

**Political Ideologies Contexts, Ideas, and Practices**  
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**Fascism - problems. The Hindu right and Nazism**

We need to look at the problems in fascism. It is not an exaggeration to say that fascist societies and systems are riddled with problems - Contradictions of all kinds and these have caused enormous problems and may well have contributed to the collapse of some of them. To start with, the complexity of large modern states means the problems will inevitably arise. Such as coordination, unexpected technical difficulties in large-scale projects, unexpectedly severe weather and so on.

Fascism's inherent exclusion of any expression of problems then means that the system can only be sustained by an ever-expanding series of lies about its perfection. This has inevitably led to administrative chaos even in everyday practical matters, because essential information about things like staffing, resources, materials available and so on becomes not only unreliable but at times nonsensical.

Well, there's a second source of administrative chaos and that is political. The overriding principle is that of the leader's infallibility. This means the public have to be prevented from learning which public institutions are responsible for particular areas of activity, because if the public learn which institutions are responsible for what, then they can even in principle, in theory start to hold such bodies responsible for things like power supply, transport, education, food supplies and the like.

This could lead to their holding the leader responsible and that is utterly inadmissible in fascism. The typical fascist response consists in creating several institutions with overlapping responsibilities, so that it is never clear whether a given matter is the responsibility of the municipal authorities, or the police, or the military, or the ruling party. Even those who work in and run such bodies cannot be allowed to work out what they are responsible for and so their duties are never given to them explicitly as stable and continuing responsibilities. So, the leader makes all appointments and moves officials constantly from one institution to another or one

post to another, while also changing the definitions and duties of each post. In practice, as it happened, some officials kept certain posts throughout Hitler's rule.

Now, this kind of intentional permanent movement of officials, of institutional responsibilities and powers, the overlapping of institutional responsibilities and powers, was very much the case in Nazi Germany but it has also been a feature of other totalitarian systems, such as the 'Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin'.

The second problem has to do with the idea of a wonderful pastoral agrarian agricultural history from time immemorial. The myth of the pastoral idyll has been repeatedly exposed. Fascist movements state this idea 'The Myth of a Glorious and Idyllic Agricultural Past' without specification or historical evidence. Serious investigation would almost certainly reveal without exception, without exception that older periods of history were as troubled as any other periods, with war, disease, famine and social and political oppression, and ferment and turmoil just as common then as we think they are now. Indeed we in our time with the almost worldwide establishment of democratic systems, even if they function very badly, many of them may well do so. We in our own time may well be much less accepting, much less accepting of chaos, turmoil, war, and killing than our ancestors were. The pastoral ideal is nevertheless central to the fascist idea of a pure nation, which existed in the past and which since then has been sullied or contaminated by other cultures, by disruptive industrialization and by other processes.

The problem here is that fascist societies also have to be permanently mobilized for war, because every other nation, every other culture is a permanent threat. And so, fascist societies have to have huge industries, designing and manufacturing the latest weapons and armaments so that they are not overrun by other cultures. According to fascism, other cultures are permanent enemies and pose a permanent threat.

Quite simply, pastoral and agrarian societies can neither create nor sustain such industries - or the highly trained and well-equipped armed forces that fascist systems need. Modern military equipment cannot be made from wood, mud, and stone. In addition, modern industries need highly trained scientists, engineers and mechanics - and they are all inheritors and exponents of something fascism rejects and explicitly rejects; and that is rational scientific intellectualism.

Well, there is a further set of problems and that has to do with gender roles and society. Fascist thinking as we saw lays down very clear roles for women, for women, and it sees their task as that of bearing and rearing children who will constitute the next generation of fascist. The Nazis in particular held training camps and other occasions at which women were instructed in how to be good Nazi mothers. But even in this lies a contradiction, because the training policy made reproduction, education, and even consumption into subjects for state direction. Mussolini went so far as to make birth control a crime, so that women would continue to reproduce members of the fascist nation. In effect these moves politicized women by taking them out of the home only to return them there and it also politicized, therefore, their very home life. So, that is another of the contradictions in fascism.

