015, the government announced an increase in MSPs—but the increases were miniscule, and did not even cover the cost of production for several crops. On top of it, states considering topping up the Centre’s procurement prices with state-level bonuses were warned that in that case they would have to bear the entire burden of subsidy in their state.¹²⁶ Instead of increasing subsidies, they are being further cut—fertiliser subsidy has been cut by Rs 2400 crore. Even the sharp fall in international oil prices has not been passed on to farmers, due to the government increasing excise duty on diesel.¹²⁷ A special focus of the finance minister's speech was on irrigation, with Jaitley claiming that the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana has been considerably strengthened. But despite the bombast, the actual allocation for this scheme (Rs 7,392 crore) is less than the revised estimate for 2015–16 (Rs 7,589 crore).¹²⁸

The most important aspect of the agricultural budget is of course the total allocation to agriculture. Jaitley in his budget speech claimed that the government had indeed raised its spending on agriculture substantially. But a closer look reveals that this was because of some statistical jugglery—“interest subsidy for short-term credit to farmers”, that in earlier years had appeared under the Department of Financial Services under the Finance Ministry, was shifted to the Ministry of Agriculture this year. In actuality, as can be seen from Table 7, total allocations for all agricultural related sectors are only marginally above the budget allocation for 2014–15, and when taking inflation into account, are a cut in real terms.

Table 7: Allocations for Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Resources (Rs crore)

	2014–15 BE	2015–16 BE	2016–17 BE
1. Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare	31,062	24,909	44,486
2. Ministry of Finance, Interest Subsidy on Short term farm credit	6,000	13,000	–
3. Ministry of Rural Development	83,852	73,333	87,765
4. Water Resources	13,837	4,232	6,201
5. Total: 1+2+3+4 = 5	1,34,752	1,15,475	1,38,452
6. GDP	1,25,41,208	1,35,67,192	1,50,65,010
7. Total Agriculture Spending (5) as % of GDP	1.07	0.85	0.92

As a percentage of GDP, total spending on all agriculture related sectors is just 0.9% of GDP. This, for a sector on which 60% of the population depend for their livelihoods! In comparison, the tax concessions to the rich in 2015–16 amount to 4% of the GDP!

The cut in budgetary allocation for agriculture, together with the sharp cuts in public social welfare expenditures, and the declining employment opportunities in the economy as a whole, have led to a further worsening of the crisis gripping Indian agriculture. To hide the reality, just like it has manipulated GDP figures, the Modi Government has resorted to fudging figures related to farmer suicides too. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) made major changes in its methodology in 2014, because of which a majority of farmer suicides have been shifted to new or revised categories in NCRB data tables. Because of these new parameters, the number of farmer suicides in 2014 fell to 5,650, which is less than half their 2013 figure of 11,772. On the other hand, there was a spectacular increase in suicides recorded under the category “Others”, from 24,809 in 2013 to 41,216 in 2014.¹²⁹

But even with these new diluted parameters, in 2015, the number of farmer suicides crossed the 8,000 mark, recording a whopping increase of 40% over the 2014 figure of 5,650 suicides.¹³⁰

3. Impact of Cuts in Welfare Services

Public Education in Crisis

In July 1992, delivering judgement in the Mohini Jain case, the Supreme Court of India ruled that dignity of an individual cannot be assured unless it is accompanied by right to education, and that fundamental rights cannot be appreciated and fully enjoyed unless a citizen is educated. Even if we leave aside such high flown objectives as realisation of freedom and dignity, education is crucially important even for something as basic as human development.

No country in the world has developed without making provisions for providing free, compulsory, equitable and good quality elementary education to ALL its children in the initial stages of its development, and later expanded it to secondary and higher secondary education. (And all developed countries have done this entirely through public funding; they are aware that the private sector will only invest for profits.) Unfortunately, India has not been able to provide this to a majority of its children seven decades after independence—nearly 9 crore of the roughly 20 crore children in the 6–14 age-group in the country have either never enrolled in school or have dropped out of school without completing even basic schooling!

