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India, the Bomb and the BJP/RSS: Nuclear Exhibitionism - Footfall of "Hindu" Fascism

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From Ayodhya to Pokhran ; Ram Mandir to Shakti Peeth ; Jai Shri Ram to Bam Bolo. The BJP/RSS has yet again changed gear - this time, from religious fanaticism to (almost) 'secular' jingoism.

At one level, the change is mere cosmetic rather than substantive and does not signify any fundamental shift. Both are essentially attuned to the task of generation, accentuation and systematic spread of insecurity, paranoia, hatred and aggression. Both are meant to stir primordial and bestial passions up from the darkest recesses at the bottom of human hearts directed against the (carefully constructed) 'other'.

At another, the two are separated not only by passage of time but also by a significant shift in the underlying balance of power, which has taken place in the intervening period. While Jai Shri Ram was the war cry of the emergent (Hindutwavadi) fascism (in opposition), with limited (though not insubstantial) access to the levers of state power ; Bam Bolo is an extremely important milestone in the evolving and unfolding action plan to reset the 'national agenda' by a central government already installed in power, headed by these fascist forces.

Here, it bears recalling that the central agenda of the BJP/RSS (i.e. the Sangh Parivar) is the establishment of a Hindu Rashtra (i.e. a "Hindu" nation state) and this calls for outright negation of the Indian nation state (and its ideological basis) which came into being through the process and as the culmination of India's struggle for independence from the British colonial rule. The 'idea of India' which emerged and evolved over the last 150 years or so during the course of this epic struggle (and also in its aftermath) essentially recognises the legitimacy of the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural character of the Indian society and consequently pluralist secular (corporatist) democracy as the only viable basis for the independent Indian state. The project of Hindu Rashtra, on the other hand, calls for mobilising the otherwise amorphous and heterogeneous Hindus by (re)defining , (re)constructing and (partially) homogenising them involving an intricate and elaborate process of identity building mainly through the mechanism of "stigmatisation and emulation" of the "evil, threatening and alien other", which is again ceaselessly being constructed and reconstructed. While religion is put to extensive and intensive instrumentalist use in the task of militant, exclusionist, majoritarian mobilisation, elements of (ultra)nationalism are also put to good use by borrowing and (mis)appropriating the idioms and icons of (widely accepted) mainstream (secular) nationalism, particularly (though not exclusively) of its rightwing variety.

If (at least partial) adoption of 'soft Hinduism' by successive Congress governments at the centre, roughly since the mid-seventies, (against the backdrop of a generalised rightward shift in the (national) political mood caused by the sum total of actual outcome of a 'welfarist' state driven capitalist economic development in the post-independence (parliamentary) democratic India and a worldwide decline of radicalism in the post-Vietnam War era) prepared the ground for the successful emergence of hard Hindutva (i.e. rabid Hindu communalism labeled as 'cultural nationalism'), then the gradual supplanting of the call for "unity in diversity" by the injunction to "join the national mainstream" on the part of the (then) mainstream establishment made the frenzied cry of "one

nation, one people, one culture" (or "Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan") sound less and less strange and alien.

The Pokhran blast carried out 14 years back, on the 18th of May, 1974, notwithstanding the officially proclaimed peaceful intentions, constituted the first visible turning point in independent India's policy of spirited championing of international peace, disarmament and creation of a nuclear weapon free world. The United Front headed government of India's refusal to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) as drafted by the Conference on Disarmament (CD) headquartered at Geneva, which was meant to impose blanket ban on all (except for sub-critical) nuclear explosions constituted the second turning point. This time the turn was even more radical, not just because the refusal was justified by unjustly equating the (virtually) non-discriminatory CTBT with the grossly discriminatory NPT (Non-Proliferation Treaty), which allowed the five acknowledged members of a permanent and exclusive nuclear club to uninhibitedly expand their nuclear arsenals, while disallowing all other states of the world, designated as nuclear have-nots, any such aberration. But because, for the first time, India's national security concern was cited as one of the principal reasons for not signing the treaty, thereby implying that the nuclear weapons, meant to cause indiscriminate mass destruction with long lasting traumatic effect on all life forms, are legitimate means to effectively ensure (India's) national security. This constituted a total reversal of India's official security doctrine being followed till then.

It can be quite justifiably argued that as the opening of the lock of Babri Masjid paved the way for its eventual demolition, similarly Pokhran '74 and CTBT '96 prepared the ground for the test explosions carried out on the 11th and 13th of May, 1998 for demonstratively military purposes. It would, however, be a criminal folly to ignore that as in case of 'lock opening' to 'demolition', 'Pokhran '74' to 'Pokhran '98' as well constitutes a qualitative (just not quantitative) leap conveying portends of imminent doom and thereby calling for the most determined and concerted actions on the part of those who are committed to defend and deepen 'democracy' in India. Here, it needs to be reiterated that the very existence of India will be in serious jeopardy in case 'democracy' does not survive.

In order to work out a set of appropriate and effective responses to this latest development, arguably of momentous import, it is required to examine the validity of the rationale being put forward in support of these blasts, identify the actual source(s) of inspiration, explore the real motivations and comprehend/anticipate the range of future possibilities.