Well, there is one more, at least one more and this is purity of descent. Fascism relies on the claim that every nation shares a common pure descent which is at permanent threat or risk of contamination or even degeneracy through interbreeding with other races or nations. This claim, the claim to purity of descent, is almost impossible to prove, and it may well mean nothing as a matter of scientific fact. Human beings seem always to have interbred with one another and some evidence has been identified of interbreeding between our species, *Homo sapiens*, and another hominid species, the Neanderthals or *Homo neanderthalensis*.

Other evidence has been published of interbreeding between humans and more than one other hominid species. Yet the claim to purity of descent, or racial purity, is utterly central to fascism - and the Nazis had their own problems proving it. For example, many eminent German and Austrian families such as the enormously wealthy Austrian family of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein and his pianist brother Paul were of Jewish descent, and Ludwig was baptized in a Catholic church, possibly because his mother was a Catholic. It is not known if he ever practised the faith very much; he probably did not, but that does not matter. The point is, were his family to be understood by the Nazis as Catholics or as Jews? The Nazis ended up classifying people by fractions of Jewishness such as one eighth or one quarter. This taxonomy might look ridiculous but it often had deadly consequences for those whom Nazi officials and administrators deemed sufficiently Jewish to be sent to concentration or extermination camps.

And

More recently, substantial scientific evidence has emerged, mainly from genomic or genome-wide studies, to undermine even further the very idea of genetic purity and of certain claims to the primordial occupation of regions of the world. For example, those who brought the Indo-European languages, particularly those of the Sanskritic family of languages, to India arrived about four and a half thousand or four thousand years ago -And they interbred very widely with populations already in the region.

Similarly, genomic investigators have concluded that early modern Britons who lived about 10,000 years ago had dark to black skin and blue eyes. Now, the genetic evidence is expanding and expanding steadily. But another enormous problem for fascism is the claim to prior occupation of territory. Humans originated, we now think, in what is now part of East Africa and they have migrated all over the world, often going in very different directions, encountering other groups of humans quite often, and they have not necessarily stayed in the areas where they first settled. The claim to prior occupation is virtually impossible to resolve, and the time scales are, on the evidence, almost impossible to establish to the degree of certainty fascism requires for its political purposes. The only thing fascist theory can offer here is therefore, empty assertion. So, this is increasingly documented by genomic and other genetic research published in the world's major journals.

The claim to priority of occupation is - again - virtually impossible to establish; humans have moved all over the world and have interbred in very complex ways which continue to surprise us all the time. We are, as I have said from time to time in class, a gigantic genetic mishmash.

Well, how does that tie up with the politics of fascism? Fascism claims to liberate us from the state. Well, what is this fascistic freedom from the state? We are well aware of how fascistic and other very powerful or charismatic leaders claim that they will put an end to the chaotic, messy, corrupt states that we live in or clay, or the claim that we live in such states will be ended by liberation from the chains and shackles of the state - that claim is often made. We'll be liberated from bureaucracies and rules and regulation, but fascism then subordinates all individuals to the single will of the leader.

This subordination is total and any dissent or disagreement becomes not just treasonable, but a threat to the nation. Because for fascism the leader embodies the will of the nation. In practice too, fascist societies are extremely oppressive and can be arbitrarily brutal. Nevertheless

fascism has attracted much admiration in areas of the world which were themselves the victims of economic and racial oppression. And during the 1920s and 1930s there was much more contact between the Hindu right in India and European fascist leaders than is often recognized today.

New material is being published all the time and we should take account of some of it; some of it is very authoritative. We will spend some time on The Hindu Right, fascism, and the Nazis. Now, the history of this connection is very well documented in Nazi Germany and elsewhere. The records are still held and are accessible to scholars and researchers. The history of this connection shows a strong attraction on both sides that is a primarily political one on the side of the Hindu Right and a complex intellectual and even quasi-spiritual one on the side of substantial numbers of Nazi leaders including those at the highest level.

The Hindu Right have long been attracted by fascism, and between the wars some of the movement's most famous leaders studied fascism closely; some of them met Mussolini in Italy and their writings, which are often strikingly similar to Nazi writings, in language and tone, show clear approval of Nazi policies. The political strategies and methods the Hindu right adopted were often similar.

