

Rising Fascism in India: Case Study of Modi's Regime

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ABSTRACT

Indian hegemonic ambition in South Asian region has always paved the way towards instability of the region. Indian successive governments have tried to dominate in the regional politics since the inception of India. Bhartya Janata Party (BJP) governments always use violence against minorities in India to get more support from nationalist elements. This paper explores the Indian fascist policy in general and policy of Narendra Modi in particular towards minorities in India. This paper will explore the traits of Narendra Modi as the fascist leader of contemporary world that is threatening the regional peace and stability of South Asia by its domestic policy within the India and its policy towards Kashmir. Different aspects of Fascism are discussed in the paper to provide a theoretical foundation to Indian aggressive policies. Policies of Modi regime with special reference to Pakistan and Kashmir are also discussed in this research paper. The paper identifies the nexus between RSS and BJP for promoting the fascist policies in India. The research concludes that Modi government is using the violence, authoritative control and totalitarian approach in running the affairs of state in India. This fascist approach is a threat not only for India itself but also for the stability of South Asian region.

Key words: India, Narendra Modi, Fascism, BJP & Kashmir.

Fascism: an analysis

Fascism is a term that is used to denote the radical inequality that demands obedience to ruler and obedience to state. Fascist states use aggressive controlling and authoritative method to run the affairs of the state. Fascism can be seen more than a political ideology as a mean of seizing power. Fascism is a philosophy that can be seen in many parts of the world particularly in Eastern Europe during the mid of 20th century. Although the life of fascism in those countries was not so long yet its repercussions can be seen till now even in contemporary world. Germany, Italy and Japan among those countries who had experienced the fascist regimes in past. Benito Mussolini of Italy and Adolf Hitler in Germany are considered as the torch bearer of fascist regimes in 20th century. The fascism was on its rise in Italy during the World War I. Benito Mussolini and other extremist political groups supported the war of Germany and Austria Hungary. With the passage of time, Mussolini was rose in power and he started to use different autocratic and violent means to gain more power in Italy. Similarly Hitler also

used violence and extremist techniques to get more and more power in Germany. Adolf Hitler was known as an early admirer of the Italian fascist regime.

Historian John McNeill pointed out that fascist movements of early era were based on the ideology of “hyper-nationalism or super-patriotism, promoted militarism, glorified masculinity, violence, and youth, worshiped a cult of the powerful leader, and idealized a mystical national ‘golden age’ in the past that could be reborn.” (Singer, 2017). Some identified fascism as “a mentality of us against them”. Some denoted it as “authoritarian, nationalist, anti-democratic.” For some, it is violent aspect and extreme form of authoritarian rule (Albright, 2018). Simeon (2012) referred Fascism as “the emergence of right-wing dictatorships marked by ultra-nationalist ideologies, the abolition of the rule of law and the destruction of democratic institutions”.

Fascist movements always seek towards one party rule over the police, the press, the military and the courts. Fascism has different characteristics that distinguished it from other forms of government and modern ideologies. It includes totalitarian ambitions, authoritarian policies, countering the cultural and political liberalism, opposing the parliamentary-democracy and use of excessive force and violence to suppress its opponents. Fascist regimes have many things in common such as use of violence, extreme militaristic attitude, strong nationalism, excessive use of power and avoidance from democratic and political norms and values.

Fascism in contemporary world

In contemporary political environment some states are having the same landscapes which were experienced by the European states in past. Some populist movements also inclined towards turning off fascist behaviour in contemporary political environment. Although populism does not mean the fascism at all, yet populism can be turned into fascist behaviour. Fascist regimes used the technique of violence ruthlessly to impose their fascist agenda over their subjects. The increase of power of fascist leader was not only due to popular support of the general public but was also due to the fear by using the violence against their opponents to suppress them. There is a fast growing tendency in global politics regarding the supremacy of a certain kind of far-right nationalism in contemporary global politics such as United States, Turkey, Russia, Poland and Hungary. Similarly the rise of BJP in India in contemporary environment is also seen as a rise of far-right nationalism on the same pattern.

In contemporary world, the rise of Narendra Modi in India and Donald trump in United States of America are the most recent example of rise of fascist tendencies which are reflected through the emergence of racist and ultra nationalist ideologies. Phobic attitude of such fascist leaders are not only dangerous for their own country but also a threat to the peace of the world in general and threat to the peace to their region in particular. Indian government is using violent military actions and suppressing the opponent by illegal means and

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ways. Hence, Modi government is becoming more popular among Hindus by using such methods which have always been used by the fascist regimes.

