

Why Did December 6, 1992 Happen?

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It is rubbish to say that a large number of Hindus have turned to Hindutva because secularism has meant the pampering of minorities. Hindutva is not a response to 'pseudo' secularism. It is a response to genuine secularism, among other democratic values, and it has its origin in a political need to counter aspirations for democracy and equity in the concrete context of the new consensus being fabricated by the ruling classes concerning economic and political matters.

MOST of the time we are asking ourselves the other question: how could December 6 happen? Leftists and liberals being predominantly guilt-ridden people, that is how we tend to question undesirable happenings. How could it ever have happened, how is it we never prevented it, never so much as guessed it, and so on. Guilt is a good thing, for it makes for introspection and self-criticism; but the self that is introspecting should—at least after a certain amount of wholesome flagellation—be able to see its acts (including non-acts) as part of a social and historical totality wherein it certainly cannot escape responsibility for the consequences of what it does or fails to do, but that responsibility is only an aspect of the fundamental truth that the self that is acting to create or destroy the world is itself part of the world and is co-determined—in its aims, intentions and the practical consequence of its ideals as well as presumptions—along with the rest of the world including the objects of its activity, by the forces of material life and the conflicts that bedevil that life. Ideas are real, volition is real and the responsibility that goes with them is equally real, but to accept this is not to attribute an unreal sovereignty to human volition and human thought in history. However much we may wish to introspect today, it is a little too much to believe that December 6 happened because we did not realise how much the excesses of Shahabuddin and the idiosyncrasies of the Shahi Imam of Delhi's Jama Masjid hurt the 'sentiments of the Hindu masses', and did not condemn those gentlemen loudly enough.

This is what we are being told now, both by the self-appointed prosecutors of pseudo-secularism (whose logic is not very clear: firstly, why are they worried about pseudo-secularism when they do not approve of secularism itself; and secondly, do they mean that they would not have pulled down Babar's mosque if only secularists had condemned Imam Bukhari?);

and by some people who like to pretend they are one among the liberal crowd and are only doing that community a service by insisting that it introspects and confesses to its sins which are the origin of today's disasters. Both these varieties of critics are only very intelligent people who know that the best way to attack democrats is to make them feel guilty for then they will tie themselves up in confessional knots and ignore the bigger duty of analysing what is happening and why. Having noted in more than sufficient detail the sins committed by secularists, it is time now to be done with confessions and take a look at matters objectively, however dubious that task may seem to the subaltern theorists and the post-modernists whose current preponderance among the progressive intelligentsia is one reason—with due respect for their intellectual vigour and correct intentions—for the latter's helplessly inadequate response to the bulldozing of Hindutva.

MYTH OF PAMPERING OF MINORITIES

It is rubbish to say that a large number of Hindus have turned to Hindutva because secularism has meant the pampering of minorities. This is a very clever argument that uses the acts of opportunism indulged in by the Congress governments to justify a basically anti-democratic opposition to the very recognition of the status of minorities and the rights that are due to them. The minorities as a whole have never been pampered, but only the communal-minded opinion-makers and vote-gatherers among them, usually to the detriment of the oppressed among them, as for instance in the case of the infamous Shah Bano affair. Secondly, the granting of special rights and protection to certain regions of the country such as Kashmir and the north-east has nothing to do with minorities or the pampering of them, as the BJP has been consistently and very mischievously

propagating, thereby doing incalculable harm to the nationality aspirations of people who are peripheral to Indian history, politics or culture; or who wish to lead an independent existence for reasons of their own.