Even for those going to school, the conditions in a majority of the schools are so bad that it is a national shame:

- More than 50% of the primary schools in the country are single, or at best, two teacher schools! And 57% of the primary schools function with 3 classrooms or less. Implying that a single teacher is teaching two or three different classes at the same time in a single room, in an overwhelming majority of the primary schools in the country!
- A shocking 19% of all regular teachers in elementary schools in the country are not professionally trained; another 14% teachers are working on contractual basis, of whom more than one-third are not professionally trained.
- 35% of elementary schools do not have usable toilet facilities, and 44% do not have separate toilet facilities for girls—an important reason for girls dropping out of schools.
- 24% of all elementary schools in rural India do not even have functional drinking water facilities.
- Given this state of our schools, is it any wonder that a survey found that 52% of Class V students were unable to read Class II–

level text and 49% could not solve simple two-digit subtraction problems (that they are expected to learn in Class II)!¹³¹

But the government is unconcerned. It is simply not interested in increasing spending on education to improve the quality of our educational institutions and provide genuinely free, compulsory and good quality education for all children. During its two years in power, an inconsiderate BJP Government has slashed school education budget so severely that the budget allocation for 2016–17 is lower than 2014–15 BE by as much as 32% (in real terms)!

Table 8: BJP Govt.'s Budgetary Allocations for School Education
(Rs crore)

	2014–15 BE	2016–17 BE
Department of School Education and Literacy	55,115	43,554
<i>of which:</i>		
<i>Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan</i>	28,258	22,500
<i>Mid-Day Meal Scheme</i>	13,152	9,700

The Parliament passed the Right to Education Act in 2009, whose declared objective is to provide 'free and compulsory' education to all children in the age-group 6–14 years. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is the main scheme of the Central government for implementing this Act. But even for this scheme, the government is unwilling to allocate funds. The allocation for SSA this year has fallen by a whopping 20% over 2014–15 BE. Even the allocation for the Mid-Day Meal Scheme has been chopped. The country's ruling classes are not willing to spend money even on providing a decent nutritious meal once a day to the country's children!

Health System in Shambles

Our health system is in "crisis", because of which India is the disease capital of the world:

- More than 2 lakh people in the country die of malaria every year, while TB kills 3 lakh.
- According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), India accounts for nearly one-fourth of the deaths in the world due to diarrhoea, more than one-third of the deaths due to leprosy and more than half of the deaths due to Japanese encephalitis.

- India's under-five child mortality rate is the highest in the world, with 12 lakh such deaths in 2015; a majority of these deaths are preventable.
- India is also in the grip of an epidemic of chronic diseases, which account for more than 50% of the deaths in the country.¹³²

It is possible to address these health challenges, but that would call for strengthening of the public health system. The WHO recommends that countries should allocate at least 5% of their GDP for public health services; India allocates barely 1%. India ranks 171 out of 175 countries in public health spending. Consequently, the public health system is in a bad shape, because of which citizens are forced to depend upon the private sector for treatment. Of the total health spending in the country, private household spending accounts for a huge 72%.¹³³

This extreme privatisation of healthcare is having ruinous consequences. Six crore people are pushed into poverty each year due to high health costs, a fact even admitted by Finance Minister Jaitley in his budget speech this year.¹³⁴ And yet, he has kept the budget allocation for health at the same level as two years ago, which amounts to a reduction of 13% in real terms! On top of it, a significant part of this limited health expenditure is being used for funding a health insurance scheme and thus promoting profiteering of private hospitals, rather than strengthening public health services.

Table 9: BJP Government's Budgetary Allocations for Health
(Rs crore)

	2014–15 BE	2016–17 BE
Ministry of Health and Family Welfare	37,966	38,207
Ministry of AYUSH	1,272	1,326
Total Expenditure on Health	39,238	39,533

4. Impact on Marginalised Sections

Budgetary Cuts in Allocation for Women

This is also known as the Gender Budget. The Gender Budget Statement (GBS), first introduced in Union Budget 2005–06, captures the quantum of budgetary resources earmarked for women by various

departments and ministries.

