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**LESSON NO. 4**

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**FASCISM AND NAZISM**

Facism today is described to be anti-liberal and anti-socialist socio-political philosophy. Historically, Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy are the two notorious specimens of Fascism. But this does not mean that Fascist ideas and programmes did not exist in other states. The most recent example of a Fascist state is that of Argentina under General Peron until 1975. It took millions of human lives and incalculable loss to capital and goods to demolish the Fascist political structures. Yet the world is not free from fascist ideas, "The military power of Italy and of Germany has been destroyed, the Italian Fascist and the German National Socialist regimes are buried in ruins, but it would be foolish to suppose that the crisis which gave rise to those regimes has passed or that the spirit which informed their leaders has died." This is in spite of the fact that Fascism as a creed has fallen from the estimation of the thinking people. The charges of Fascism being levelled by government and opposition parties against each other in India indicate the laxity with which the term Fascist is used.

What is then the exact meaning of **Fascism**? Does it have a body of well defined and set principles? There are no Fascist manifestos, the summarising and rationalising the aims and policies of Fascism. According to Mussolini; "Fascism is based on reality. Bolshevism is based on theory, we want to be definite and real. We want to come out of the clouds of discussion and theory." In the same strain he declared, "My programme is action not talk." Justifying and rationalising this, Alfredo Rocco said, "It is true that Fascism is above all action and sentiment and that such it must continue to be. Were it otherwise, it could not keep that immense driving force, that renovating power which it now possesses, and would merely be the solitary meditation of a chosen few."

Togliatti in his "Lectures on Fascism" warned against the tendency to regard Fascist ideology something that is solidity formed, complete, homogenous. Nothing more closely resembles a chameleon than fascist ideology. "Do not look", and said, "at Fascist ideology without considering the objectives which fascism proposes to reach at a given moment with a given ideology." He is of the view that fascism can only be understood in its process of development, not as something static and finished.

Despite its stress on pragmatism, Fascism in its movement as well as in its final stage exhibits certain peculiar traits. Fascism does make certain theoretical assumptions and does formulate its general racial ideas Mussolini's "The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism" (1923), Hitler's "**Mein Kampf**" and the expository writing of

Alfredo Rocco, G. Gentiles, Ennio Corrandini and some others have a fairly good idea of what the movement stood for. A Political Science Dictionary defines Fascism as a political system of the extreme right, which incorporates the principles of the leader (dictator), a one party state, totalitarian regimentation of economic and social activity and the arbitrary exercise of absolute power of the regime."

#### **4.1 Principle elements of Fascism :-**

William Ebenstein in his book "Today's Isms" states that the principle elements of the fascist outlook are as under :

1. Distrust of reason
2. Denial of basic human equality
3. Code of behaviour based on lies and violence
4. Government by elite
5. Totalitarianism
6. Racism and Imperialism
7. Opposition to International Law and Order.

##### **4.1.1. Distrust of Reason**

Fascism does not believe in the rational personality of man. The fascists believe the instincts and emotions are the real spring of human action. The rational faculty is valuable for rationalising rather than taking a national action. Fascism in this way is the political culmination of intellectual movement known as "revolt against reason". It rejects rationalism in favour of the sentimental and the uncontrollable elements in man. "Psychologically fascism is fanatical rather than reflective, dogmatic rather than open minded. The Fascists act, infact, instinctively rather than theoretically. Fascism is democratic in its propaganda if not in its essence. It addressed itself to feelings not to intellect. Rational appeals are accessible to few and are subject to speculation, examination and criticism. To allude the masses to its programmes and action, it created myths. Hitler with the myth of superiority and Mussolini with the myth of Grand Italian State could rally the masses under their banners.

##### **4.1.2. The Denial of Basic Human Equality**

Fascism is anti-democratic as it does not accept one of the pillars of namely, the basic equality as of human beings. The belief in human equality in Western civilisation was nourished by the Greek, Jews and Christianity. The Greek view of man as rational being, the Jewish idea of oneness of God, which necessarily leads to brotherhood of man and Christian faith in the inalienability and indestructibility of the human inequality. In their scheme man is superior to women, soldier to civilian, party member to non-party members, German to Jew or Italian to non-Italian, and above all strong to weak. "The chief criteria of equality in the western tradition are man's mind and soul whereas the fascist affirmation of inequality is based ultimately on strength."