Hindutva is not a response to pseudo-secularism. It is a response to genuine secularism, among other democratic values, and it has its origin in a political need to counter aspirations for democracy and equity in the concrete context of the new consensus being fabricated by the ruling classes concerning economic and political matters, whose immediate and urgent manifestation is the structural adjustment programme. The sins of opportunism committed by the Congress in the name of secularism merely constitute an excuse to justify this execrable abomination, which should no longer be seen as merely the world view of the BJP, much less as an anachronistic revival of mediaevalism, but as the core of the emergent ideology of the ruling classes in the current political-economic context that has been in the making ever since Indira Gandhi came back to power in 1980. The response of the prime minister, the administration, the police and the highest judiciary of the land—ranging from the weak-kneed to the down-right collusive—shows amply that what we are faced with is much bigger and wider than the devilry of the Sangh Rarivar

LEGITIMISING IDEOLOGY

What made Hindutva necessary as an ideology and what made it possible are questions that need to be answered. For more than three decades this country was ruled by a combination of bureaucratically controlled and planned economic development, small doses, of welfare and reform, a big dose of the Nehruvian ideology of socialism, secularism and democracy and where that failed, the ruthless use of the policeman's gun. Planning and control are now declared obsolete, reform and welfare are a drain on the budget, the policeman's gun is ubiquitous, and the ideology has become non-functional. Indeed, the practical viability of the ideology is predicated on a certain restriction of the consumption and accumulation of the rich, a certain minimum of transfer of resources from the rich to the poor, and a certain minimum of tolerance of their right to agitate for a better life. As the national consensus of the ruling classes regarding the generation, distribution and investment of the nation's resources centred on planning and the public sector broke down, and as they started cutting each other's throat to corner the nation's resources as well as the

political power that determines their distribution, there was little desire and less inclination left not to appear predatory and to share anything with the masses. And there was a corresponding diminution of the already slight inclination to tolerate popular movements. This change did not come because Nehru died and lesser mortals took over. It was the inherent logic of the original consensus that led to its demise. The purpose of bureaucratic control and planning was not to engender state socialism, as many leftists voluntarily promised on behalf of the ruling classes, but to enable the propertied classes to modernise technologically and accumulate at a greater rate and in a more stable and balanced way than would have been possible for them left to themselves, that is to say left to the market. But the logical outcome of this was a technologically more or less modernised ruling class with newly grown muscles and sinews which soon discovered that the original consensus was an obstruction, a hindrance, to further accumulation. As a natural consequence of the individualised character of this realisation, the breakdown of the old consensus resulted, not in a conscious collective attempt to fabricate a new consensus but in political anarchy and economic individualism. As all the institutions of the state were involved in the process of 'nation building' in the original consensus, there was now an all-round breakdown of consensual values in the polity, and a thorough destruction of all the institutions thereof whose sanctity was an ideological principle commonly agreed upon. It was through this anarchy, opportunism and plain plunder that the new consensus was to evolve, and is indeed evolving. It was evident from 1980 onwards that a core element of this consensus would be the transference of a privileged role in accumulation from the bureaucracy to private hands, but given the context of a dependent and underdeveloped capital, that is not a simple matter of 'going over to the market'. It includes not only the industrial policy reorientation and tax restructuring that Manmohan Singh talks smoothly about, but also the accommodation of, for instance, the *arrack* lords of Andhra Pradesh with whom it is the gun and the bomb and not any marginalist principle that determines who invests where, how much and why. The process will therefore take quite some more time and see quite a lot of turbulence, both social and political, as well as economic uncertainty. What is most likely to emerge at the end is some kind of a warlord market economy (if that expression makes any sense) rather than anything imagined even by the most cynical textbook model of a capitalist economy.

One of the problems this ogre faces is the lack of a direct legitimising ideology.

