

Fascism

Genesis

Unlike communism, fascism was not a well-knit doctrine. It was more of an attitude. It had to be all things to all men to increase its appeal to masses. Fascist leaders often defended their lack of a well-defined doctrine on the ground that it was more 'a policy of action'. Mussolini said, "we do not believe in dogmatic programmes, in that kind of rigid frame which is supposed to contain and sacrifice the changeable, changing and complex reality... Doctrine beautifully defined and carefully elucidated with headlines and paragraphs, might be lacking; but there was to take its place something more decisive faith".

Fascism was essentially a product of the forces released as a result of World War. Italy was denied its principal territorial claims at the Paris Conference after the World War I. It felt that it had been betrayed by the allies. After World War I, the economic situation also deteriorated. Unemployment increased. Successive parliaments

were unrepresentative, corrupt and inefficient. People had grown sceptic. Strikes were frequent. A general feeling of crisis prevailed throughout the country. The Government of the day failed. The socialists could replace it but did not muster enough courage. In the meanwhile fascists under the leadership of Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) began to take advantage of this situation. He thought that nationalism was far more potent than communism. In October, 1922, he decided to march on Rome. The march ended with Mussolini's appointment as Premier. Without caring much for political institutions, he began to transform the entire system into personal dictatorship.

The post-war situation in Germany was even worse. Germany had been defeated. The war guilt clause severely indicted Germany. It put sole responsibility for the war on Germany. The allied powers refused to permit the German Republic to make any drastic changes in the economic structure of the state. German territories were ceded to France, Poland, Denmark and Belgium. Rhineland was occupied to ensure German payment of reparations to allies specially France. The country was politically divided. It was smarting under international humiliation.

Nationalist Socialist German worker's, Party (NSDAP or NAZI) under the leadership of Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) exploited this situation. As the economic situation deteriorated and the number of unemployed increased, the rank of the party swelled. In the election of July, 1932, the Nazi poll leapt to 37 per cent of the total. President Hindenburg appointed Hitler Reich Chancellor in January, 1933. He calculated that induction into office would curb his radical activities, to counter this calculation; he ordered a plebiscite in March 1933. The Government secured 52 per cent of the votes cast; and this established him finally. Then he successfully engineered parliamentary and electoral support by intimidating his rivals.

Both Hitler and Mussolini tried to organize a new regime and restore order in their respective countries. Both were convinced of the weaknesses of liberal democracies. They hated intense factionalism of competing parties. They were alike

in their hatred of foreign governments as well as of communism at home. Both tried to transcend class-conflict in the name of greater and higher ideal of nationalism.

Fascists argued that the state is the nation. It is identified with society. It has its own life. Nothing has any value or significance outside the state. It alone has the capacity to synthesize value, interpret, develop and give expression to every aspect of life. Liberals start with the individuals, and view the state from their perspectives. Fascist theory starts from the opposite point of view. It argues that man is a social animal. He cannot live apart from larger organism called the Nation State. If he is selfish, he is anti-social. The state has every right to correct him. The individual is just a cell in this organism. It is only by remaining as such that he can find his true freedom. He is free only when he identifies himself with the state.

Once it is recognized that the state is the organism and individual is merely a cell, it is easy to conclude that the cell is expendable for the sake of the whole. The state becomes something more than the individuals who compose it. The state, as conceived by them, is a spiritual and moral fact in itself. Mussolini declared, 'The Italian Nation is an organism with purposes, a life and means of action transcending in power and duration, those individuals singly or grouped, which compose it. It is a moral, political and economic unity which realizes itself in the Fascist State'. Thus, in the name of the nation-state fascists were able to deny individuality, natural rights and judicial independence that characterize political institutions in Western Europe.

Fascism is also authoritarian. It accepts rigid hierarchy in social organization. If the state is society, the leader is its brain. He assesses the needs of the body and decides how best to satisfy them. He, in a sense, interprets the general will of society. He has the sole authority to decide for society.