##### **4.1.3. Stress on Violence and Lies**

The Fascists do not believe in the politics of adjustment. For them, political

opponent is enemy to be vanquished. Not only this, they eulogise violence for its own sake. Brutality and violence unprecedented in modern history characterised both the Italian Fascist and the German Nazi movements. Violence of them was the best condition or real health for a people. Hitler declared that "war is eternal, war is universal. There is no beginning and there is no peace. War is life." Throughout the Fascist literature violence and war are described as the most simple affirmation of life, the climax of human achievement, and as a purifying bath of steel. To the Fascist violence appeared as a morally and socially necessary form of human action. With their insistence of living species and on the survival of the fittest, Fascism and national Socialism appear as the political expression of evolutionists and so called Darwinian views." And lies are not a taboo for a Fascist. For him end justified the means. Fascist lie may not be same as Fantonic "noble lie", Plato's philosopher Kings know that they are propagating lie they do not have any doubt about it. But the Fascist may be creating myth or telling lies while passionately believing in them.

#### **4.1.4. Government by Elite**

Fascism do not believe in a democratic rule. To them democracy is the most inefficient form of government. All are not born equal and all are not capable of ruling themselves. The constiution of Fascist state is essentially elitist. It is a government by select minority. According to them only minority of the nation has the capacity to perceive and give effect to the national interest. Sovereignty, therefore, is not in the people but in the rational state, and only elite are competent to speak for the nation. The concept of rule by a small minority of the population qualified by birth, education or social standing can be traced back to Plato. But this does not mean that the Fascists Governments were completely cut off from the general masses. They did not lack popular approval. However, initial approval of the Fascists did not make their governments democratic. What makes a government democratic is that it always depends on popular will be given frequently in free elections. In Fascist regimes even when government enjoys popular approval, it carried on dependently of popular consent, without free election a free press or a freely functioning opposition.

The Fascist leadership principle comes very close to Rousseau's concept of General Will. The Fascist leader is considered infallible, endowed with mystical gifts and insights. The Duce of Fuehrer can never be wrong. He claims to symbolise the wills and aspirations of the people. The people are told to see in him their true historical selves, their true destiny as in a magic mirror in which they see themselves magnified and exalted.

#### **4.1.5. Totalitarianism**

Under a totalitarian system nothing escapes the regimenting control of the government. Political dictatorship generally do not interfere in education, religion, business and agriculture in a big way. Fascist totalitarianism on the other hand spares nothing. It is, according to Ebenstein, totalitarian in its objective as well as in its means. It controls all phases of human life. The Fascist state sums up the

manifestations of the moral and intellectual life of man. Mussolini entered into an agreement with the Catholic Church of Italy giving it certain privileges and recognising certain rights of the Holy See. But this was only a strategy. His belief, however, was that everything is in the state, for the state, nothing beyond the state and nothing out of the state.

#### **4.1.6. Racism and Imperialism**

According to the **Nazis**, Germans belonged to superior and noble race. "The Jew is a parasite, a sponger, a pernicious bacillus, his presence is also like that of vampire, for wherever he establishes himself the people are bound to be bleed to death." Not only internally but also externally racism stands for the superiority of one race over the other, hence its right to rule and dominate the inferior people and races. The German objective of world domination included the elimination of some nations through genocide and of the enslavements of the rest. The Ruthless prosecution of the Jews in Germany was in accord with the racist theory of the Nazis. Mussolini was not racist. Both Mussolini's and Hitler's regimes were imperialistic in nature. Mussolini had the hallucinations of the Roman empire being revived under his leadership. All the Fascist states had grand schemes of national expansion. For them there was no other alternative for the state. It must either expand or perish.

#### **4.1.7. Opposition to International Law and Order**

State is the highest political organisation for the Fascists. There cannot be anything over the above state. This is the logical outcome of the Fascist belief in inequality, violence, racism, imperialism and war. The Fascists were Jingoists and Imperialists. International organisation and law, they thought, were there for the interest of the weak for they stood in the path of the glory of Fascist states. The Fascist regime of Italy and Germany had no use for the League of Nations. Germany withdrew in 1933 and Italy in 1937 from the League of Nations.

#### **4.2 Fascist Economics**

The economic ideals of Fascism are in full accord with its general philosophy. Fascist state in its application to economy was known as "Corporate State". The Fascist economy was sub-divided into state controlled association of capital and labour and each association had a monopoly in its field. One party state was made the final arbiter of the conflicts between capital and labour. The Italian Fascist regime set up a corporate state to show the Italians and the world that Fascism was not more reaction against liberal capitalism and socialism, but a new creative principle of social and economic organisation. The economy was divided into syndicates of associations of workers, employees and the professionals. Only one syndicate was either Fascist politicians or persons of reliable loyalty to the Fascist regime. In effect, these associations of workers and employees were nothing but instruments of state policy, with no will or life of their own. The Fascist government in Italy established administrative organisation to control the economy of the State. These were known as corporation. Fascist corporation was a government agency and not like modern

business corporation in the liberal countries. In Mussolini's own words, the essential basis of the corporate state was single party, a totalitarian government and an atmosphere of strong ideal tension. In fact, the whole Fascist economy is dominated by dogmas of sovereign state and irresistible governments. The Fascist economy is a war economy even in time of peace.