A material system that is perceived by the people—rightly or wrongly—as arising from or at least along with their own aspirations can claim legitimacy for itself in the name of those aspirations, as happened with early capitalism in western Europe that justified itself on the grounds of the liberal principles of the Enlightenment; and as happened—though at a much less spectacular level—with independent India's economic and political consensus which legitimised itself on the grounds of socialism and democracy. Such a directly legitimising ideology is made up of the most positive values of the time. But today's restructuring, which should not be attributed to the devils called IMF and World Bank but should be understood as a phenomenon essentially arising from the logic of India's economy, has no such facility. It can only attract the loyalty of the people by appealing to what is negative, destructive and undemocratic in their ideas, or by completely diverting their attention from itself and asking for loyalty not on the ground of what the restructuring will do for them but on grounds such as threats to 'our' culture, 'our' identity and 'our' existence. Both these elements are present in the ideas and myths that have been thrown up with great ferocity in recent years and are slowly getting welded together to form an ideology suited to these times. Since these ideas do not add up to a new world view—such as liberalism or socialism—they are being welded into an old one, and one that is eminently suited to the negative, destructive and anti-democratic essence of the ogre in the making. And that is Hindutva, the most consistently anti-democratic of all pre-modern world views. The Nehruvian ideology touched a chord in the hearts of the people not because the ruling classes were very sincere about it but because it corresponded to the people's own desire—fresh from anti-colonial and social struggles—for a just and equitable society. Today Hindutva becomes a possible ideology for the opposite reason. It is a framework that cannot express any liberating ideal, but can sanctify every suppressive injunction, everything that is negative and inhuman.

CHALLENGE TO DEMOCRATIC POLITICS

The BJP may well express resentment at the horror stories currently in circulation that the political victory of Hindutva will mean the restoration of Manu and his Dharmasastra to the status of Law. The BJP is presumably not stupid enough to believe this to be literally possible. Manu's Law in its literal sense can rule today's India only if it is accompanied by a daily use of the gun and the battle tank, which can only be an option of last recourse for any rational ruling class. But even divested of the extremities, of brahminical bar-

barism, Hindutva will cease to be itself if it gives up its core world view, which is that society (or rather, *samara*) is a pre-ordained structure of differential status and privileges; that each one of us is placed in a certain location in that structure; and that *dharma* consists in living by the rules that govern that location. A modern Hindutva—assuming the best possible case—may reform itself up to a point and rid itself of the worst features of caste and patriarchy to mitigate its most obvious iniquities, but the essential idea that right living consists in accepting and living by the rules governing one's position in this hierarchically ordered structure called *sansara* is the non-delegable core of Hindutva, and that is what makes it so attractive to those who are sick of the claims made by notions of equity and justice upon the nation's resources and social peace, to the detriment of their own accumulation which is naturally identical with the nation's greatness. This last bit about the nation's greatness is of course a latter-day addition to the original purpose of ensuring social stability. To lead a *dharmic* life is not only to live according to one's status in society but also to find satisfaction in doing so. The purpose of the *dharmic* life was said to be eventual *moksha*, which is an ideological notion, a myth, that covers up the real purpose of social stability and orderly existence of hierarchical privileges and exploitation. Today, in modern terms, Hindutva adds to this traditional notion a completely modern (and secular!) patriotism. Apart from eventual *moksha* to oneself, this *dharmic* life will bring greatness to the country, which is as wholly secular an ideal as equity except that it is anti-human and obnoxious. In regarding communalism and secularism as the opposite of each other in the idiom of Indian politics, it should not be forgotten that communalism is the use of religion for an entirely secular purpose. It would be no surprise if, in secret, Advani did not believe in *moksha* at all.

We heard this plaint about the greatness of the country audibly during the anti-Mandal agitation. And we hear it every time there is a discussion about the country's problems in a college, a club, a village panchayat, or even among the passengers of a train or bus. The pampering of minorities, of backward communities and regions, of women and of recalcitrant ingrates such as the Nagas, the Bodos, the Gurkhas and other snub-nosed people, is heard of again and again. So is the costly mistake of doling out cheap loans, subsidised assets, artificially created employment opportunities, inefficient bits of land and unviably tiny enterprises to the poor, the unemployed and the landless. The tone of this complaint, for all its modern concerns, rhymes so well with the tones of the Hindu view of the world and

the Hindu ideal that right life consists not in seeking to improve that life but in accepting it and living in the light of the division of humankind according to *guna* and *karma* by the Lord Himself—as He Himself confesses in His Celestial Song—into the great and the small, the free and the unfree, the noble and the base. It is no surprise therefore that it is rising so fast and emerging as a dominant ideology suited to the current season. And it is in this that the real challenge to democratic politics lies, not in the imagined likelihood of a formal restoration of brahminical mediaevalism, however much the swamis and acharyas who have recently turned to politics may desire that.