The individual is merely a cell. He must accept the dictates of the leader. He has duties to perform but no lights to enjoy. The judgment of the leader

is infallible. It cannot be disputed. Hence, representative democracy has no place in a Fascist system. It must be replaced by the government of the leader and others appointed by the leader. The leader alone can provide corrective measures to what is happening in society. Fascists called their leader Duce and the Nazis Fuhrer.

The Doctrine

It is a doctrine which believes that the state is not subject to any moral laws. The state is the supreme custodian of morality itself. It is the supreme community. "Mussolini is always right" was one of the maxims of the party, whose motto was "To Believe, To Obey To Fight". In this slogan Fascism virtually identified itself with an important element of Christianity. It considered religion as the manifestation of the deepest in man. It sought to defend and protect it. This view largely explains the cordial relations Mussolini had with the Pope. Extreme Nazism tried to create a state church but did not succeed much.

Fascism rejected democracy based on the rule of the majority. It denied that numbers alone can govern by means of periodical consultation. The receptivity of the masses is very limited, their intelligence is small. The principle of equality is replaced by the principle of one man leadership or the Nietzschean doctrine of the superman. The pattern of democracy is that of a pyramid balanced on its apex.

This principle is supposed to apply to all branches of life. In industry, for example, the employer was the leader of the factory and the workers his followers. It is for this reason that communists hated fascists. They thought the equation of the employer to the leader and workers to the followers in the German Labour Code was nothing but a smoke screen to hide the totalitarian designs of the capitalists. For them fascism was the last desperate attempt of capitalism to save itself, it was not so much capitalism in decay as capitalism fighting for life. Fascism adopted a clever posture. It dissolved all working class organizations. It also limited the initiative of the employers. It accepted capitalism and yet stressed

its subordination to the ideal of welfare state. Hitler declared that it was the duty of the state to see that "capital remains the servant of the nation". Both tried to advance their own idea of corporate state. Based on Hegel's concept of three classes -the agricultural, the industrial and the universal or governing, Mussolini argued that these classes were not antagonistic in the Marxian sense but were complementary to each other. Each class was accepted by the state as having the right to pursue its own welfare. Labour must do its job, the employers theirs. The third element, that is party, must govern both. Both workers and capitalists are subservient to it. It was hoped that such a state would abolish class conflict and create harmony.

The doctrine of political and moral supremacy of the state meant the rise of militant nationalism in both these countries. Both denied the possibility or even the utility of perpetual peace. War brings up to its highest tension all human energy and brings out the best in all. "In internal warfare, mankind has become great", declared Hitler, "in external peace mankind would be ruined". Both Hitler and Mussolini dreamt of new empires.

Most reprehensible feature of German fascism was the Aryan race theory. Hitler declared that Aryans are superior to every other race in the world and hence most fit to govern. The fundamental aim of his regime was to ensure the purity of the Aryan race. In the name of this doctrine, he unleashed a war against the Jews. They were sent to gas chambers and mercilessly killed. By defending himself against the Jews, Hitler thought he was doing God's work. The whole character and education of the Nazi regime was supposed to find its apex in racial instruction. "It must brand the sense of race and feeling of race", said Hitler, "on the instincts and the understanding of the hearts and brains of the youth entrusted to it". Naturally, Mussolini did not share this view of the existence of pure races.

Different Viewpoints

It would be proper here to analyse four viewpoints regarding Fascism. First, a number of exponents have depicted Fascism as a danger to

liberal economy. They opine that liberal political values as well as institutions have failed to deliver goods. As a result of this failure, Fascism has been able to take the place of capitalism. Second, some critics have equated it with a totalitarian system. They regard it as a fore-runner of totalitarianism. Fascism lays stress on total restraint on citizens where privatization finds no place. As Mussolini has said "Everything is written in the state. There is nothing outside it. There is nothing against it". Such commentators were quite popular during the Cold War period when Fascism -Communism co-relationship was justified. Nazi-Soviet Pact was given a wide acclaim. Points of similarities were drawn between Hitler's attempt for improving the race and Stalin's 'purification' drive. In a system like this fear and suppression were of prime importance. Efforts were made to bring closer the perceptions of Fascism and Communism. However, the ideologies as well as their premises have been fundamentally different. Fascism safeguards the interests of the middle class people and supports traditional institutions like Church and army, whereas communism has been opposing these values. Third, in the sixth decade of the 20th century, Fascism was described as radicalism of the rightists. Traditional views were put forward and encouraged. In a bid to present Fascism as rightist, it was projected as a continuum from the past. The political ideology assumed significance in such an explanation. Fourth, Fascists often quoted writings of Rousseau, Hegel, Nietzsche to legitimise their beliefs and action. It was only opportunism which made them do it. Otherwise it is doubtful whether they really appreciated the profundity of Hegel or Rousseau or Nietzsche.