India is one of the world's worst places to be a woman. Firstly, she may be killed even before being born, or as an infant or a little girl. If she survives that, there is every possibility that as she grows up, she may be molested/raped/tortured by her husband. In India, a crime against a woman is committed every 100 seconds: a woman is molested every 7 minutes, raped every 15 minutes, a case of cruelty committed by either the husband or his relatives occurs every 5 minutes, and a dowry death occurs every 65 minutes (reported cases only, actual are obviously much more; all figures for 2013).¹³⁵

In a country where a crime against women takes place every 100 seconds, an insensitive government has slashed the Gender Budget over the last two years by a huge 20% (in real terms)! The new government—led from the front by the Prime Minister himself—is adept in giving empty slogans. Soon after coming to power, the Modi Government announced the setting up of 'One Stop Crisis Centres' for women across the country to provide assistance to victims of sexual assault—one in each district, 660 in all. But it allocated only two crore rupees for this scheme in Budget 2015–16. The same budget also had a princely allocation of Rs one crore for a 24-hour Women's Helpline to assist women in distress!

In January 2015, Prime Minister Modi himself launched the *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Abhiyan* whose declared aim is to end discrimination against the girl child and educate her. However, in both the 2015–16 and 2016–17 budgets, the scheme got only meagre allocations of Rs 100 crore, which is a mockery of this important slogan.

Table 10: BJP Government's Budgetary Allocations for Women
(Rs crore)

	2014–15 BE	2016–17
Gender Budget	98,030	90,625
Ministry of Women and Child Development	21,194	17,408

The list of women oriented schemes in the Gender Budget is very long. But due to the sharp cuts made in the Jaitley budgets, and especially in the outlay for Ministry of Women and Child Development, all these schemes are going to remain only on paper, as they have got only miniscule allocations.¹³⁶ This includes schemes like

the Indira Gandhi Matritva Yojana, the Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls, and the Scheme for Protection and Empowerment of Women (an umbrella scheme covering 8 schemes).

Budget Allocations for Dalits and Adivasis

More than six decades after the Constitution outlawed the practice of untouchability and discrimination on the basis of caste, and guaranteed that every citizen shall have equality of status and opportunity, the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes continue to face many forms of untouchability practices as well as social, economic and institutional deprivations. Not only that, they are also subjected to enormous atrocities, ranging from abuse on caste name, murders, rapes, arson, social and economic boycotts, to naked parading of SC/ST women, and being forced to drink urine and eat human excreta.

In the 1970s, the government launched the Scheduled Caste Sub Plan (SCSP) and Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) to ensure the flow of targeted funds from the general sectors in the Central Ministries towards the development of the Dalits and Adivasis. The guidelines under these two programmes clearly state that the allocations for them as a proportion of the Plan outlay should be at least in proportion to their share in the total population. The population share of Dalits is 16.6% and of Adivasis is 8.6%, according to the Government of India Census 2011. However, the allocations for SCSP and TSP have never reached the stipulated norm of 16% and 8% respectively.

Under *Manuvadi* BJP rule, the allocations for SCSP and TSP have been sharply reduced, by as much as 35% over the 2014–15 BE. Consequently, the allocation for SCSP has fallen to just 7.1% and the allocation for TSP to a lowly 4.4% of the Plan expenditure for 2016–17!

Table 11: BJP Govt.'s Budgetary Allocations for Dalits & Adivasis
(Rs crore)

	2014–15 BE	2016–17 BE
Scheduled Caste Sub Plan	50,548	38,833
Plan Budget	5,75,000	5,50,010
SCSP as % of Plan Budget	8.79	7.06
Tribal Sub Plan	32,387	24,005
TSP as % of Plan Budget	5.63	4.36

CONSEQUENCES: OBSCENE INEQUALITY

Globalisation has led to the transformation of the country into a first-world–fourth-world society. While a small percentage of the population have become enormously rich, and live first world lifestyles, crores of ordinary people have been pushed down to fourth world immiseration. A host of statistics bear this out.