SOCIAL BASE OF HINDUTVA

The fact that Hindutva suits the ideological needs of India's ruling classes in the present period—much as Nehruism suited their needs in the previous period—does not explain why it has become politically strong today. For that one needs to account for the significant social base it has acquired today.

In analogy with the rise of fascism in Europe, analysts seeking to explain this phenomenon have pointed to the increasing frustrations in society, but frustrations peculiar to an underdeveloped third world country, as a source of support to rabid minority-hatred. What matters here is not so much the immediate social and economic problems such as unemployment, hunger, overcrowding, rising prices, etc, but the death of hope and hope-inspiring values, for which it is the rulers of the country who are to be blamed. In the absence of hope the frustrations give rise to rage which is easily channelled into hatred of linguistic, ethnic and religious minorities. The Sangh Parivar does this, and simultaneously creates a new hope, or rather a new faith, not of a full and satisfying life for oneself, but of the emerging might and power of the Hindu nation. There is no doubt a lot of truth in this analysis. Analysts have also not been lacking who have taken a more sympathetic view of the frustration, though not of its consequences. They have seen Hindutva as a reaction to western liberalism and secularism imposed upon Indians *sahib*-fashion by English speaking urban persons. One does not know whether this resentment really exists outside the intelligentsia—the small town 'vernacular intelligentsia'—and whether one can attribute it to the mass of Hindutva's new-found following. And in any case the viewpoint that regards liberalism as a species of westernised elitism—which is different from a critique of its inherent weakness in a situation where it does not emanate from below but is preached from above—is a decidedly dubious one.

But in seeking reasons for the wide acceptability that Hindutva has in recent

times gained, it will not do to stop with general analysis of fascism and its capacity to gain popular support in times of acute social crisis, economic and social insecurity, frustrated aspirations, etc. It is necessary to take into consideration the specific nature of Hindutva and the appeal specific to it. Both Hitler and Mussolini spoke of socialism. Hindutva has never done so, and will never do so. European fascism had in the beginning, until it came to power that is, a 'populist' aspect. Hindutva abhors anything carrying the slightest taint of democracy and socialism so much that it will not even be populist. A populist fascism, for instance, would today have made a big show of opposing the new economic policy. The BJP will not only not do that, it offers the most brazen arguments in defence of liberalisation of the economy. It must be remembered that the only time Hindutva so much as toyed with the idea of social equality was when the BJP adopted the ambiguous notion of Gandhian socialism for a short while, but that too was dropped very fast, for even the play-acting could not be stomachied.

CONCENTRATION OF RESENTMENT

To see Hindutva's political ascendancy as a result of the frustration of positive hopes and desires is to see the popular aspect of its base. But that is only one of the aspects. There is another that is more fundamental. In this, the popular base of Hindutva is not really 'popular' unless one defines that term in a merely empirical sense. In this aspect Hindutva is not a fascist distortion of positive aspirations, but a fascist concentration of negative traits, of resentment and frustration born in reaction to the space conquered by the oppressed and the underprivileged in India's political universe. Hindutva cannot properly be called a counter-revolution—there is no revolution going on in India that is strong enough to deserve such a big name to its enemy—but it shares with counter-revolution inequality that it gains in seeming popularity by appealing to the resentment created not just at the top of society but *across* society by democratic and egalitarian aspirations from below. It is not often enough recognised in Marxist analysis of counter-revolution that privileges exist at all levels of society and not just at the top—though not all of them may have an equally determining influence on the social structure—and that therefore there is a little enemy of equality within each one of us, however lowly we may be in relation to the totality. The smallest farmer thinks he is superior to the wage labourer—especially, though not only, if the latter is untouchable—and the lowliest man thinks he is lord of his wife. There is no fatalism about this, for given a thoughtful political response from the democratic forces this

resentment can be corrected, but in the absence of such a political response it can create a seemingly popular base for fascism.