Finchelstein claimed that both Modi and Trump did not only known as right wing populists but also they had divided the society in two opposite camps, “the elites” and “the people”, raised resentment against intelligentsias, refutation of knowledge and culture in favour of nature, advancing the opposing ideas, disrespect towards political forces, military power and judiciary and banning the freedom of press by having intolerant behaviour towards media (Merelli, 2016).

Modi, RSS and fascism

Modi was elected as Prime Minister first time in May 2014. Some of the writers have portrayed his personality not as a hard liner rather as a development oriented politician who is emphasizing on governance, technology and development (Ruparelia, 2015; Pal et al., 2016). Whereas some of the writers presented that the voters were mobilized through typical BJP campaigning on traditional Hindutva pattern (Jaffrelot, 2015; Mukerji, 2015). Ashish Nandy wrote while remembering his interview with Modi in early 1990s that, “It was a long, rambling interview but it left me in no doubt that here was a classical, clinical case of a fascist...” (Sardesai, 2014) Narendra Modi is known as a fascist leader all over the world because of his fascist policies and his connection with RSS since he came into the power. Narendra Modi came into power from the platform of Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) in connection with Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Narendra Modi has joined the RSS long time ago. BJP is a political arm of RSS that is known as a famous far-right Hindu nationalist party. RSS always promoted the idea of suppression of non-Hindu minorities. Narendra Modi, the current Prime minister of India is a member of RSS. It is pertinent to mention that Nathuram Godse who assassinated Gandhivas also a member of RSS. This showed the real face of RSS. RSS was heavily influenced by European fascist movements in general and by the policies of Mussolini and Hitler in particular.

BJP came into power particularly during Modi regime by adopting the ideology of Hindutva and by using the emotional rhetoric of making India a state for Hindus based on harshly conservative, patriarchal, ethnically and religiously pure past (Stanley, 2018). The relationship of BJP and Fascism is not a new phenomenon that emerged during Modi regime. It is rooted in the historical connection of BJP and RSS. Hindus are considered as national race by the BJP whereas Muslims, communists and Christians are identified as alien elements by them. Golwalker, a former prominent BJP leader expressed about minorities in a very racist way by claiming, “The foreign elements may live at the mercy of the national race... and quit the country at the sweet will of the national race. That is the only sound view on the minorities’ problem” (Simeon, 2012).

In last two decades, the numbers of RSS loyal have been increased manifold not only in political sphere of life but also in civil servants at every e level of

state administration. Many scholars have identified the rise of RSS as an ideology and strategic power in their writings Bhatt (2001) Ludden (1996) George (2016). There are thousands of decentralized offices of RSS across India and they are playing the role of facilitator in implementing the fascist policies. This membership increase has influenced the implantation of RSS policies throughout the India BJP is a Hindu nationalist political party that does not only reject the pluralism but also targets the minorities in India particularly Indian Muslims. Modi fascist activities were liked during his government in Gujarat. During the 2002 anti-Muslim riots in Gujarat almost 1000 people were killed under the patronage of Narendra Modi who was chief minister of Gujarat at that time.

RSS has long-term goal of establishing the Hindu *Rashtra* nation. The policies of Modi particularly educational policies were part of the tool to achieve this objective. Another fascist initiative of Indian rulers can be seen by the attempt to change in curriculum. They are trying to promote the Hinduism as an enlightened, peace loving and non-violent religion whereas they are promoting the narrative regarding Islam as violent, benighted and fundamentalist religion in textbooks. Text book during the Narendra Modi government in Gujarat are clear example of RSS ideology towards Indian nationalism. At that time, Hitler was the textbook hero. Moreover during the regime of Narendra Modi in Gujarat Nazism and Fascism were glorified. Fascist regimes are always successful due to false propaganda and stimulating anti-intellectualism and Indian government under Modi is successful in making room for false beliefs that can be dangerous for the State itself. Ashok Swain who is professor of peace and conflict research at Uppsala University has identified that BJP is now a one-man party and he is considered as a God by a large number of his followers.

Non-secular attitude of India under Modi

Brosius (1999) mentioned that RSS and BJP are Hindu nationalists and they are using media to propagate the ideology of Hindutva and they are moving towards a path that can create a Hindu Nation. Media is used by BJP not only for the communications but also aggressive message to win the hearts and minds of the voters for BJP. White paper on Ayodhya clearly depicts that this campaign was to counter the “erosion of national identity and national consciousness as corrective to this denationalised politics.” Edward and Rama Murthy (2017) in their article indicated that although India is portraying itself as a global state having the secular mindset but in actual the policies of Indian government are distinctively Hindu. The construction of Hindu temple by destroying the 16th century mosque, the famous *Babri Masjid*, clearly shows the non-secular face of Indian government. The religious polarization is one of the big reasons behind Modi’s success in both elections. In fact, during the second term, Modi’s policies are more aggressive at home and abroad.

