

# The Genocidal Pogrom in Gujarat: Anatomy of Indian Fascism

## Hindutva's fascist heritage

In the 1930s Hindu nationalism borrowed from European fascism to transform 'different' people into 'enemies'. Leaders of militant Hinduism repeatedly expressed their admiration for authoritarian leaders such as Mussolini and Hitler and for the fascist model of society.

The existence of direct contacts between the representatives of the (Italian) fascist regime, including Mussolini, and Hindu nationalists demonstrates that Hindu nationalism had much more than an abstract interest in the ideology and practice of fascism. The interest of Indian Hindu nationalists in fascism and Mussolini must not be considered as dictated by an occasional curiosity, confined to a few individuals; rather, it should be considered as the culminating result of the attention that Hindu nationalists, especially in Maharashtra, focussed on Italian dictatorship and its leader. To them, fascism appeared to be an example of conservative revolution. This concept was discussed at length by the Marathi press right from the early phase of the Italian regime.

From 1924 to 1935 Kesari regularly published editorials and articles about Italy, fascism and Mussolini. What impressed the Marathi journalists was the socialist origin of fascism and the fact that the new regime seemed to have transformed Italy from a backward country to a first class power. Indians could not know, then, that, behind the demagogic rhetoric of the regime, there was very little substance.

Moreover, the Indian observers were convinced that fascism had restored order in a country previously upset by political tensions. In a series of editorials, Kesari described the passage from liberal government to dictatorship as a shift from anarchy to an orderly situation, where social struggles had no more reason to exist.

The Marathi newspaper gave considerable space to the political reforms carried out by Mussolini, in particular the substitution of the election of the members of Parliament with their nomination and the replacement of parliament itself with the Great Council of Fascism.

Mussolini's idea was the opposite of that of democracy and it was expressed by the dictator's

principle, according to which ‘one man’s government is more useful and more binding’ for the nation than the democratic institutions.

Is all this not reminiscent of the principle of ‘obedience to one leader’ (‘ek chalak anuvartitva’) followed by the RSS?

Finally, a long article of August 13, 1929, ‘Italy and the Young Generations’ stated that the Italian young generations had succeeded the old one to lead the country. That had resulted in the ‘fast ascent of Italy in every field’. The article went on to describe at length the organisation of the Italian society according to fascist models. The principal reasons of the discipline of the Italian youths were strong religious feelings, widespread among the population, attachment to the family, and the respect of traditional values: no divorce, no singles, no right to vote for women, whose only duty was to sit at home, by the fireplace. The article focussed then on the fascist youth organisations, the Balilla and the Avanguardisti.

One can easily come to the conclusion that, by the late 1920s, the fascist regime and Mussolini had considerable popularity in Maharashtra. The aspect of fascism which appealed most to Hindu nationalists were, of course, both the militarisations of society and what was seen as real transformation of society, exemplified by the shift from chaos to order. The anti-democratic system was considered as a positive alternative to democracy which was seen as a typically British value.

The first Hindu nationalist who came in contact with the fascist regime and its dictator was BS Moonje, a politician strictly related to the RSS. In fact, Moonje had been Hedgewar’s mentor, the two men were related by an intimate friendship. Moonje’s declared intention to strengthen the RSS and to extend it as a nation-wide organisation is well known.

Between February and March 1931, on his return from the Round Table Conference, Moonje made a tour to Europe, which included a long stop-over in Italy. There he visited some important military schools and educational institutions. The highlight of the visit was the meeting with Mussolini. An interesting account of the trip and the meeting is given in Moonje’s diary and takes 13 pages.

The Indian leader was in Rome during March 15 to 24, 1931. On March 19, in Rome, he visited, among others, the Military College, the Central Military School of Physical Education, the Fascist Academy of Physical Education, and, most important, the Balilla and Avanguardisti organisations. These two organisations, which he describes in more than two pages of his diary,

were the keystone of the fascist system of indoctrination — rather than education — of the youths. Their structure is strikingly similar to that of the RSS. They recruited boys from the age of six, up to 18: the youth had to attend weekly meetings, where they practised physical exercise, received paramilitary training and performed drills and parades.