For example, in 1931 B. S. Moonje of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the RSS, made a 10 day visit to Italy, he visited military colleges as well as the Balilla and Avanguardisti organizations, both of which were specifically dedicated to the indoctrination of youth. Moonje was particularly impressed by their aim of unifying and, as he saw it, regenerating the nation by militarizing it; and when he met Mussolini, he told the dictator that he would praise the Balilla and other such bodies after he returned to India.

He did just that, and extolled the virtues of fascism in press interviews. In 1934, he founded the Central Hindu Military Education Society. [which never] ever appeared as a major force in Germany]. But Savarkar explicitly approved of the Nazi annexation of Austria and the German-speaking provinces of Czechoslovakia, the Sudetenland, because he thought that the move would unite all Germans and consolidate them into a pan-German State.

Savarkar went even further, telling an audience of about 4,000 in Pune in 1938 that a nation could be formed only if people had a desire to form one and that what would unite them was unity of thought, religion, language, and culture. Furthermore, he praised the Nazi expulsion of Jews from Germany, which had already started, and openly sided with the Nazis, saying that

the movement of the Germans was a national one, but that of the Jews - he assumed that there was such a movement - was a communal one.

Now, that is all thoroughly documented, and authoritative material is being published all the time. Savarkar said much more in the same vein throughout the period, and admiration for Hitler was widespread at the time. It may still be. Such admiration was certainly expressed in the Hindu Right's Publications, and one of the most explicit statements of this was by M. S. Golwalkar, who said in 1939 that Nazi Germany's "purging" - that was his word - of Jews had shown that different races could not be - again I quote - "assimilated into one united whole", and that this was - I quote - "a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by."

For the Hindu Right, being a Hindu was a matter of race and blood. The Hindu Mahasabha, of which Savarkar was president, made a statement in March 1939 glorifying Nazi Germany's - I quote - "revival of the Aryan culture", and hoping that their - again I quote - "crusade" against that culture's enemies would bring - again I quote - "all the Aryan nations to their senses". The Hindu Right seem to have thought that they were part of such a nation. We cannot know whether the Nazis would have agreed had they won the war; they saw Asian races as far inferior to Nordic races.

I will point out there that there was nothing much that was good about the British Empire; the more that comes out, the worse it looks. British documents have been steadily declassified in increasing quantities over the last several decades. Many of them show just how brutal and vicious the Empire was, and often calculatedly so. But if Nazi Germany had won the war it is quite likely that not one of us would have been here today.

Well, what then accounts for the Hindu Right's admiration for fascism? They were, among other things, permanently ambivalent about British rule over India; many of their members documentedly praised the colonial government when it did things which facilitated their agenda. For example, when it handed over the writing and publication of school textbooks to Indians who had similar attitudes to the Hindu Right or belonged to its movements, the Hindu Right were extremely appreciative; this is documented, published, even by some of the Indian writers concerned.

Secondly, neither the RSS nor the Hindu Mahasabha took part in the Quit India movement. Savarkar, for example, had a plan to encourage Indian enrolment in the army, so that those who enlisted would get military training. Among Nazi leaders, the work of German Indologists, some of whom were themselves theorists of racial hierarchies or members of Nazi Party or both, served a very significant purpose. The Nazi leaders or theoreticians knew that they needed some kind of replacement for existing major denominations of the Christian faith - so that they could, as they thought, eliminate an alternative source of authority, namely the Christian faith, and also a major division in modern European history, that is, the Catholic-Protestant divide. It is hardly surprising that the Nazi leaders found in Hinduism and apparently highly congenial set of doctrines in order to earlier pre-Christian myths and legends from Europe and Scandinavia. I quote from Eric Kurlander's book of 2017, and this is in the second edition of the set book, it is not in the first edition but the source is public.

I quote again:

“As we have seen however, they all [Adolf Hitler, Martin Bormann, Heinrich Himmler and Alfred Rosenberg] agreed more broadly on the need to find an authentic Ario-Germanic substitute for Christianity, a new syncretism that would bridge Germany's confessional divide.”