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Re-election of Narendra Modi as Indian prime minister has resulted in increasing Hindu nationalism and increasing fascism in India. Narendra Modi always portrays himself as a Hindu nationalist and always pursuing the policies of Hindu National politics. The re-election of Modi can be called as a referendum on violence against minorities, social exclusion of minorities, lynching of people belonging to low-cast and minorities and on fascism conducted by RSS and BJP in the first tenure of Narendra Modi.

From the experience of other states, Modi government has learnt that the more violent fascist movements always gather more popular support from the public (Ebenstein, 1973, p.111). Narendra Modi government in India are completely following the basic elements of fascist outlook (Ebenstein,1973, p.119) by adopting the policies of denial of basic human rights and equality, creating distrust among population, promoting the violence based on lies, government by elite following the policies of racism, totalitarianism and imperialism and opposing the international law and order.

Suppression of opponents by using the violence through government machinery has always been an instrumental tool used by Modi during his tenure as Chief Minister of Gujarat and later on as a Prime Minister. He was elected as Chief Minister of Gujarat, a Western Indian State, in 2001. In 2002, almost 3,000 peoples lost their lives in the wake of Hindu-Muslim riots in the state. The United States of America banned him from entering in US.

In February 2019, Modi government ordered to arrest different persons during the Delhi riots because of opposition of government. Even during the pandemic time, Modi government has targeted the minority directly or indirectly even for supplying of this pandemic. Recent example of using water cannons and tear gas shell over the lawful protest of the farmers in New Delhi clearly shows the fascist behaviour of Modi government in India. It is not only the political comments against opponents but also the direction of police, the erosion of civil liberties and the politicization of the judiciary are showing the trend that India is tilting towards fascism. This type of policies are compelling the scholars, politicians, researchers and activists to think that whether India is becoming a fascist state due to increasing authoritarian tendency of Modi government.

Communal violence and human rights violations during Modi regime

The issue of Human rights violation in India has always been remained a concern for the global world. Human rights of minorities are constantly undermined by the Indian government particularly during present regime. Communal violence in India is a perfect manifestation of the violence against minorities. 1984 persecution of Sikhs in Delhi, 2002 massacre of Muslims in Gujarat, 2008 killing of Christians in Odisha resulted in the deaths of thousands of minorities. Only in a single campaign for the destruction of the Babri Mosque, around five thousand lost their lives (Simeon, 2012).

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Many scholars such as Malik and Singh (1994), Ludden (1996), Sarkar (1996), Hansen and Jaffrelot (1998), Bhatt (2001), George (2016) have highlighted the atrocities of Modi government in India. Baksi and Nagarajan (2017) have compiled the data of extreme violence against Muslims and Dalits since the BJP government of Narendra Modi came into power in India (Ohm, 2015).

The recent attacks of lynching against Muslims by small number of people in groups of Hindus sometimes arm with swords sometime arm with knife and even some times with sticks. This type of violence is now a part of daily life in India. The killing of minorities, such as Dalits and Muslims on very minor issues, by the extremist Hindus are provoking the idea of fascist government in India. Interestingly the government has not only failed to stop this violence against minorities in India but also playing instrumental role in igniting such type of violence against minorities to make India a Hindutva state to get the dream of RSS realized. These internal riots and external policies are clear manifestation of totalitarian character of Indian government which is very far away from democratic values and norms of India. Increasingly fascist attitude can be seen in the government policies that whenever an individual or mob is involved in violence against minorities in general and against Muslims and Dalits in particular, these are not identified as crime by the police rather it is identified as a counter attack due to a sense of perceived threat from Muslims or Dalits.

The BJP government under Narendra Modi leadership has turned a blind eye to the mass murder of Muslims and many extremist leaders, fascist groups and police personals promoted as a reward being a part of that violence (Banaji, 2018, p.338).Gang rapes of Muslim, stabbing, beheading the Muslims and burning the Muslims to death, burning of Muslim housing societies are the main features introduced by the fascist regime to suppress the Muslims in India (Sarkar 2002; Ohm 2010).