According to the literature promoted by the RSS and other Hindu fundamentalist organisations and parties, the structure of the RSS was the result of Hedgewar's vision and work. However, Moonje played a crucial role in moulding the RSS along Italian (fascist) lines. The deep impression left on Moonje by the vision of the fascist organisations is confirmed by his diary.

“The Balilla institutions and the conception of the whole organisation have appealed to me most, though there is still not discipline and organisation of high order. The whole idea is conceived by Mussolini for the military regeneration of Italy. Italians, by nature, appear ease-loving and non-martial, like the Indians generally. They have cultivated, like Indians, the work of peace and neglected the cultivation of the art of war. Mussolini saw the essential weakness of his country and conceived the idea of the Balilla organisation... Nothing better could have been conceived for the military organisation of Italy...

“The idea of fascism vividly brings out the conception of unity amongst people... India and particularly Hindu Indias need some such institution for the military regeneration of the Hindus: so that the artificial distinction so much emphasised by the British of martial and non-martial classes amongst the Hindus may disappear.

“Our institution of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh of Nagpur under Dr. Hedgewar is of this kind, though quite independently conceived. I will spend the rest of my life in developing and extending this Institution of Dr. Hedgewar all throughout Maharashtra and other provinces”.

Definitely more meaningful is the report of the meeting with Mussolini. On the same day, March 19, 1931 at 3 pm, in Palazzo Venezia, the headquarters of the fascist government, he met the Italian dictator. The meeting is recorded in the diary on March 20...

“I shook hands with him saying that I am Dr Moonje. He knew everything about me and appeared to be closely, following the events of the Indian struggle for freedom...

“Signor Mussolini asked me if I have visited the University. I said I am interested in the military training of boys and have been visiting the Military Schools of England, France and Germany. I have now come to Italy for the same purpose and I am very grateful to say that the Foreign Office and the War Office have made good arrangements for my visiting these schools. I just

saw this morning and afternoon the Balilla and the Fascist Organisations and I was much impressed. Italy needs them for her development and prosperity. I do not see anything objectionable though I have been frequently reading in the newspapers not very friendly criticisms about them and about your Excellency also.

“Signor Mussolini: What is your opinion about them?”

“Dr Moonje: Your Excellency, I am much impressed. Every aspiring and growing Nation needs such organisations.

“Signor Mussolini – who appeared very pleased – said – Thanks but yours is an uphill task. However I wish you every success in return.

“Saying this he got up and I also got up to take his leave”.

The description of the Italian journey includes information regarding fascism, its history, the fascist ‘revolution’, etc, and continues for two more pages.

One can wonder at the association between BS Moonje and the RSS, but if we think that Moonje had been Hedgewar’s mentor, the association will be much clearer. The intimate friendship between Moonje and Hedgewar and the former’s declared intention to strengthen the RSS and to extend it as a nation-wide organisation prove a strict connection between Moonje and the RSS. Moreover, it makes sense to think that the entire circle of militant Hinduism must have been influenced by Moonje’s Italian experience.

**Moonje’s Plans for Militarising Hindus:**

Once Moonje was back in India, he kept the promise made in his diary and started immediately to work for the foundation of his military school and for the militant reorganisation of Hindu society in Maharashtra. He really did not waste time, for, as soon as he reached Pune, he gave an interview to The Mahratta. Regarding the military reorganisation of the Hindu community, he stressed the necessity to ‘Indianise’ the army and expressed the hope that conscription would become compulsory and an Indian would be put in-charge of the defence ministry.

He finally made a clear reference to the Italian and German examples: “In fact, leaders should imitate the youth movements of Germany and the Balilla and Fascist organisations of Italy. I think they are eminently suited for introduction in India, adapting them to suit the special conditions. I have been very much impressed by these movements and I have seen their activities with my own eyes in all details”.

Soon fascism became a subject of public debate and Hedgewar himself was among the promoters

of a campaign in favour of the militarism of society, according to fascist patterns. On January 31, 1934, Hedgewar presided over a conference about fascism and Mussolini, organised by Kavde Shastri. Moonje made the concluding speech.