If the last four decades of India's political history have not seen much of official achievement of socialism and democracy, there has nevertheless been a tremendous expansion of democratic and egalitarian aspirations among the oppressed people, which has been frequently suppressed but also accommodated once in a while in a half-hearted manner. These aspirations have not been just abstract. They have taken the concrete form of small and major struggles, organised and unorganised. The struggles have often taken place in the teeth of discouragement, belittlement and brutal suppression by the state, for all that it is officially committed to equality and justice. They have achieved a little in legislative and institutional terms. But whether they have achieved anything or not, there has been no effective dampening of the aspirations, and therefore no going back to old habits of thought, talk and behaviour in day-to-day life and toil. Even if the wage labourer's daily wages have not increased faster than the cost of living, his/her self-respect has registered an irrepressible increase, and this tells in day-to-day relations with farmers.

Though not all the rights asserted are economic in character, their gratification is ultimately predicated on a speedy, balanced and equitable pattern of economic growth. Forgetting the equitable part of it, even a speedy and balanced growth has become a questionable possibility in the ex-colonial third world countries in the context of a crisis-ridden and hence evermore aggressive imperialist domination. And therefore the unrelenting assertion of rights has given rise to widespread—though uneven—frustration in society. The frustration is very real at the top levels of society but is not confined to the big capitalists and big landlords. It exists at levels well below what may be strategically perceived as the class of the principal enemies of the people. The aspiration for equality cannot and will not be confined to an exclusive hatred for the owners of big property alone, whereas each one of us enjoys some little bit of privilege and therefore each one of us harbours a little enemy of equality within who will come into the open the moment he finds it possible to brand the assertion for equality 'unrealistic', as for instance when the country is on the verge of insolvency or something quite like it. Just as the BJP therefore claims to think that Muslims are pampered and the industrialists think that organised labour is pampered, caste Hindus find it possible to openly grumble that the untouchables are pampered, men that women are pampered, teachers that students are

pampered, and so on across each barrier of dominance and privilege. To most of those who are allegedly pampered this opinion usually comes as a shock because they themselves see little pampering of their lowly selves by the state and on the contrary considerable suppression of any assertion of theirs to greater livelihood, freedom or dignity. What they do not realise is that the very recognition of rights that go against (especially but not exclusively) traditional hierarchies and forms of privilege is regarded as proof of 'pampering' by the privileged, a grouse that finds articulate expression the moment a climate of legitimacy is created, as for instance when the country is caught in a deep economic crisis.

Even given a convenient climate, the vocalisation of the frustration need not have the same political consequence at all levels of society. At the upper levels, the consequence is a great thirst for order and stability, which is now coincident with the stated and unstated conditionalities of the international lending agencies. From the World Bank to the Indian capitalists and from the government of US to the government of India everybody is sick of the 'soft state that has been which cannot discipline its workers and citizens; and everybody wants an end to wasteful indulgence in the form of subsidies, concessions and rights and a pestoration of order and discipline—both fiscal and political, the first being the excuse for the second in Indian society. At this level Hindutva is not a political option passionately believed in, but one of the possible alternative providers of order and stability, the other being a protracted state of emergency, provided that it makes itself politically practical by attracting sufficient support at the middle and lower levels of society.

HINDU CRITIQUE OF EGALITARIAN ASPIRATIONS

It is at the middle and lower levels of society that Hindutva has in recent times shown itself capable of attracting significant support. At this level the frustrations consequent upon the upsetting of inherited hierarchies and inequalities have joined with the more obvious frustrations born of economic misery, which we have referred to above. The cause of this misery being rather obscure—and deliberately made more so by the government and its apologists—it too is attributed in a vague and unarticulated manner to the wilful pampering of the unreasonable assertions of those less privileged than oneself. The frustration thus becomes a critique of the state and takes on an anti-Establishment aspect. Minimum wages acts, reservation for underprivileged castes, freedom of education and employment for women, special loans and schemes for small farmers, special programmes for back-

ward and scheduled caste poor, preferential treatment of backward regions, etc—these and such policies and measures become the target of frustrated polemics in any discussion one has these days with even the less than upper sections of society about India's problems and prospects.