Media is promoting the Hindus as superior and innocent nation whereas they are portraying the Muslims as guilty of terrorism, coronavirus and dirty. These messages were not only propagated in India but also circulated through online websites, pamphlets, television serials, videos tapes, brochures, newspapers, films and even WhatsApp groups throughout the world by the different branches of RSS. Koonz identified this tactic as a Nazi concise and Science (Koonz, 2003).

During the last six years of Modi regime one can observe a continuous degradation of India secular image and its democratic values. BJP government has introduces the controversial citizenship bill in the parliament that clearly based on the discrimination between refugees due to their religion. Citizenship Amendment Bill fueled a large hue and cry within India particularly from minorities. Both the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Constitution amendment Act are not only dangerous but also these steps are likely to be creating division and devastation in the Indian society at large. These steps that

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have denied the Identity to the Indian citizens and minorities are targeted and discriminated by the government so it will be very difficult for a state to survive for a long time peacefully. The revocation of Indian Citizenship Act has made almost 200m Muslims in a state of statelessness because they don't have papers to prove their identity that they are Indian (The Nation, 2020).

Naredari Modi government is famously known due to its anti-minority rhetoric in global world. From lynching of Muslims on different pretext to denial the rights to the Sikhs, the Modi's India government is not only turning blind eye to these atrocities but also supporting those elements who are involved in such mayhems. This human rights violation in all over India is promoting the Modi regime as a fascist regime of modern world.

Revocation of article 370 and Kashmir issue

BJP, RSS and other Hindu right wing forces have always opposed the article 370 on the pretext that this article is against the spirit of Indian democratic norms and distorting its secular image (farooq & Javaid, 2020, p.4). The successive Indian governments have always assured the Muslims of Kashmir that they would not take any step against the article 370 because it was a permanent feature of the Indian Constitution and has been confirmed by the High Court of Jammu and Kashmir and Supreme Court of India in its different rulings (Bhardwaj, 2019). Revoking of constitutional autonomy of Indian held Kashmir in 2019 followed by the curfew in that area raised a large hue and cry in Indian held Kashmir. These types of legislations do not only destabilizing the states internally but also these have regional and global implications in terms of creating instability in the regional balance of power sometimes. This deliberate attempt to convert Muslim majority area into Muslim minority also depicts the fascist behaviour of current government.

The world government must take the notice of Modi's fascist policies not only in terms of violating in the United Nations' resolutions over Kashmir but also violating the bilateral agreements with Pakistan. The Indian recent policy over Kashmir is particularly very dangerous because it has not only disturbed the peace of the region but also it has opened the door for nuclear war between two neighbouring states. Modi's domestic as well as external policies towards Kashmir are compelling the neighbouring states particularly Pakistan towards increase in its military power.

Continuous violation of ceasefire by Indian troops, cross border firing of Indian troops on innocent civilian population on Pakistani side of the border, false flag operation such as Pulwama attack of 2019, cross border attacks by Indian fighter jets on the Pakistan India border are the some examples of Indian fascist and aggressive policies towards Pakistan. In an incident, two Indian fighter jets were shot down and the pilot of the one fighter jet, Abhi Nandan, was

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captured. However he was released in the light of International Laws and as a goodwill gesture.

The continuous cross border firing by Indian forces on civilian population is also showing the extremist behaviour of successive Indian governments. It is very unfortunate that Indian forces have violated the ceasefire around 1,267 times only during one year of 2019 that resulted into at least 47, mostly civilians, martyred and around 241 injured (Daily Times, 2020). Farooq and Javaid (2020) called the revocation of Article 370 as a “Modi masterstroke”

Global and domestic response on Modi’s policies

It is not only the outer world but the voices within the Indian state are on rising as regarding the Modi by identifying these policies as fascist policies. The marginalization of the Muslim society and minorities in the wake of Modi’s policies are not only facing criticism globally but in India as well. The global thinkers, civil society and opposition political parties are also raising their voices on such fascist policies.

It is not only the world leaders even international media is criticizing the Modi on its fascist policies that is endangered the peace and stability of South Asian region. The Economist, a famous British magazine, has published an article entitled ‘Intolerant India: How Modi is endangering the world’s biggest democracy’.