A few months later, on March 31, 1934 Moonje, Hedgewar and Laloo Gokhale had a meeting, the subject of which was again the military organisation of the Hindus, along Italian and German lines:

“Laloo — Well you are the president of the Hindu Sabha and you are preaching Sanghathan of Hindus. It is ever possible for Hindus to be organised?

“I said — You have asked me a question of which exactly I was thinking of late. I have thought out a scheme based on Hindu Dharm Shashtra which provides for standardisation of Hinduism throughout India... But the point is that this ideal cannot be brought to effect unless we have our own swaraj with a Hindu as a dictator like Shivaji of old or Mussolini or Hitler of the present day in Italy or Germany... But this does not mean that we have to sit with folded hands until (sic) some such dictator arises in India. We should formulate a scientific scheme and carry on propaganda for it.

The intimate connection between Moonje and the RSS and the fascist character of the latter is confirmed by British sources. An intelligence report published in 1933 and entitled, ‘Note on the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh’, ascribed to Moonje the responsibility of the reorganisation of the Sangh in the Marathi speaking districts and in the Central Provinces in 1927. The report, describing the activity and the character of the RSS, warned that, “It is perhaps no exaggeration to assert that the Sangh hopes to be in future India what the ‘Fascists’ are to Italy and the ‘Nazis’ to Germany”.

Summing up, it is clear that the Hindu nationalists were very much attracted by the figure of a strong leader. Moreover, they were keen to give their organisation a strongly centralised structure.

Moonje’s trip to Italy, contrary to what happened in the case of Subhash Chandra Bose and other nationalists, did not give place to any further co-operation between Hindu nationalism and the fascist regime. However, these contacts were important at the ideological and organisational levels. In fact, Moonje kept his promise to improve military education in India and, as soon as he came back from his European trip, he started to contact all those who could support his idea of militarising Hindu society.

In 1934, Moonje started to work for the foundation of his own institution, the Bhonsla Military School. For this purpose, in the same year he began to work at the foundation of the Central Hindu Military Education Society, whose aim was to educate them in ‘Sanatan Dharma’, and to train them “in the science and art of personal and national defence”. Moonje’s programme was therefore entirely devoted to Hindu society, and not to Indian society as a whole.

It is possible that the other function of the society was that of facilitating the diffusion of military education and supporting the foundation of new schools. During the preliminary work for the foundation of both school and society, Moonje publicly admitted that his idea of militarily reorganising Hindu society was inspired by the “military training schools of England, France, Germany and Italy”.

Moonje’s ‘Preface to the Scheme of the Central Hindu Military Society and its Military School’ says at the outset: “This training is meant for qualifying and fitting our boys for the game of killing masses of men with the ambition of winning victory with the best possible casualties (sic) of dead and wounded while causing the utmost possible to the adversary”.

Moonje does not give any clear-cut indication regarding this ‘adversary’, whether it was the external enemy, the British, or the ‘historical’ internal enemy, the Muslims. The document continues with a long dissertation on the relation between violence and non-violence. In it are drawn many examples from Indian history and Hindu holy books, all in favour of organised violence, in the form of Militarism. On the contrary, non-violence is considered a form of renunciation and cowardice.

Moonje’s views corresponded almost perfectly with Mussolini’s opinions: “...The same thought is repeated though in a more forceful and direct language by Signor Mussolini, the maker of modern Italy, when he says: ‘Our desire for peace and collaboration with Europe is based on millions of steel bayonets’.”

And again from Mussolini’s Doctrine of Fascism: “I absolutely disbelieve in perpetual peace which is detrimental and negative to the fundamental virtues of man, which only by struggle reveal themselves in the light of the sun”.

“War alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it”.

“Fascism believes neither in the possibility nor the utility of perpetual peace. It thus repudiates the doctrine of pacifism, which is born of renunciation of the struggle and an act of cowardice in

the face of sacrifice”.