As regards the claim that the blasts are meant to counter the heightened threats to India's security from China and Pakistan and actually have helped India to emerge far more 'powerful' and 'secure', this is evidently false. As has been pointed out in the editorial of The Economic Times (15.05.98), "[t]his is an illusion. India's strategic position [in the aftermath of the blasts] has not improved, and may just have deteriorated." The editorial has also rightly pointed out that a nuclear war is unwinnable as it assures mutual destruction. What, however, needs to be further clarified that a nuclear weapon, quite contrary to popular perceptions, is very much unusable as well. Nothing illustrates the point better than the well-demonstrated inability of the American war machinery to use the dreaded 'bomb' even while suffering a long drawn out, humiliating and bloody defeat in Vietnam. Incidentally the 'bomb' could not be used against the recalcitrant Iraq (or for that matter Libya, Cuba, North Korea or Iran either). The fact that the mighty USSR, the owner of second largest nuclear (and conventional) arsenal had to suffer disintegration at the beginning of the present decade should be enough to blow up the myth that the 'bomb' accords greater security, if not to the 'people', at least to the 'state'. What is, however, most interesting to note that in the aftermath of the blasts, instead of emerging 'more powerful', with more and more countries rallying behind India, it stands very much isolated in the international arena. Even non-nuclear Japan, Germany, Canada, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand have either actually taken punitive measures or are publicly threatening to do so against nuclear India. Not only

that, immediately after the blasts, the level of personal security for the Prime Minister had to be raised and the Home Minister predicted that now Pakistan would step up its hostile activities in Kashmir. In effect, the blasts have caused radical deterioration of India's 'security' environment and very substantial erosion of its political clout and 'power' in the international arena.

A section of the Left (and centrist parties) have claimed that the blasts (and the anti-Chinese tirade of the Indian Defence Minister that preceded these) have been occasioned by American promptings from behind the scene and this is a part of imperialist grand design to encircle and corner China. This proposition is evidently a product of a fossilised mindset, pathologically disinterested in and incapable of comprehending the ambient reality. Interestingly, the official Chinese response itself has quite clearly pinpointed India's internal political compulsions, and not any external stimulus, as the cause of these blasts. In fact, as of now, the American establishment does not have any policy for aggressive containment of the People's Republic of China, notwithstanding the fact that there are some voices (e.g. former Senator Larry Pressler or the House Speaker Newt Gingrich) within it, who by no means represent the mainstream, clamouring for building up of India to counter the potential Chinese challenge. The fact that America has taken leading initiative to ensure imposition of collective sanctions against India clearly reveals the hollowness of this theory. As a matter of fact, it is the BJP/RSS led government of India, which is trying to hard sell the idea that the "Hindu" India is keen to play the role of American gendarme in South Asia (as the Zionist state of Israel is doing in the Middle East) provided the Clinton administration concurs with their project of making India "Hindu" and in the process winks at their nuclear adventurism and such other aberrations. It is precisely with this intention they have opened the floodgate of concessions to the American multinationals ready to do business in and with India, so that they are enticed to lobby on their behalf together with the American politicians appreciative of this proposition. If, in spite of all this and some initial softness, the Clinton administration has toughened its stand, without completely closing the channels of communication, it is because of its serious and determined efforts to get the CTBT ratified by the American legislators in the teeth of dogged Republican opposition and eventually implemented by the international community.

In a broadly similar manner, any suggestion that the blasts were prompted essentially by the Indian owning classes, notwithstanding the BJP/RSS led central government's likely attempts to appease the business and the industry through some 'tough' anti-working class and pro-liberalisation measures taken under the cover of ultra-nationalist frenzy generated by the blasts, would be quite out of tune with the actual reality. The blasts by themselves do not reflect and further the interests of the Indian owning classes, large sections of which are too keen to integrate with the world economy, in any fundamental sense. The realisation that this adventurist act on the part of the Sangh Combine may inflict heavy damage on the Indian economy (and the polity as well), made easier by the sanctions imposed by the various developed countries, has already made a section of this class quite jittery about all this (as exemplified by the ET editorial quoted above). This fact needs to be clearly recognised as it admits of the possibility (though not inevitability) of building up of a 'national' front against the fascists, broadly in line with what had happened during the authoritarian Bonapartist Emergency Raj of Indira Gandhi in the late seventies.

If the 'soft Hinduism' of the Congress variety did actually legitimise and consequently help promote the 'hard Hindutva' of the Sangh Combine, instead of combating it, the 'soft (and competitive) nationalism' of the anti-BJP parties, in response to the Combine's carefully orchestrated plan to stir up national jingoism from the vantage position of the seat of central power, is also not destined to meet with any different fate. The sinister design of the Sangh Combine, the two(!) installment blasts (coinciding with the release of a special commemorative issue of the RSS organ *Organiser* on Nuclear India) being only the tip of the proverbial iceberg, can be combated only through determined and principled adherence to and championing of the cause of pluralism, secularism,

egalitarianism and democracy, at least on the part of those who look upon themselves as the potential vanguards in this battle. In the instant case, in order to stall the rising and menacing tide of national jingoism, which is being deliberately caused as a part of the fascist agenda, there is absolutely no alternative to militant pacifism with serious and principled commitment to the cause of international peace and disarmament.

By their latest action, the Sangh Parivar has yet again demonstrated that they would not desist from even the most extreme form of adventurism, as and when the opportunity arises or is engineered. No amount of 'multi speak' or tactical zigzag on their part can obliterate this simple truth. Under the present circumstances, even partial surrender to the passions of national chauvinism will prove disastrous as it would ideologically and politically disarm even the hard core followers of the anti-BJP parties, not to speak of the larger masses, and make them extremely vulnerable against the further onslaughts of the fascist Combine. The initial dithering on the part of the various opposition parties has already made things quite a bit difficult. But all is not yet lost. A number of protest demonstrations organised by numerous small groups and eminent intellectuals/activists all across the country has shaken, if not shattered, the myth of 'national consensus'. This must be built upon by standing firm, resolute, determined and speaking up clearly and loudly urging the 'nation' to get united against the unfolding sinister anti-India conspiracy of installing a "Hindu" fascist regime. There is no other option left.

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P.S.

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