The argument is always expressed in perceptibly Hindu language. The rural and vernacular elite use the crude language of *dharma* and *karma* and the urban intelligentsia uses the more sophisticated and seemingly disinterested notions of harmony and symbiosis made popular by the likes of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. But whatever the idiom, the thought is the same, from the university seminar room to the gram panchayat office; and from chambers of commerce and industry to any gathering of persons who possess somebody else in a relation of domination as an essential aspect of their being and identity. This Hindu critique of egalitarian aspirations, which becomes a critique of the state that is seen as pampering those aspirations, has existed for a long time under the secular-democratic skin of the Congress and other political parties. It is now breaking out of the skin and getting ready to replace it, a process made both possible and essential by the restructuring of India's ruling economic and political consensus in a context that is equally defined by international capitalist crisis and consequent aggression of imperialist capital; and the coming to age of the domestic ruling classes of industrial, trading and agrarian rich that have accumulated substantial wealth through import substitution and planning, and are all set and ready for a period of rough and tumble scramble that has little relation to the ideal model of innovative and expanding capitalism that could afford some political democracy and some of the finer sentiments of public life. It cannot be said too often that whatever anybody may think of India becoming an unrestricted market economy, this transition is taking place in a subordinate and dependent niche within a globally crisis-ridden capitalism, and therefore the transition is unlikely to result in anything resembling the liberal ideal. It is in this specific context that society experiences a great thirst for order and stability and a great aversion for all manner of pampering of the weak, the small and the lowly, of which only the pampering of minorities is explicitly indicted by the BJP for tactical reasons. And it is in this specific context that all the defenders of petty and big privileges find legitimate expression for their grievance in a patriotic critique of the state for wasting away the nation's greatness by indulging all manner of destabilising hopes. In other words, it is in this specific context that Hindutva becomes both a necessary and possible ideology of the ruling classes.

This has two implications. One, whether or not the BJP actually manages to come to power, and whether or not the swamis and the acharyas manage to rewrite the Constitution in the light of Manu, we will be living with Hindutva as a strong element of the ruling ideology for a long time to come. European fascism was fought courageously by the left and democratic forces, a fight that their Indian counterparts can equally ably put up; but European fascism was rendered unnecessary by further material factors such as rapid capitalist development of a non-colonial variety that had enough room for democracy. It is the latter that is lacking in today's third world. Whatever democratic and egalitarian ideology was possible in the third world was confined to the short period of estate abolition and import substitution. After that the process of further accumulation within the framework set by crisis-ridden imperialism and a fractious domestic elite ranging all the way from sophisticated managers of capital to violent warlords leaves little space for a humane culture.

Two, the democratic forces have the task of devising a strategy that will defeat the seemingly natural process by which one underprivileged group sees another slightly more or less underprivileged as its enemy. They can neither be dismissive of the need to fight for equality and justice at all levels, nor of the need to create a real unity of all oppressed people. If the first mode of dismissiveness was characteristic of the strategies of the Left for a long time, the latter mode is today's fashion. The Left should be candid enough to admit that its failure on the first count is responsible for the legitimate, of the second, which today has plenty of theorists ranging all the way from the seemingly down-to-earth and untheoretical Gandhian types to the incomprehensible post-modernists. Whatever the guilt of the Left, the resulting attitude of theoretical and political flippancy is doing a lot of damage. While it would be incorrect to attribute the exploitation of horizontal frustrations by Hindutva in its entirety to the failure of the Left to build a unity of the suppressed people that is both solid and sensitive to the dispersed and multi-layered nature of hierarchies and domination in society, it is nevertheless necessary to realise that unless such a unity is honestly sought and successfully built the fight against Hindutva will not be complete, not only because the fight requires large numbers but also because insensitivity on this score will leave open an important area of frustration in society to be exploited by the promise of order and stability that Hindutva so ably makes thereby creating a seemingly popular base for itself. The rest of its appeal is of a straight forward fascist character that needs no new philosophical analysis.