Janet Rice, Federal Senator said, “human rights were fundamental and must be protected in all countries and for all people. Sadly in India, as in many countries around the world, people’s human rights are frequently not respected. We are particularly concerned at the impacts on religious minorities, political opposition groups, Indigenous peoples and other vulnerable communities.” (Khan, 2020)

Lee Rhiannon, former Australian Senator claimed, “there has been an alarming decline in democratic and secular standards in India. “I am often asked ‘Is the Modi government promoting a fascist vision for India?’ I understand why people ask this question,” she wondered. She further added that construction of massive detention centres in India for a large number of population considered to be non-citizens under new amendments in existing laws. Minorities are subject to target killing. Since more than one year, the Kashmiri people has been deprived from freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of movement by imposing curfew and by banning the communication means and international media in the wake of unilateral and arbitrary abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. The political leaders of Kashmir faced detention to prevent them from taking part and leading any anti-government protest and demonstration. She opined that “International community needs to be informed.” (Khan, 2020).

Shaffaq Mohammad, former Member of European Parliament (MEP) and British politician has identified the contemporary India as a fascist state as was

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Europe that killed around 6 million Jews in the past. Similarly, state sponsored elements are targeting minorities in general and Muslims in Particular in India to promote the ideology of Hindutva. He also criticized the abrogation of Article 35A and 370 in August 2019 for revocation of special status of Kashmir and autonomy of the Indian Occupied Kashmir along with one year brutal lockdown in Indian Occupied Kashmir. He was also a leading proponent of a resolution against the Indian Citizen Amendment Act. He also proved to be an instrumental in getting support of five major political groups having vital role in European Parliament.

Marie Newman, US Congresswoman also assured regarding the accountability of the Modi government in the wake of human rights conditions in India. Suchitra Vijayan, Executive Director of The Polis Project claimed that Modi government was increasingly using fascist policies to suppress the opponents and minorities by controlling media, law enforcement agencies and the judiciary (Khan, 2020).

Professor Anjali Arondekar, Director, Centre for South Asian Studies, criticized the Incumbent BJP government on its caste-based politics of oppression, discrimination though which the Modi government is marginalizing the minorities such as Muslims in India (The Express Tribune, 2020)

Imran Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan, has spoken about fascist ideology of Indian government in general and of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in particular on many occasions. He showed his concerns that regional peace and stability is facing threat and almost eight million Kashmiris and Muslims in India are suffering due to fascist policies of Modi regime (The Nation, 2020). Imran Khan tweeted, "The Hindutva Supremacist Modi Govt with its arrogant expansionist policies, akin to Nazi's Lebensraum (Living Space), is becoming a threat to India's neighbours. Bangladesh through Citizenship Act, border disputes with Nepal & China, & Pak threatened with false flag operation." (Voice of Sindh, 2020)

Even many Indian celebrities have denoted Modi as a fascist. Well known film director Mahesh Bhatt and well known Indian author Javed Akhtar condemned the Narendra Modi for paving the way for the rise of Hindu nationalism that has facilitated the rise of intolerance in India. Both of them have also shown their great concern regarding the genocide of the Muslims in India (The News, 2020) In an interview famous poet Javed Akhtar expressed that, "Of course, he is a fascist. Fascists do not have horns on their heads. Fascist is a thinking, and this thinking that we are better than others is fascism," he said. "The moment you hate people in wholesale, you are a fascist," He further added that "Hate the Muslim is the lifeline of the Bharatiya Janata Party". Famous film maker Mahesh Bhatt also expressed that many Indian celebrities were not commenting on the fast spreading hatred across India due to fear of targeting their movies by the far-right (The News, 2020).

Conclusion

Indian government under Modi regime can be seen as a perfect example of Fascism as it is militarizing the civil society and criminalizing the State. Violence is one of the most important key indicators of fascist regimes and during the recent government of BJP, communal violence has been increased manifold since Narendra Modi came into power. Modi's fascist policies are making him direct descendants of Mussolini and Hitler.

Since in his office as Prime Minister, the Narendra Modi was completely failed to wash out his image as a fascist ruler because of his long association with RSS. It has been a great concern since long not only in India but also in the global world that are BJP government would be disaster because of its fascist attitude. The violence against Muslims and Dalit shows that BJP and Modi has a license to torn the social fabric of Indian society by creating mayhem.

Indian government further got the opportunity to enhance its fascist agenda due to the War on Terror. The war on terror has propagated the image of Muslims as extremists and violent and potentially identified as a community harboring the terrorists and extremists elements. Revocation of article 370 has further strengthened the image of Modi's regime as a fascist regime. Such kind of steps will not only aggravate the volatile situation in Indian Occupied Kashmir but also will destabilize the South Asian region. The Indian government must revisit its policy of aggression towards minorities in general and towards Muslims in particular to revive its secular image in the eyes of global committee of nations. The global powers should also pursue India to change its fascist policy to maintain peace and stability in the region.

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