### **4.3 The Nature of Fascist Crisis**

Fascism became a living creed for the teeming millions in Italy, Germany and Japan. What were the reasons for it? Hallowell is of the view that we have not been able to understand the true nature of the crisis of which Fascism is but a particularly virulent manifestation. Three different theories are put forth to explain the emergence of Fascism after the First World War.

The Marxist view is that it was a decadent form of capitalism. R. Palme Dutt has called Fascism as the highest form of capitalism and the 'terroristic dictatorship of finance-capital'. In certain special historical conditions, the progress of the bourgeois imperialist, reactionary offensive assumes the form of Fascism. The principle aim of Fascism is to destroy the revolutionary labour vanguard, i.e., communist sections and leading units of proletariat. The Thirteenth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International held at Moscow in November-December, 1933 defined Fascism as "open, terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinist and most imperialist elements of finance-capitalism. Fascism tries to secure a mass basis for monopolist capital." But this view is not considered wholly true by the Western scholars. According to them, the Marxian interpretation of Fascism ignores the Western steps that were taken progressively to destroy capitalism in Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy. They also point out that there is no clear relationship of cause and effect between the severe economic crisis, and the emergence of Fascism. The economic crisis of the early 1930's was world wide and even more severe in some other western countries. To severe economic crisis the nations can respond in more than one way and surely Fascism is not the only way. Hallowell is of the view that 'we must go behind the economic crisis to the mental and spiritual state from which the action of despair grows.'

Sometimes the Fascist dictatorship is likened to personal dictatorship of a Napoleon or an Idi Amin. But this again is a gross over simplification of reality because Fascism rested upon the consent of a very large portion of the population. It was a mass movement and not simply a conspiracy of a few individuals. Fascism is different from ordinary dictatorship in other respects also. It is a totalitarian creed whereas, ordinary dictatorships are generally confined in the political field and they do not take whole gamut of the social relationship into their fold.

If the phenomenon of Fascism cannot adequately be explained as conspiracy of capitalists, if it is something more than a personal dictatorship. It cannot be explained in terms of peculiar national culture then the question arises as to what it is. To this question, Hallowell's answer is that it is the political manifestation of spiritual,

intellectual, social and political anarchy. To Hallowsell, "Fascism is the action of despair and an effort to fill the void life by the repudiation of reason and of God.

Fascism has also been explained in terms of the middle class movement, representing a protest against both capitalism and socialism, big business and big union. In an article, "The psychology of Hitlerism" Harold Laswell stated that "In so far as Hitlerism is a desperate reaction of the lower middle class, it continues a movement which began during the closing years of the nineteenth century. Materially speaking, it is not necessary to assume that the small shopkeepers, teachers, preachers, lawyers, doctors, farmers and craftsmen were worse off at the end than they had been in a middle of the century. Psychologically speaking however, the lower middle class was increasingly overshadowed by the workers and the upper bourgeoisie whose unions and parties took the centre of the stage. The psychological impoverishment of the lower middle class precipitated emotional insecurities within the personalities of its members, thus, fertilizing the ground for the various movements of mass protest through which the middle class might revenge themselves (Quoted by Lipset in his "Political Man"). Agreeing with the above view, Lipset states that, "Fascism and populism propose to solve the problems by taking over the state and running it in a way which will restore the old middle classes economic security and high standing in society, and at the same time reduce the power and status of big capital and big labour". But this should not mean that other social strata are not attracted towards Fascism. Fascist ideology in Italy, for example, sought at various times to appeal to all the groups and remained sufficiently amorphous to permit appeals to widely different strata. Since Fascist politicians have been extremely opportunistic in their efforts to secure support, such movements have often encompassed groups with conflicting interests and values, even when they primarily expressed the need of one stratum. Hitler, a centrist extremist, won backing from conservatives who hoped to use the Nazis against the Marxist left. The conservative extremists like Franco have often been able to remain centrists among their followers without giving them control of the movement.

#### **4.4 Quest for the Fascist Myths**

The Fascists do not have their mass base in any one class of society. People from different social classes, and for different reasons, fall prey to Fascist tentacles. Industrialists and landowners, finance and support, dreaded of the prospect of joining the proletariat and look to Fascism for the salvation of their status and prestige. The third group particularly vulnerable to Fascist propaganda is the military. The professional military men tend to overestimate the virtues of discipline and unity. That is why in Germany, Italy, Japan and Argentina army actively supported the Fascist movements. The unemployed with the feeling of being useless and unwanted, fell prey to Fascist propaganda. It gives them a sense of belonging and self-respect by increasing their illusion of involvement in the cause of the nation or the race. Some blue collar workers are also attracted towards it. On the social background of Fascism, Ebenstein points that "it is post-democratic and post-industrial". The Fascist countries were not

without previous experience and they were industrially more developed. He is of the view that Fascism is the coercive method of solving conflicts with an industrially more advanced society.