“India's billionaires have never had it so good”, to quote a magazine that keeps track of these worthies. The number of dollar billionaires in the country went up by a record 60% in just one year, from 56 in 2014 to 90 in 2015, as per the latest global ranking of the uber rich by *Forbes* magazine. Their total wealth is a mind-boggling \$295 billion, or Rs 19.2 lakh crore—an amount that is equivalent to 14% of India's GDP for 2015–16!¹³⁷

The number of high net worth individuals, defined as those with a net wealth of above \$50 million, has also been rising rapidly. According to a 2015 report by *Credit Suisse*, India now has 2,083 ultra-high-net-worth individuals, 3% more than 2014, of which 940 people own more than \$100 million each.¹³⁸

No wonder the rich are elated with Modi–Jaitley; *achhe din* have truly come for them! With India now having the fourth largest number of billionaires in the world, they have declared that India is on its way to becoming an economic superpower.¹³⁹

On the other hand, the poor have never had it so bad! While the *Economic Survey* of 2015–16 claims that the incidence of poverty in the country has declined from 37.2% in 2004–05 to 21.9% in 2011–12, a host of other studies show that this is a huge underestimate:

- Basing herself on official NSSO data, the noted economist Utsa Patnaik has shown that the percentage of persons in rural areas who could not consume enough food to obtain the minimum recommended calorie norm (2,200 calories/day) was 75.5% in 2009–10. In urban areas, the percentage who could not consume enough food to obtain the norm (2,100 calories/day) was 73%.
- An official committee (National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector, also known as the Sengupta Commission) came to the conclusion that people living on less than Rs 20 a day, that it defined as “poor and vulnerable”, constituted 77% of the population in 2004–05.
- The Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative of the Oxford University devised a Global Multidimensional Poverty

Index, which used weighted indicators relating to education, health and standard of living to arrive at measure of multidimensional deprivation. It found that in 2005–06, 53.8% of the population were 'Multidimensionally Poor', and another 16.4% were 'Vulnerable to Poverty', totaling 70.2%.

- The same *Economic Survey* that claims poverty fell to 21.9% in 2011–12 admits that share of informal employment in total employment remained above 90% throughout the period 2004–5 to 2011–12.
- The Socio-Economic and Caste Census (2011) data relating to rural households are now available. They show that for nearly 75% of rural households, the income of the highest earning member is less than Rs 5,000/month; and for 92%, it is less than Rs 10,000 a month. For more than half of rural households, the main source of income is manual casual labour—the most insecure, deprived and sweated type of employment.¹⁴⁰

Not only is the gap between the rich and the poor huge, it is widening. According to data from *Credit Suisse*, India's richest 1% (12.5 million people) owned 36.8% of the country's wealth in 2000. By 2015, their share had gone up to an astounding 53%! And on the other hand, the share of the bottom 90% has gone down from 33% to 24% (over 2000–15), while the share of the bottom 50% shrank from an already low 5.3% to 4.1%.¹⁴¹

Mukesh Ambani, the richest man in India, owns more wealth than the combined wealth of the bottom 20% of the population (250 million people). Fifteen richest Indians own more wealth than the bottom 50% of the population and hundred richest Indians own more wealth than the bottom 70% of the population.¹⁴²

Despite this extreme inequality and terrible marginalisation of the overwhelming majority of the country's population, the government is cutting its already low welfare expenditures on the poor, and transferring the savings to the rich! In 2016–17, the total government allocation for the Department of School Education, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, for all agriculture-related sectors and for the Ministry of Women and Child Welfare totals only Rs 43,554 + 39,533 + 138,452 + 17,408 = Rs 238,947 crore, an amount that is less than half the total tax concessions given to the rich last year! And apart from tax concessions, the rich are being given so many other breathtaking subsidies—loan write-offs, loan restructuring, allowing them to plunder mineral wealth of the nation virtually for free, grants of public

funds as 'incentives' to investors in the infrastructural sectors, and so on.

