“Hindu fascism” and the BJP Government

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Numerous Western India-watchers, Delhi correspondents and other “experts” have been warning for many years that a BJP government would be a terrible thing, as this was a “fascist” party. Today, it is possible to separate the sincere and conscientious experts from the others, by a very simple criterion: has he or she compared the actual performance of the BJP government with these dire predictions? Or in practical terms: has he or she apologized to the readers or viewers for misinforming them all this while?

For indeed, the prediction of BJP “fascism” has fallen flat on its face, as will be clear from a brief survey of the defining elements of “fascism” and how they relate to Indian reality. For starters, fascists are reputed to be violent. It was predicted that communal violence would increase a hundredfold if the BJP were allowed to come to power. In reality, the BJP term in power has been the most peaceful year since decades. Even in Jammu and Kashmir, Islamic killings of Hindus have markedly decreased. That terrorists killed twenty Hindus in Jammu (an incident that went strictly unreported in the Western media) on the eve of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee’s peace mission to Pakistan is first of all the responsibility of the killers themselves, even if not preventing this massacre was secondarily also a failure of the security forces. Note that most of the victims of the remaining communal violence were Hindus -- hardly the doing of the Hindu nationalist government.

The Christian missionary lobby had aptly sensed the frustration of the India-watchers at seeing the “unexpected” success of the BJP in maintaining communal peace, hence its initiative to launch an international slander campaign alleging BJP atrocities against the Christians. More than ever, they could count on the foreign experts to amplify their propaganda. The world media consumer was told about the rape of four nuns and about the killing of a Christian girl and her little brother “by Hindu fundamentalists”; but not about the subsequent finding that the culprits had been Christians. Even the murder of Rev. Staines and his two sons could not definitively be attributed to Hindu activists, but even if could have been, this would make the death toll of the “persecution” of Christians in India peanuts compared to the suffering of Pakistani or Indonesian Christians, not to mention Kashmiri Hindus.

So, undeniably, the Vajpayee government has been a very responsible one in controlling communal passions. One of the reasons is that the BJP knew that in case of communal rioting, it would at any rate be held accountable. Secularist governments, by contrast, can let communal sores fester and riots escalate, for they know that the blame will always be put on the BJP (or how false allotment of guilt can aggravate the crime).

But at least the BJP’s “militaristic” policy of nuclear and missile testing proved its “fascism”? This proposition could only be discussed with those who have always called the USA, France, England, Russia and China “fascist” states because of their tested nuclear capability. But the BJP never started these military projects: India’s first nuclear bomb was tested in 1974 under Indira Gandhi, and the Agni missile was also inherited from previous governments. What the BJP has done is to be open and frank about
India's status as a nuclear power — which is intrinsically better for world security than secretive armament policies. The demonstration of top-notch technological know-how in the tests was less a military than a geopolitical statement: a clear rejection of the unipolar New World Order. Nothing fascist about that, but a democratic expression of India’s national will, for military self-reliance is a policy supported by the vast majority of the Indian people.

Speaking of democracy: a fascist is first and foremost an opponent of democracy, right? Within his first year of government, Hitler had passed the first anti-Jewish laws, eliminated some fellow-Nazi rivals in an orgy of violence (Night of the Long Knives), dissolved all other political parties, and abolished Parliament. Anyone upholding the equation “BJP = Nazi” must either show the parallels in Vajpayee’s regime, or withdraw his allegations and apologize. In particular, he will have to concede that the BJP has by no means threatened or undermined democracy, on the contrary. The BJP has for twenty years been the only major political party with a functioning intra-party democracy, quite in contrast with the autocratry of the Gandhi dynasty in the Congress Party or the mafia mores of the socialist and regional parties. Under the Emergency (1975-77), the Hindu nationalists were in the forefront of the struggle for democracy and against Congress dictatorship. When the Janata coalition government in which they were the senior partner (like Hitler and Mussolini in their first governments) lost its majority, they abided by the rules and stepped down to contest new elections. This time again, they upheld the democratic traditions.

The BJP also refrained from using the loopholes in the Constitution to undermine federalism by dismissing state governments at will, quite unlike Congress practice. Indeed, the BJP even sacrificed its own government to uphold federalism: it could easily have appeased Mrs. Jayalalitha by dismissing the Tamil Nadu state government (or by intervening in the judicial proceedings against her), yet it stuck to its principles. All in all, the BJP government’s fall was unusually honourable: it was narrowly defeated by a coalition of Communists, separatists (Soz), criminals (Laloo, Mulayam), dynastic plotters (Sonia and her cronies) and corrupt politicians fleeing justice (Jayalalitha, possibly Rajiv Bofors’s widow). I used to be skeptical of the BJP’s capacity for governance and of Vajpayee personally, but I must say now that even if the BJP with its numerous coalition partners has not achieved anything great (unless you count Pokharan 2 as great), it has refrained from making a number of predictable mistakes, and it has entirely had nothing to do with the predicted crimes of a “fascist” nature.

A final question: how come no one among India’s investigative journalists has cared to find out about Sonia Gandhi’s background? Rumour has it that her father was a militant fascist and, in 1943-45, a volunteer in the German army on the eastern front. We should not judge her own worth by that of her father, nor should we judge his youthful choices too harshly: fascism was not nearly as murderous or totalitarian as Nazism, the motivation of East Front soldiers was often the same as that of the much-decorated Korea volunteers a few years later (viz. to stop Communism), and it took bravery to volunteer for front duty in a losing war. But still, if such a biographical detail pertained to a BJP prime-ministerial candidate, would he and we not be reminded of the fact every time his name was mentioned? More generally, why are the Indian and Western media so full of imaginary BJP threats to democracy when their darling secularist parties have so many anti-democratic skeletons in their closets?