#### **4.5 Fascist State**

"The Fascist State is an embodied will to power and government", says Mussolini. State, to Fascist, has will and personality of its own, more real than the will and personalities of the individuals composing it. "The Fascist State has drawn into itself even the economic activities of the nation and through the corporate social and educational institutions created by it, influences every aspect of the national life." Fascism conceive of the state as absolute in comparison with which all individuals or groups are relative, only to be conceived of in their relation to the state. In the words of Coker, "the whole ideology of Fascism is dominated by the dogmas of the sovereign state and irresistible government. All particular interests of the individual must be supported by a omnipotent, hierarchial organisation of the nation. A citizen's political obligations are more important than his rights." "The true Fascist" declares Gentile, "is Fascist in his home, school and workshop as well as in his politics. "The Fascist State is the vehicle of the destiny of the nation and the individuals are there to be harnessed for marching towards its goal which proved to be self-destruction.

#### **4.6 Fascism and Traditional Dictatorship**

Fascism's dictatorship is to be distinguished from traditional dictatorship on two grounds. Firstly, traditional dictatorship is not based on mass support rather their main support is either personal magic or force of the dictator or good-will of the army or established bureaucracy. Secondly, Fascism is a totalitarian ideology whereas traditional dictatorship is authoritarian but not totalitarian. The most recent example of traditional dictatorship of Franco's Spain and Idi Amin's regime in Uganda.

#### **4.7 Fascism and Nazism**

The similarities in both creeds are so pronounced that generally no distinction is made between Fascism and Nazism. But the two movements exhibited certain marked differences.

Fascism was not thoroughly racist whereas Nazism was ruthlessly brutal and more powerful in Germany. The most fundamental difference was that both aimed to conquer power and that centre of power which is the modern state. But in one case the power is to be wielded programmatically and piecemeal simply for its sake, while the party which has been its instrument may gradually be abandoned. In the other, power will be used to realise to total plan or a series of plans inspired by the original doctrine and then the party may become a church.

#### **4.8 Fascism, How Long ?**

Mussolini in his "The Political and Social Doctrines of Fascism" (1933), rejects the conception that there can be any doctrine of unquestioned efficacy for all times and all people. Political doctrines pass, but humanity remains. And finally he asserts, illogically of course, that his century 20th will be century of Fascism. He meant by a

century of Fascism as century of collectivism and hence a century of the state. Luckily enough for the humanity his prophesy did not come true. 20th Century is of the state no doubt, but is not of Fascist State. Fascist elements and tendencies exist and sometimes come to the force in almost all the states of East and West. But Fascist state as such does not exist for the moment.

Ebenstein states that "If there is any Fascist threat to democracy today and there it no longer comes from Berlin, Rome or Tokyo. It derives its parasitic strength from the inertia and apathy of citizens of a democracy, because without such civic diseases there can be no support for demagogues and fear-mongers who seek to aggrandise themselves at the expense of the whole body politic."

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

The Fascist movement has been characterised as a "return to the Idealism, a conception of civil life, a powerful innovating movement, the beginning of a new culture." But for those who are trained in liberal tradition, Fascism in its most accomplished form is a one party system controlled by a personal dictator operating in a totalitarian state which has combined nineteenth century nationalism in politics with twentieth century collectivism in economics. The Fascist hates communism, liberalism and internationalism. Secondly, Fascism is rampant nationalism. Thirdly, Fascism is anti-intellectual, grossly emotional, behaviouristic, always aggressive, full of sound.

#### **4.10 Questions:**

Discuss the principle elements of Fascism

#### **4.11 Suggested Readings:**

Adolf Hitler: Mein Kampf

M.J. Thornton: Nazism



**M.A. (POLITICAL SCIENCE) PART-II  
SEMESTER- IV**

**PAPER VII  
OPTION: IV  
POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES**

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**UNIT NO. 1 & 2**

**Department of Distance Education  
Punjabi University, Patiala**

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**Lesson Nos. :**

**Unit-I**

- 1 : Ideology : Meaning, characteristics and End of Ideology Debate
- 2 : Liberalism
- 3 : Nationalism
- 4 : Fascism & Nazism

**Unit-II**

- 5 : Marxism
- 6 : New Leftism
- 7 : Environmentalism
- 8 : Feminism

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