No wonder that in the first year of the Modi Government, the share of the richest 1% in the total wealth of the country went up from 49% to 53%, a rise of 4% in just one year. The Modi Government is undoubtedly the most pro-rich government in the history of independent India.¹⁴³

Secession from the People

There is little room for doubt.

The BJP that has an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha, and the corporate houses that control the reins of power from behind the scenes, have seceded from the people. They are dumping the vision of our nation's founding fathers embedded in the Directive Principles of our Constitution:

- ✍ to build an egalitarian society and a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life [Article 38 (1)];
- ✍ to strive to minimise inequalities in income [Article 38 (2)];
- ✍ to direct policy towards ensuring that the operation of the economic system does not result in concentration of wealth [Article 39 (c)];
- ✍ to make effective provision for securing education and public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want [Article 41];
- ✍ to regard raising the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among the primary duties of the State [Article 47].

TO CONCLUDE

With the coming to power of the BJP at the Centre, the RSS has now come out from behind the curtain. The dozens of organisations spawned by it have launched a two-pronged offensive. On the one hand they are pushing ahead their communal agenda with great speed. Cadres of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Bajrang Dal and scores of other sister-groups have intensified their campaigns like *Ghar Wapsi* and *love-jehad* aimed at intimidating religious minorities, especially Muslims and Christians. They are brazenly attacking their places of worship. They are violently imposing their vegetarian diet

preference on the vast majority of the people who prefer a mixed diet of vegetables and meat, to the point that in the name of cow protection, innocent Muslims are being attacked and even killed. Hundreds of incidents of communal violence have taken place since the new government assumed power. They are insidiously attacking the very conception of India as a secular, democratic and socialist republic as visualised by our country's founders and enshrined in the Constitution of India.

And on the other hand, they have launched a vicious offensive to attack all ideologies and progressive forces that can challenge their Brahmanical ideology. The arrest of JNU Student's Union President Kanhaiya Kumar under false sedition charges on the basis of a doctored video is only the latest incident in a series of attacks launched by the ABVP-BJP-RSS on our campuses to impose their regressive ideology and stifle the voices of those who disagree with their politics. They are also unashamedly foisting persons with Hindutva leanings as heads of India's leading academic institutions, even if they are ill-qualified for the post. To isolate, suppress, crush the voices of reason and rationalism, of all those who can expose their narrow and crooked espousal of Hinduism, of all those who can expose the falseness of their slogans, they have now launched a concerted attempt to label all progressive intellectuals as anti-nationals.

Why are the BJP-RSS doing all this? Are they really concerned about the Hindus? If it were indeed so, then, since the majority of the people in the country are Hindus, they wouldn't have been implementing policies that attack the livelihoods of common people, policies that deprive the majority of children of the country of elementary education, policies that deprive common people of basic healthcare, policies that deprive people of even food, policies that are pushing crores of people below the poverty line, policies that are pushing thousands of farmers into committing suicide every year . . . Obviously, the worst affected due to these policies are going to be Hindus, since they are the majority community.

Are they really concerned about the nation? The BJP Government is handing over control of the most important sectors of the country, including defence equipment manufacture and communications, to foreign corporations. It is even proposing to give these foreign brigands residency status. Our mineral resources, infrastructural sectors, even social sectors like drinking water supply and education-health systems, are being handed over to foreign and Indian big

business houses for their profiteering. The labour laws are being dismantled to enable these corporations to squeeze out the last drop of blood from the workers and transform it into profits. The BJP is allowing crooks who have swindled public sector banks of thousands of crores of rupees to flee abroad. It has announced a scheme permitting those who have stashed away lakhs of crores of rupees in illegal accounts abroad to convert it into white money, instead of arresting them as anti-nationals. And on the other hand, patriotic Indians fighting to prevent our wealth and resources from being plundered by foreign corporations are being labelled as anti-nationals—such is their definition of nationalism!