In any case, once they captured power, they destroyed socialists, communists, recalcitrant members of bureaucracy, unions trade, Jews and all those who opposed paramilitary forces. They centralized the powers of the state, eliminated rights, in the name of the supremacy of the common good. Their economic policy was indeed a success to some extent. Both in Italy and Germany, the aim was self-sufficiency and much progress was made in that direction. The economic crisis had

hit both the countries and there were signs of some recovery. Both were able to unite their respective countries. They restored their nations to the status of first class powers. Both instilled new hopes into masses. One has to see the war movies to appreciate how great their impact was on the psychology of all.

Various political writings have explained Fascism in different ways. Of these, the following four view points stand out prominently.

- (i) Fascism as a menace to the liberal states,
- (ii) Fascism as a protagonist of radical totalitarian state,
- (iii) Fascism as a radical rightist ideology,
- (iv) Fascism as a revolt against modernism.

Fascism can be evaluated from three points of view -as an ideology, as a movement and as a system of government. Ideologically, it was against humanism. It was anti-humanitarian and sought to destroy some of the most cherished human values-rights and interests, freedom and equality in the name of the supremacy of the nation-state.

Looking at from the ideological point of view, it can be said that while liberalism destroys unity in the name of the individual interest. Fascism destroys the individual in the name of the state. The individual becomes expendable for the sake of the state and can be sacrificed at its altar. The 'nation state' is important but it cannot be identified with the government because for all practical purposes the government merely consists of a group of people who speak in the name of the state. The more we glorify the state, the more we glorify the persons who claim to speak in its name and hence, the more we pave the way for the emergence of dictatorship. Society is composed of various wholes. The interest of the state is not always superior to the interest of the individual. That is why the Mahabharata declared that for the sake of the village an individual may be sacrificed, for the interest of the province the village may be sacrificed, for the sake of the country the province may be sacrificed, but for the sake of the individual soul even the whole world may be abandoned. Moreover, the state as a whole is not alone. There are other states which have an identity

of their own. No whole has a right to trample on the freedom of other wholes. No state has a right to destroy other states.

Again, while evaluating it from the standpoint of a system of Government, it may be observed that a Government based on a denial of human rights and interests cannot last long. Dictators are forced to keep up nations to high emotional pitch. In order to do so they devise various methods of rewards and punishment to perpetuate themselves in power. Hitler did so by irrational propaganda and the use of myths and symbols and the repetition of slogans. Such a policy leads inevitably to violence at home and wars abroad. The story of the rise and fall of fascism demonstrates the truth of the statement.

As a movement. Fascism appeared in Italy after the First World War. With the advent of Mussolini in 1922, the movement got momentum. After sometime Hitler came upon the stage in Germany and Fascism set its foot in many countries. The Fascist movement swiftly spread to Austria, Hungary, Romania and Spain. But after the Second World War, Fascism was totally repudiated. It was realized that Fascism, specially military expansionism and violation of human rights, was an outcome of Hitler's policy. That is why the Fascist block was not only completely annihilated, but also totally rejected, condemned and criticized.

If we evaluate Fascism as a political system, we find that it is based on the concept of one party, one man and police domination. It is a system where political and social activities are controlled by the state. In the international sphere, the Fascist administrative formations have been expansionist and aggressive, consequently posing danger to Human Rights, administrative systems and national existence. The Second World War was an outcome of this policy.