When the Nazis took power in 1933, the contours of this *Völkisch*, that is, people-based, Ario-Germanic syncretism remained unclear. Central elements would nevertheless include a non-transcendental religion similar to occultism in its this-worldly mysticism; a moral revolution based on power, race and loyalty to the Fuhrer; and a metaphysical emphasis on death and rebirth within the context of blood, soil and race.”

- end of quotation - that is in Eric Kurlander's book, published in 2017 after detailed research into the Nazi archives.

Now, Max Müller, whose work was used for these kinds of purposes even long before the Nazi Party existed, tried to warn against the racial anthropologist practice of using his linguistic theories to support the idea that Aryanism is a matter of definable racial membership. But Muller's warning came too late, and he himself continued using the term 'race' to denote linguistic groups.

A central problem resulting is that this kind of work enabled a wide range of political movements including elements of the anti-colonial Indian nationalist movement and proponents of Hindutva

who politicize Hinduism, to form I quote, “a majoritarian view of an over integrated Hinduism,”. This approach effectively suppresses, and at worst obliterates, the pervasiveness, depth and power of caste in Indian society. As Roy, that is Baijayanti Roy, says, “It also suppresses the variety of belief systems and social mobility that have long been a feature of an inherently pluralist and complex Indian society.”

The Nazis too, as we have seen, had to rewrite to their own history to suit their own purposes. In addition, this kind of contact between Indian and German researchers and scholars went beyond assisting nationalist movements. For many German scholars and Nazi leaders this was part of a project towards reviving a German identity which they considered had been overshadowed by the successes of the French and British Empires, by the power of the Soviet Union - particularly Russia - and by Roman and Judaeo-Christian cultural and religious dominance.

From many Indian scholars, collaboration with German researchers offered the chance to strengthen the struggle against British colonialism and to assert an Indian identity against one that was defined by the colonial power. We must note that this was not automatically a malign process; major Indian leaders including Jawaharlal Nehru wanted larger numbers of Indians to study in Germany precisely so that they would be outside the British Imperium.

Yet, this kind of identity politics and its contemporary forms still have a very dangerous side. One scholar, who is cited in the forthcoming second edition of the book, says, “Germans and Indians generated potentials for liberation, for solidarity building, for retaliation, for jingoism and even for genocide.” The author, Kris Manjapra rightly notes however, that these possibilities did not necessarily materialize in practice: “Aryanism did not cause Nazism, but Nazism was needed in order to activate and modulate a latent, annihilist potential in the Aryan idea.”

The consequence is that Indian admirers of fascism embody many of the contradictions in fascism itself. Those contradictions have been widely identified and criticized and that makes the appeal of fascism a very important topic. Because at first, an ideology which is so inherently fragmented and contradictory can't gain and retain support across so many sections of many different societies, that is exactly what has happened; we need to try and understand why.

And that means we need to look at the appeal of fascism. Fascist leaders have always had enormous personal popularity, whether their movements have gained power or not. The adulation Hitler and Mussolini received is almost legendary. Yet it is not clear whether or not



fascist parties themselves have become genuine mass parties: analyses seem to vary on this point. According to Hannah Arendt, Hitler restricted the number of actual Nazi Party members so as to maintain control over the party. But therefore, he needed and actively encouraged the appointment and rapid promotion of a very large number of sympathizers in all organizations.

Now, the number of applications to join the party increased rapidly after Hitler became Chancellor in January 1933, and he instead ordered that membership be limited. The hardcore members numbered about 1.5 million thereafter. As many as 8 million people or about one eighth of the then German population eventually joined the party but many of them did that because membership made jobs and promotions easier to get. The number of active members was much smaller, but a substantial proportion of those were in essential and respected professions such as medicine, teaching, universities, and the applied sciences.

In all as many as 17 million people, perhaps a quarter of the then German population, may have joined organizations which had strong links and associations with the Nazi Party. Now, no matter that the size of the active membership was small, no matter what the size of the Nazi Party, its attitudes had very great appeal across all classes of German society. This attraction across classes is a notable feature of fascism throughout. For example, in Nazi Germany followers included small business people from the lower middle classes, the owners of large industrial corporations, the landed aristocracy, and sections of the clergy in the institutionalized religions.