The BJP–RSS are portraying themselves as the truest nationalists in the country. But it is important to see through their false propaganda. We must not forget, these are the very same people who had played no role in our freedom struggle. The RSS was critical of movements like the Quit India Movement and even of martyrs like Shahid Bhagat Singh. Rather than organising people to fight the British rulers, it was more interested in mobilising the Hindus to fight the Muslims, thereby weakening the united struggle of the Indian people against British colonial rule. Rather than asking people to join the epic movements like Non-cooperation movement and Salt Satyagraha, it propagated respect for the unjust and draconian laws of the British rulers. The RSS had critiqued the national flag; it was critical of the Constitution when it was drafted, lamenting that India's Constitution makers had ignored the *Manusmriti*.

The reason why the BJP–RSS are aggressively pushing forward their communal, fascist agenda is to divert the attention of the common people from their real agenda, which is to run the country for the benefit of the big foreign and Indian business houses. While the majority poor and unemployed Hindu masses are made to believe that it is the impoverished Muslim masses who are their real enemies—who are plotting to run away with Hindu girls and convert them, who are conspiring to become the majority community by producing dozens of children, whose mosques need to be destroyed today because Muslim kings destroyed Hindu temples 500 years ago—and the minorities are too terrorised to think of anything else than survival, the BJP is quietly but speedily implementing policies dictated by the World Bank that are meant to benefit the giant corporations of the developed countries and big Indian business houses. While we, the common people, are busy labelling each other as anti-nationals, the country's rich are laughing all the way to the bank . . .

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Lokshahisathi Sangharsh Yatra

September 21 – 24, 2016

Pune – Satara – Sangli – Kolhapur – Dharwad



Neo-liberalism and fascism are twin brothers; the former creates the ground for the latter, and the latter by its rejection of the principles of democracy, makes it possible for corporate houses to continue with their accelerated profit accumulation despite the worsening economic crisis.

More than two decades of capitalist globalisation and now the rapid growth of fascist forces are threatening the very conception of India as a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic as visualised by our country's founders and enshrined in the Constitution of India. To create awareness particularly among the youth regarding the growing assault on democracy and secularism, several progressive groups of Maharashtra are organising a LOKSHAHISATHI SANGHARSH YATRA (Ride for Democracy). Nearly 300 motorcycles will be participating in the Yatra; apart from that, several people will be joining in cars.

Schedule for the Yatra:

- **September 21**, 6 pm: Inaugural Program, Rashtra Seva Dal Open Hall, Sane Guruji Smarak, Pune.
- **September 22**: Pune to Satara
- **September 23**: Satara to Kolhapur, via Islampur and Sangli.
- **September 24**: Kolhapur to Dharwad, via Belgaum



Fascism comes to power on the basis of democracy, then subverts it: negates freedom and equality, replaces democracy by majority authoritarianism, mobilises the majority to attack minorities and intellectuals in the name of a false nationalism.

But fascists never question capitalism. Mussolini stated: “Fascism is the merger of state and corporate power.”

The values and practice of the BJP–RSS bear uncanny similarity to fascism. Since the BJP has come to power, the RSS and its innumerable wings are terrorising Muslims–Christians, attacking intellectuals in the name of nationalism, violence on Dalits has increased . . . The RSS wants to transform India into a Hindu Rashtra, subverting our Constitution.

Fascism and neoliberalism are twin brothers . . .

The BJP is implementing the same neoliberal policies as the previous UPA Government, only at a faster pace—whose aim is to maximise profits of corporations, while increasing inflation, unemployment, poverty . . .

While Hindus are made to believe that Muslims are the enemies, the rich are becoming enormously richer, and lakhs of farmers are committing suicides . . .