As far as Germany was concerned, Moonje quoted a booklet entitled *Wehrwissenschaft* (Military Science), written by Ewald Banse, a professor at the Brunswick Technical High School: “The starting point of the book is that war is inevitable and certain and that it is imperative to know as much about it and to be as efficient as possible...the mind of the nation, from childhood on, must be impregnated and familiarised with the idea of war”, because, the Professor says: ‘The dying warrior dies more easily when he knows that his blood is ebbing for his national god’.”

The spirit of the last sentence is surprisingly coincident with the essence of the Hindu nationalism.

When Moonje had to indicate practical ways of militarising Hindu society, he returned again to the example of Italy and its military and paramilitary organisations, and reported what he had seen. He described in detail the structure of the ‘She Wolf’s Children’, the *Balilla* and the *Avanguardisti*. He asserted that these organisations could provide paramilitary training to the male population from the age of 8 upto 18, when the youth became young fascists. Italy was therefore in a position of having “command of 6,000,000 trained and disciplined men ready to face any emergency”.

The result was that, “The *Balillas* are taught to build up moral character and take the first steps towards becoming soldiers”. As a consequence, “There will thus be no longer any distinction between the citizen and the soldier, between the civilian and the man in uniform”.

Of course, nowadays we know that, inspite of this remarkable number of militarily trained citizens, Italy lost the war. Moonje did not know that the level of the training was low, and the fascist faith of the people skin-deep.

Fascist ideas were widespread among Hindu nationalists, at least in Maharashtra. The above mentioned script had been printed in the form of a pamphlet and distributed not only among the people Moonje tried to involve in his project, but most probably, to an even wider public, which unfortunately, is at present difficult to measure.

### **Eve of Second World War:**

After Moonje’s trip to Italy there was no further direct contact between exponents of the main Hindu organisations and the Italian government. However, by the end of the 1930s Italian

representatives in India established some connections with the extremist fringes of Hindu nationalism. The Italian consulate in Bombay was very active in seeking contacts with the local political milieu. The Italian diplomatic mission in Bombay was part of a network linking consulates in Bombay and Calcutta with the radical movements of Maha-rashtra and Bengal. The influence of fascist ideology and practice must have gone far beyond the limits of the main organisations of Hindu militant nationalism and must have tended to the wide and intricate net of secondary militant groups and centres of physical education or paramilitary training. This is shown by the example of the Swastik League, founded on March 10, 1929 by M R Jayakar — who became president — and by other local personalities. In organising the Swastik League, Jayakar, who had a prominent position within the Hindu Mahasabha, drew some inspiration from the fascist paramilitary organisations.

### **Savarkar and Nazism:**

At this point we have to dwell on the crucial problem of Savarkar's position vis-à-vis the European radical right. With Savarkar's coming on the political scene, from the late 1930s to the Second World War, there was an intensification of cries in favour or in defence of Italian and German policy, even if the preference for Germany increased progressively.

Savarkar was declared president of the Hindu Mahasabha as soon as he was released in 1937, and he held that office until 1942. His presidentship covered the most sensitive period of both Indian and international history in this century. According to the commonly accepted opinion — supported by the organisations of militant Hinduism — the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha have never been particularly close, and during Savarkar's presidentship, they severed their links.

Reality, however, seems to be different. In fact, the available documentation shows not only that such a split never happened, but that the two organisations always had close connections.

We should not forget that Hedgewar had been secretary to the Hindu Mahasabha from 1926 to 1931. The RSS seems to have provided support to the Hindu Mahasabha, as shown by the fact that groups of RSS militants used to gather at the public meetings organised to celebrate Savarkar's release.

Two of the main topics of the speeches Savarkar gave at the gatherings organised in his honour and at any other public function of his party were the international situation and Hindu-Muslim relations.



Regarding the first aspect, Savarkar had a rather cynical view of the relations India should entertain at the international level. He returned to freedom and entered into politics at the time of the formation of the Rome–Berlin Axis and Japan’s adherence to the pact. Such an outcome was favourably assessed by Hindu radical nationalism, including the Hindu Mahasabha.

