

An Elementary Misconception about the Hindu Rashtra*

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The BJP as we know is a Hindu-supremacist party. It is the political front of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a fascistic organisation which believes in establishing a Hindu rashtra. Though the BJP itself cannot openly espouse this vision because of its need to remain within the four corners of the constitution, it is trying its best to realise this vision de facto. But what does a Hindu rashtra really mean? The fact that it entails the subversion of secularism and the reduction of the Muslim minority, in particular, to the status of second class citizens, is clear. But many believe that since the literal translation of Hindu rashtra is a Hindu State, it means the establishment of a Hindu State, for the benefit of the Hindu community.

This however is an elementary misconception. The Hindu rashtra will actually, and necessarily, be an authoritarian State which will suppress Hindus and Muslims alike, depriving them of their democratic rights, destroying the federal structure of the Indian polity, and subjecting the bulk of the Hindus, no less than the Muslims, to unprecedented levels of exploitation by international finance capital and the domestic corporate-financial oligarchy. The Hindu rashtra in short is not a State of Hindu domination; it is a State of domination by monopoly capital. It is not a State where the Hindus will be any better off than before; on the contrary they will be infinitely worse off, with monopoly capital given a free run, just as the Muslims will be.

But, monopoly capital, it would be argued, has been in a position of ascendancy for long; why is there any need for it to further tighten its hold over society and polity, and to seek electoral support for such tightening by promoting Hindu supremacism? The reason lies in the fact that the crisis of world capitalism which has been severely affecting the Indian economy of late, makes the old props for monopoly rule inadequate at present. The promise of “trickle down” of growth to the people at large had been belied long ago. The promise that the government, through its tax-policy will garner larger resources from a larger GDP and therefore have more to spend for the poor, which was dangled in the eleventh five year plan document, has been shown to be vacuous; in fact income and wealth inequality have risen to astronomical levels since then. Meanwhile, because of the crisis, unemployment, even before the pandemic, had risen to levels unseen over the last five decades. And the distress in rural India is so great that the central government has chosen, disingenuously, to suppress the NSS data on consumer expenditure. These show that between 2011-12 and 2017-18, per capita real consumer expenditure in rural India declined by as much as 9 per cent! The squeeze on the people of the country has never been as drastic as of late, even without reckoning with the pandemic. The pandemic has made matters infinitely worse.

But that is not all. There is no solution within the neoliberal dispensation for the crisis that has engulfed the economy, though, naturally, finance capital does not acknowledge this fact. Its response to the crisis produced by the regime of neoliberalism is to insist on even more neoliberalism. For this, it advocates a dismantling of trade unions, snatching away of tribal land with even greater ease, privatisation of public sector assets to an even greater degree, and fiscal transfers

from the government to the capitalists of even larger magnitudes. All these are measures the Modi government is assiduously pursuing.

For enforcing such measures what is required is a government that is pliable and has little knowledge of economics, so that it can unquestioningly do the biddings of finance capital; and also a government that can mobilise public support behind itself even as it does the latter's biddings. The BJP government fits these requirements perfectly. It has zero knowledge of economics and therefore dances to the tune of finance capital whom it naively calls "wealth creators". At the same time it provides through its Hindutva agenda a smokescreen behind which it can do the biddings of finance capital. Hindutva never filled anyone's belly; but it is significant that "Bhoomi Poojan" was being held for a temple at Ayodhya, distracting the nation's attention, when a slew of massive concessions had been given to finance capital.

Consider the facts. Over the last several weeks, the working day has been extended for workers to twelve hours in BJP-ruled states, negating a century of struggle by the international working class; environmental assessment norms for new projects have been reduced to insignificance; fiscal transfers of over Rs1.45 lakh crores have been made to capitalists; privatisation has got extended to natural resources like coal violating a promise of the anti-colonial struggle, and is now being considered even for the railways. The capitalists and financiers have never had it so good, while the working people, including the tribals facing dispossession, are being pushed to unprecedented levels of penury.

None of the pro-capitalist measures of the Modi government will do anything to alleviate the crisis; on the contrary they would aggravate it greatly. The crisis is one of inadequate demand for home-produced goods; and these measures will squeeze demand even further. A fiscal transfer to capitalists which must entail heavier taxation of the working people if the fiscal deficit is to remain within the bounds imposed by finance capital, essentially means a shift of income distribution from the working people to the capitalists; this reduces aggregate demand at the margin (since the workers consume much more out of a rupee transferred than the capitalists), and hence, far from causing larger investment, has the very opposite effect of shrinking private investment. Exactly the same can be said of the other measures. In essence they are measures to shift income distribution in favour of the capitalists from the working people; and they would inevitably aggravate the crisis, which only brings us back to the point made earlier that there is no solution to the current crisis within the framework of neoliberalism.

Precisely for this reason the disaffection among the people will only increase over time, and to contain this disaffection, more and more repression will be resorted to, and distractions will have to be arranged, such as building the Ram temple, inaugurating the Ram temple, and so on. The emphasis on Hindutva in short creates such distractions. It not only keeps the oppressed working people divided, but also seeks to ensure that, notwithstanding disaffection among the working people including those belonging to the religious majority, the BJP continues to get enough votes to stay in power.

Hindu supremacism is a convenient ideology to be nurtured by finance capital: it enters into an alliance with the Hindutva forces in a period of economic crisis that would otherwise threaten its dominance and aggrandisement. Hindu supremacism,

Hindu rashtra and such like are not for the benefit of the Hindus; they are for the benefit of finance capital, which is why finance capital supports the Hindutva forces in every possible way.

But then, it may be asked, surely any exclusion of the Muslims from jobs, and from other benefits, would mean a larger share for the Hindus; so how can we say that Hindu supremacism will not benefit the Hindus? This counter to our argument might be pertinent in those situations where the minority that is targeted happens to have cornered a larger share of jobs, a larger share of seats in educational institutions etc than its share in the population; this for instance was true, at one time, of people of Indian origin in many east African countries. But in a situation where the targeted minority happens to be an excluded group, as is the case in India where the Muslims on average are in an even more abysmal situation with regard to jobs and education than the Hindus on average, such targeting will not even serve the Hindus in this vicarious manner. In short, the slide towards the Hindu rashtra targets the working people, both Muslims and Hindus; the idea that it would serve the interests of the Hindus is a sheer misconception. The sooner this misconception is removed, the better.

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