Now, the small business and training classes or the petty bourgeoisie hated and feared socialism, which had enjoyed much wider support after the First World War than it is often recognized to have done. Now, the petty bourgeoisie also feared large corporations because they thought, not unreasonably, that these would destroy their own prospects with mass production and economies of scale. The larger businesses and corporate classes also hated socialism, and they feared the trade unions, and they welcomed the Nazis for that as well.

They were also completely indifferent to the fate of the petty bourgeoisie because that for them was just a class which had to give way in face of the new, the new businesses, the new steamrolling giant corporations. But - the larger business of corporate classes also stood to gain colossal wealth from the Nazi rearmament programme, and that is exactly what they did; they gained immense wealth from rearmament.

What about the landed aristocracy? They were very taken with the idea of pastoral or rural stability. They too hated socialism, because they feared that if it spread they would lose their social status, their inherited privilege, and their rural or peasant workforce. As for the older established religions, sections among them feared that the spread of socialist or other egalitarian ideas would undermine the existing social order, particularly by giving women alternatives to rearing children and running the home. Even some German socialists favored the Nazis, for example because they expanded the industrial economy very greatly and provided mass employment to end the great depression.

The Nazi regime also showed what looked like a socialist element; it provided health care at work and it supported families with substantial numbers of social workers, nurses, health visitors and domestic-science teachers. But most of the German communist and socialist leaders had been exterminated by the 19, early 1930s by the Nazis. For their part, feminists, German feminists, also thought a self-sacrificing female elite would help the cause of national regeneration and some of them also opposed the left. Well, what we have is a puzzling and complex attraction to the Nazis shared by a lot of different groups and classes in society.

This included artists and writers; fascism has often attracted artists and writers in many countries. Among the most famous in - broadly speaking - western culture were people like T. S. Eliot who held a theory of racial hierarchies. The South African poet Roy Campbell was an Afrikaner nationalist and a racialist and racist. The writer D. B. Wyndham Lewis, the poet Ezra Pound, were both great admirers of fascism. The Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier, whose actual name was Charles-Édouard Jeanneret - he was a passionate fascist and open about it.

A noted filmmaker, Leni Riefenstahl, made *Olympia*, which were two films about the Berlin Olympics. They have been very widely broadcast since they were made; they are filled with, those films are filled with very striking imagery much of which is openly fascist and they are of very high cinematographic quality, many of the images are really striking, even stunning. But they show, equally clearly, Riefenstahl's admiration for Hitler and for Nazism as a whole, about which Riefenstahl herself was quite explicit.

As for other areas of activity, it happened that several major industrialists also held views very similar to the Nazis, and Henry Ford was one of them; his own views were very extreme. Well, various artists' artist's admiration of fascism poses its own questions, but a continuing problem is that fascist movements of parties have often gained mass support from large groups which

are often very hostile to one another. For example, the petty bourgeoisie and the corporate business classes; the petty bourgeoisie hated and feared the corporate business classes. The landed aristocracy and various trade union groups hated each, hated one another. How is it that they all became such ardent supporters of fascism, sections of the unions as well? Historically, what seems to have united them as followers of fascism is that fascist leaders showed or persuaded each group to hate the same things that each group hated. And if they all hated the same thing, that united them because they forgot about their differences.

It's a little bit like this; the landed aristocracy feared the loss of their role dominance. The religious bodies feared the decline of the traditional family. The corporates hated and feared socialism, and so on. How is it that fascist leaders have managed to pull all of them together despite their long traditional suspicion and even hatred for one another, and their materially grounded opposition of positions in different classes and in different areas of the economy?

Well, one lesson for all of us may be that one of the easiest ways to get millions of people's support even if they hate each other is to persuade them to hate the same thing or the same group of people, even if they themselves are only pretending to hate those same those things or that group of people. And it could be that making or persuading people to hate the same thing is much - much - easier than unifying them by any other procedure or method. That is the end of the topic.