‘India’s foreign policy’ was the subject of a speech Savarkar gave to about 20,000 people in Pune on August 1, 1938. The following are the most meaningful parts of the speech, according to a press note issued by the Bombay office of the Hindu Mahasabha.

“He observed India’s foreign policy must not depend on “isms”. Germany has every right to resort to Nazism and Italy to Fascism and events have justified that those isms and forms of governments were imperative and beneficial to them under the conditions that obtained there. Bolshevism might have suited Russia and Democracy as it is obtained in Briton (sic) to the British people”.

Political systems correspond then to the nature of the respective population. This theory was clearly inspired by a deterministic conception of race, similar to the conception of race then dominant in Europe.

Starting a controversy with Nehru, Savarkar openly defended the authoritarian powers of the day, particularly Italy and, even more so, Germany: “Who are we to dictate to Germany, Japan or Russia or Italy to choose a particular form of policy of government simply because we woo it out of academical attraction? Surely Hitler knows better than Pandit Nehru does what suits Germany best. The very fact that Germany or Italy has so wonderfully recovered and grown so powerful as never before at the touch of Nazi or Fascist magical wand is enough to prove that those political “isms” were the most congenial tonics their health demanded”.

Savarkar asserted in a speech in the presence of some 4,000 people at Pune on October 11, 1938, (that) if a plebiscite had taken place in India, Muslims would have chosen to unite with Muslims and Hindus with Hindus. This was a consequence of the principle according to which it was not enough living together for a few countries to form a nation, as “the common desire to form a nation was essential for the formation of a nation”.

During Savarkar’s presidentship the anti–Muslim rhetoric became more and more radical, and distinctly unpleasant. It was a rhetoric that made continuous reference to the way Germany was managing the Jewish question. Indeed, in speech after speech, Savarkar supported Hitler’s anti–Jewish policy, and on October 14, 1938, he suggested the following solution for the Muslim

problem in India: “A Nation is formed by a majority living therein. What did the Jews do in Germany? They being in minority were driven out from Germany”.

Then, towards the end of the year in Thane, in front of RSS militants and local sympathisers, right at the time when Congress expressed its resolution against Germany, Savarkar stated that, “in Germany the movement of the Germans is the national movement but that of the Jews is a communal one”. And again the next year, on July 29, in Pune, he said: “Nationality did not depend so much on a common geographical area as on unity of thought, religion, language and culture. For this reason the Germans and the Jews could no be regarded as a nation”.

Without this unity, not even Muslims and Hindus could be regarded as belonging to the same nation. Indian Muslims should rather resign themselves to be considered as a minority, the recognition of whose rights should depend on the magnanimity of the majority.

Finally, at the end of 1939, on the occasion of the 21st session of the Hind Mahasabha, Savarkar made one of the most explicit comparisons between the Muslim question in India and the Jewish problem in Germany: “...the Indian Muslims are on the whole more inclined to identify themselves and their interests with Muslims outside India than Hindus who live next door, like Jews in Germany”.

One can find a certain continuity between the ideas of nations and nationhood expressed in Savarkar’s Hindutva and the content of these declarations. Indeed in his book, Savarkar, referring to the Muslims, asserted that “their holyland is far off in Arabia or Palestine. Their mythology and godmen, ideas and heroes are not children of this soil. Consequently their names and their outlook smack of foreign origin (Hindutva: Who is Hindu?).

A feeling of admiration for the Jewish policy of Germany seems to have been shared by the entire circle of Hindu nationalism at the end of the 1930s. In *We, or Our Nationhood Defined*, Golwalkar, who would become general secretary of the RSS a year later declared that:

“German national pride has now become the topic of the day. To keep up the purity of the nation and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races — the Jews. National pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the mot (?), to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by”.

This had its root in the idea that being a Hindu was a matter of race and blood, not only a matter of culture. In turn that was an idea which was strikingly similar to the racial myths celebrated in

Germany, more than in Italy.

Golwarkar's position regarding Muslims was even more extreme than Savarkar's: "in one word, they (Muslims) must cease to be foreigners or may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights".

