

UPDATE

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25 years after '*Emergency*' and the State of India's Democracy

Indian Democracy is commemorating 25 years of the dark days of the '*Internal Emergency*' in the month of June. June 26th, 2000 will be the 25th anniversary of the declaration of Emergency in 1975. But for the people of India who resisted the undemocratic reign of terror imposed by the then PM, late Ms. Indira Gandhi, the occasion is that of celebration of victory of people's power over that of the brutal state machinery. This occasion also has a lot of relevance in today's political scenario where the right to life and freedom of expression are being threatened.

There are some basic queries, which need to be clarified regarding correlation of the threat Indian democracy felt during the Emergency and that which it is facing today. Is there any similarity at all? People who supported Indira during the Emergency (including the 'left over Congress', some intellectuals and theologians who argued 'bread first and freedom later', and even some sections of the 'Indian left') would prefer to say that the picture is totally different and the situation today is much worse. But people who fought against the emergency then, but have moved towards the right (including the BJP and some 'socialists') would say that emergency was the reign of terror and there is nothing of the sort today. In the midst of these, we are forced to take a view different from both. While not sparing the party that was responsible for the Emergency, we have to attack the present regime, which is forcing the country into a very disturbing situation.

To quote scholar Ajit Roy: "Emergency was a period of 'Techno-Fascism', while today we are beginning to feel a 'Democratic Fascism'." By 'Techno-Fascism' he means a fascist regime, which does not have any mass base while in the latter the only 'democratic' factor is that they are elected to power. This is a very clear-cut technical explanation that puts in nutshell the fundamental difference between the two.

It will be useful to understand Fascism from a theoretical perspective so as to understand the philosophy of it, behind the cliché. Scholar Sanjay Basu Mullick's definition of Fascism is one of the most comprehensive ones available. According to him, the essential features of Fascism are:

- 1) Fascists consider all other people inferior to those of their national group
- 2) Fascism is often associated with racial superiority of a community
- 3) Racial inferiority of other communities is often clubbed together with their religious and cultural inferiority too
- 4) Fascism thus whips up extreme patriotism (false patriotism) to consolidate communal or national pride
- 5) Therefore, persecution of other communities, especially the minorities who are usually socio-politically weak under the dominance of the majority, is justified.
- 6) This further leads to the persuasion of warlike policies to subjugate the 'inferior' neighbors
- 7) It has no developed or coherent political philosophy; but embraced nationalism, a hatred of communism, a distrust of democratic policies, commitment to single party state and faith in charismatic leaders

It is in this background that we should be looking at the present threat Indian democracy is facing.

The reign of terror unleashed during the Emergency (including the forced family

planning, the slum demolitions, the denial of freedom of expression, etc.) need not be elaborated here. But as a comparative study, it will be good to understand where one of the world's biggest democracies is today. It will be good to analyse some case studies in order to do this.

Minorities are being attacked in the country like never before and it is the turn of the Christians now. Starting from the murder of Mr. Graham Staines and some other Indian missionaries, to the attack on Dalit / Adivasi converts, it is a continuing process of intimidation which is being followed by the agents of communal fascism in the country. In the place of Muslims, these people have the Christians for their which-hunt.

The process of 'saffronisation of education', deserves special mention. Whether it is the ban on Dr. Sumit Sarkar and Dr. K.N. Panikar, for publishing their works on Modern India (remember the ICHR controversy) or the targeted attacks on minority universities like Jamia Milia Islamia and Aligarh Muslim University, the saffron mafia has proved its manipulative power. They have also been successful in portraying all these incidents as isolated episodes, thereby diverting the attention of the nation.

The 'revival of the Indian morality' under the guidelines provided by 'Hindutva' proponents like Bal Thakeray and Ashok Singal is yet another noteworthy attempt. From the censoring imposed on M. F. Hussain and film-maker Deepa Mehta, to the dress code imposed on college girls in cities like Lucknow and Mumbai and to the ban on Valentine's day celebrations in many Indian cities, these vanguards of Indian morality are trying their level best to bring the youth and the masses under their grip by forced impositions.

The revival of the National Security Act (NSA) against the activists of a U.P. based NGO known as 'Sahyog' is totally irrational,

brutal and is unfitting for any democracy. Even after the organisation apologised and withdrew its pamphlet, which is termed highly objectionable by the BJP & Parivar, the activists of Sahyog were attacked, manhandled and, to top it all, arrested, handcuffed and paraded in the market street.

Now the question is about our credibility to talk of human rights violation in military states like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Fiji. Our government is not behind anyone else in its criticism of military regimes in these states and also against terrorism as such. One is reminded of Hitler's criticism about Stalin.

Whipping up of extreme patriotism and nationalism during Pokhran II nuclear explosions and the Kargil 'war' are only pointers to the general tendency of cashing on people's emotions. This is no different from Hitler's creation of war-hysteria in the 1930's Germany. This patriotism is absolutely missing when it comes to kneeling down in front of WTO, the US or the Trans National Corporations to whom India's sovereignty is being sold.

The ruling alliance has already proved its inefficiency and unwillingness to fight against WTO or any other agents of globalisation. Instead, they have become ardent supporters of WTO and agents of its repressive measures. Now it is left to the people of the country, the grass root organisations and the organised trade unions to keep up the fight against these agents of external fascism. It has become the duty and the necessity of these groups to prevent another internal emergency.



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