

BJP's CD: Fascist Stereotypes

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Bharat Mata, *Gau Mata* and *the Hindu woman*. These are the three staples in the Hindu Right's repertoire of communal venom. *Bharat Mata* (Mother India) is threatened by dismemberment; *Gau Mata* (Mother Cow) by disembowelment; and the *Hindu woman* is vulnerable to seduction, elopement and conversion. The villain of course consistently remains the Muslim. The script is a familiar one: from the Hindu Mahasabha in the 19th century to Modi in present-day Gujarat, all have raised the spectre of a lascivious and aggressive Muslim male, the depletion of Hindu numbers as a result of loss of its women lured by Muslim men, and a rising tidal wave of Muslim population swamping out the Hindus. All this is of course meant to be a function of the divided loyalties of the Muslim, theorised by the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) ideologue as the perpetual conflict between pitrabhoo and punyabhoo.

So really the obnoxious CD released by the BJP on the eve of the UP elections should not surprise us. Titled rather grandly, *Bharat Ki Pukar*, it is replete with all the stereotypes that fascism creates and feeds upon. A series of pedantic episodes (its pedagogical intent is made all the more clear by rendering the central character, the BJP loyalist and patriot par excellence as masterji), each sequence serves to illumine what the BJP perceives as certain hard truths. Thus the first lesson learnt is that while Hindus sing paeans to Mother India, Muslims are engaged in planting bombs and spreading terror. Lesson Number Two is that all Muslim are butchers; all Muslims are inclined to slaughter cows, and that they will acquire cows by stealth and deception, if need be. Lesson Number Three: Muslim women are oppressed and considered mere consumables by the male members of the community. It's quite interesting that this 'fact' is lamented by a Muslim women herself to Masterji, who in turn yearns for the day when all Muslim women, educated and enlightened, will realise this. Thus the possibility of splitting the Muslim community along gender lines is expressed. In contrast to the eternally oppressed Muslim woman is the independent Hindu woman, the social worker, didi (played by the President of the BJP's cultural wing in UP, Kalpana Talwar), who ultimately takes on the mantle of Hindu leadership from Masterji following his death. Lesson number Four is that Muslims breed at a great rate (jingoism about four wives, 35 children is repeated ad nauseum). So fast is the rate of growth, we are warned that, there will be no Sohan Lals and Atma Rams left, "only Abbas, Naqvi, Rizvi and Maulvi" will thrive. Lesson Number Five is that the honour and faith of Hindu women is under constant threat by Muslim men. So Lesson number Six is that BJP must be voted to power to ensure that India (for the moment Uttar Pradesh) remains the land of Hindus, and is purged of terrorists and secularists who patronise the traitors.

So pathetic is the narrative, so shoddy the acting, and so blatantly caricatured the Muslims that the film could have ended up as a comic farce. Except that the violence that often accompanies such stereotyping is all too real. The past few months have seen hectic and systematic attempts to communally polarise the UP. Mau, Gorakhpur and indeed the entire Poorvanchal belt has been on the boil, followed by an incredibly vicious campaign by the Hindu Yuva Vahini of Adityanath, the Member of Parliament (MP) from Gorakhpur. A filmic portrayal of communal myths has that much more power to provoke hatred and incite riots. For instance, there is a full 50-second visual of a cow

(or is it a buffalo?) being slaughtered with only the hem of a lungi fluttering around furtively. The association between lungi and butcher and between butcher and Muslim has already been established by now in the film. Indeed every single individual is marked off by communal identity markers: lungi, skull cap, beard, burqa and paan for Muslims; choti (tuft), janeyu (sacred thread), kaleva (red thread tied on wrists) and tika for Hindus. There can be no reconciliation, no interaction between the two. Hence the possibility of love and marriage across communities is denied. So Geeta elopes with Ram, only to discover that he is really Shehzad Ali. Ali proclaims: "when the Hindu girls get ensnared by us, they scream and shout but sadly there is no one to listen to them and we have great fun." (It does appear from the film that Muslim men spend a lot of time posing as Hindus, occasionally to procure cows for slaughter, and at other times to lure Hindu girls into marriages). Repeatedly Muslim characters are made to mouth all the communal myths that Hindutva has nurtured over the years: a group of Muslim women sit discussing how producing many progenies is their bounden duty, and how their leaders have announced awards for all those who will produce more than 10 children! Moments later, we see a sadhvi (sitting next to Vinay Katiyar and Co. on a dais) goading the audience thus: "Hindus will produce two children and Muslims will marry five times and produce 35 pups and make this country into an Islamic state." 35 pups! This must be a new low, even by BJP standards. But of course, all this has been justified by the Muslim women's discussion about procreation as a service to Jihad.

Despite the feeble denials by the BJP leadership that the CD did not form part of the 'official' campaign (never mind that Lalji Tandon released the CD with much fanfare), the party's mood has been one of belligerence. It chose to follow up the CD with an equally offensive advertisement campaign ('Kya inke iraade pak hai?') which clearly sought to identify Muslims as traitors. Around the same time, BJP's Muslim face, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi (one of those whose growth the BJP CD so fears), demanded an audit of secularism (*The Hindu*, 18 April 2007). At the end of 60 years of Independence, Naqvi insisted, an impartial assessment must be made of the net gains and losses of secularism. No, he did not mean to imply that secularism had been an empty rhetoric all these years, with the Muslims remaining at the bottom of the heap, as demonstrated by the Sachar Commission report. Rather, he railed on, secularism had allowed unfettered growth of enclaves of terror. He was only voicing what the CD crudely portrays. While it certainly is geared to a Hindu consolidation at election time, beyond this, the CD will serve as a handy manual for the Hindutva storm troopers everywhere, from Gujarat to Madhya Pradesh.

P.S.

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