### **Waiting for the Right Enemy**

The literature promoted by militant Hinduism is trying nowadays to compare the attitude adopted by the Hindu Mahasabha towards the totalitarian regimes with Subhash Chandra Bose's position towards the axis powers. According to this literature, the evidence in favour of such interpretation is a meeting which took place between Bose and Savarkar in Bombay in June 1940.

My impression of the episode is that it is a sort of historiographic invention, directed to legitimise the otherwise ambiguous position of the Hindu Mahasabha during the war. Asserting that Netaji's project had Savarkar's sanction means not only that Savarkar had a sort of patronage on Bose's activities in Europe, but more important, that Savarkar played an important role in the freedom fight.

Certainly the meeting did take place, and very possibly the two leaders discussed Bose's intention to go to Europe and seek support of the axis powers. However, all this is far from meaning that Savarkar inspired Bose, who, right from 1933, had his own connections with the dictators' governments. The president of the Hindu Mahasabha put forward his claim on the content of his meeting with Netaji four years after Gandhi's assassination, when the image of the Hindu Mahasabha and its affiliation were badly damaged by the suspicion of their involvement in the murder. Accordingly it makes sense to think that the organisations of militant Hinduism must have perceived the necessity to rehabilitate their political past and re-invent a more clear-cut anti-British stand. What stronger argument, therefore, could be available than the assertion that the Hindu Mahasabha was secretly ready to support Bose's plan?

The involvement in Gandhi's assassination was not the only reason of crisis; the image of Hindu nationalism was indeed already damaged by the ambiguous attitude adopted in the war period. The policy actually followed by Hindu nationalism during the war, namely, responsive co-

operation, was far from being unambiguous on both transfer of powers and relations with the British.

The committee wished for the realisation of the militarisation of Indian society and the Indianisation of the army. It requested a reform of the Arms Act, along the lines prevailing in the UK. It demanded also that territorial forces and paramilitary groups be strengthened, that new military organisations be created in those provinces where they did not exist before, and finally that more Indian students be accepted in the military academies. The Hindu Mahasabha requested the government to increase the local production of modern armaments so that India could equip its army, without depending on imports from other nations.

Soon after this resolution, the Hindu Mahasabha started to work for the creation of a national militia. Naturally enough, Moonje became the person in charge. Inviting party members to attend a preliminary meeting for the foundation of the militia, in Pune on October 8, Moonje described the future organisation in the following terms:

“I have the pleasure in bringing to your notice a resolution of the Hindu Mahasabha for the organisation of the Hindu Militia in the country for the purpose of taking part in the defence of India both from external and internal aggression whenever an occasion of emergency may arise during the course of the Anglo-German War.

“...I believe that it will be quite in the fitness of things, in view of the historic All-India Military leadership of the Maharashtra, that a beginning should be made in the Maharashtra; so that the lead may be taken up by the whole of India afterwards”.

Who could be the internal aggressors if not the Muslims?

The answer seems to be contained in a letter from Moonje to Khaparde of October 18: “... the Moslems are making themselves a nuisance. The Congress government will not stand up but will yield to them. We cannot expect any consideration at the hands of the Congress government. We shall have to fight both the government and the Moslems just as the Khaskars are doing in UP. The Hindu Mahasabha will give its support to such fights as the Muslim League is supporting the Khaskars: you must prepare the volunteers in your towns. The Rashtriya Swaymasevak Sangh may be useful and handy.

The theme of the ‘internal enemy’ is a further element of affinity between the ideology of fascism and of Hind nationalism, expressed by a similar rhetoric. It seems nevertheless that the Sanghatanists were inclined to fight the Muslims and the Congress, rather than the British.

According to Moonje's plans, the RSS should be involved in the creation of the national militia. Indeed, in a letter of October 18 to General Nanasahib Shinde of Baroda, Moonje affirmed: "I am glad to note that you have approved of my idea of a Hindu National Militia for Maharashtra as is being organised by the Hindu Mahasabha.

"I have been myself thinking of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and I am corresponding with their leader. They may have their peculiar (sic) difficulties and the point is that the militia should be organised under these circumstances whether the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh can undertake the task or not.

During this preliminary phase, Moonje consulted Hedgewar, with whom he exchanged several letters and whom Moonje hoped to meet, in order to discuss the participation of the RSS in the militia.

On October 27 a militant from Lahore informed Moonje that: "We have at present in Punjab several Dals and Sanghs, the total number of members of which is approximately about 50,000, but they are not working under a single organisation. There are Rashtriya Sevak Sangh, Atma Sangh, Mahabir Dal, Seva Sangh and Akali Dal working under different leaders. They have a sort of military organisation. The Akali Dal is armed with swords, but the others have other weapons. The Rashtriya Sevak Sangh has only lathis. The first thing to do is to bring all these sanghs on a uniform basis working under a single leadership though not of one man but of a council.

In spite of such mobilisation, the Hindu militia had not been formed. The government did not withdraw the existing restrictions imposed on military and paramilitary organisations and schools.

It is difficult to establish if the organisations of militant Hinduism were arming themselves against possible foreign invaders, the internal enemy, or the British. Most probably they were carefully hedging their bet, ready to take advantage of any future development. However, it is a fact that at a meeting with Linlithgow in Bombay on October 8, 1939, Savarkar adopted a decidedly conciliatory position vis-à-vis the British.

When, in the 1940s, the totalitarian regimes had already revealed their true colours, the attitude of the organisations of militant Hinduism towards fascism and Nazism was still benevolent. In spite of the already, even if only partially, known atrocities committed by Hitler and Mussolini, the main organisations of Hindu nationalism still praised the dictators and their regimes. This

position could be justified, had it been part of a coherent and strong anti-British policy. However, as I have tried to demonstrate, the forces of Hindu nationalism seem to have concentrated their efforts more against the so-called internal enemies — Muslims and Congress — rather than the foreign invaders. While Bose's alliance with the axis powers had mainly an anti-British function, the Hindu Mahasabha used its support to the dictators as an instrument in blackmail the British.

### **Conclusions:**

The preceding discussion has shown that: (a) the main historical organisations and leaders of Hindu nationalism had a distinctive and sustained interest in fascism and nazism; (b) fascist ideological influences on Hindu nationalism were present and relevant; and (c) to a certain extent, these influences were channelled through direct contacts between Hindu nationalists and members of the Italian fascist state. No doubt, beginning with the early 1920s and up to the second world war, Hindu nationalists looked at the political reality of fascist Italy, and subsequently of nazi Germany, as a source of inspiration.

One of the results of the contacts between the fascism and Hindu nationalism was the attempt to militarise Hindu society and to create a militant mentality among the Hindus. If it is true that the Hindu society elaborated its own patterns of militarisation — refer to the shakhas as a typically Indian phenomenon — it is equally true that a most relevant result of fascist influence was the transmission of a more functional organisation and a stronger political character to the already existing organisation of political Hinduism.

At the ideological level, the most meaningful effect of the fascist influence is represented by the way in which Hindu nationalism developed its own concept of diversity, transforming 'diverse' people into enemies. Of course, the concept of internal enemy is already implicitly contained in Savarkar's Hindutva. Nevertheless, the continuous reference to German racial policy and the comparison of the Jewish problem in Germany with the Muslim question in India reveals the evolution of the concept of 'internal enemy' along explicitly fascist lines.

In my opinion, if one is to understand the evolution of Hindu radicalism in the post-independence period, one has to take into account both the domestic roots of this phenomenon and the external influence on its development.

In the 1920s and 1930s fascism was an international phenomenon. As such it was bound to influence the ideology and practice of similar movements all over the world. Since many of Bal Thackeray's most outrageously anti-Muslim and racist statements are literal quotations of Savarkar's speeches and theories, it is legitimate to conclude that such influence is still alive in today's militant Hinduism.

The above article has been excerpted from a much larger piece, with detailed references under the title, 'Hindutva's Foreign Tie-Up in the 1930s: Archival Evidence', published in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Jan. 22-28, 2000), pp. 218-228.

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