The following is an extract from an essay entitled “Intimations of an ending: the rise and rise of the Hindu Nation”, by Indian author and activist Arundhati Roy, contained in *Azadi. Freedom, Fascism, Fiction* (2020). This speech was first delivered in New York, in 2019.

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While protest reverberates on the streets of Chile, Catalonia, Britain, France, Iraq, Lebanon, and Hong Kong, and a new generation rages against what has been done to its planet, I hope you will forgive me for speaking about a place where the street has been taken over by something quite different. There was a time when dissent was India’s best export. But now, even as protest swells in the West, our great anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist movements for social and environmental justice – the marches against big dams, against the privatization and plunder of our rivers and forests, against mass displacement and the alienation of indigenous peoples’ homelands – have largely fallen silent. On 17 September this year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi gifted himself the filled-to-the-brim reservoir of the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada river for his sixty-ninth birthday, while thousands of villagers who had fought that dam for more than thirty years watched their homes disappear under the rising water. It was a moment of great symbolism.

In India today, a shadow world is creeping up on us in broad daylight. It is becoming more and more difficult to communicate the scale of the crisis even to ourselves – its size and changing shape, its depth and diversity. An accurate description runs the risk of sounding like hyperbole. And so, for the sake of credibility and good manners, we groom out its hair and wipe its dripping jaw to make it more personable in polite company. India isn’t by any means the worst, or most dangerous, place in the world, at least not yet, but perhaps the divergence between what it could have been and what it has become makes it the most tragic.

Right now, 7 million people in the valley of Kashmir, overwhelming numbers of whom do not wish to be citizens of India and have fought for decades for their right to self-determination, are locked down under a digital siege and the densest military occupation in the world. Simultaneously, in the eastern state of Assam, almost 2 million people who long to belong to India have found their names missing from the National Register of Citizens, and risk being declared stateless. The Indian government has announced its intention of extending the NRC to the rest of India. Legislation is on its way. This could lead to the manufacture of statelessness on a scale previously unknown.

The rich in Western countries are making their own arrangements for the coming climate calamity. They’re building bunkers and stocking reservoirs of food and clean water. In poor countries – India, despite being the fifth largest economy in the world, is, shamefully, still a poor and hungry country – different kinds of arrangements are being made. The Indian government’s 5 August 2019 annexation of Kashmir has much to do with the Indian government’s urgency to secure access to the rivers that run through the state of Jammu and Kashmir as it does with anything else. And the NRC, which will create a system of tiered citizenship in which some citizens have more rights than others, is also a preparation for a time when resources become scarce. Citizenship, as Hannah Arendt famously said, is the right to have rights.

The dismantling of the idea of liberty, fraternity, and equality will be – in fact already is – the first casualty of the climate crisis. I’m going to try to explain in some detail how this is happening. And how, in India, the modern management system that emerged to handle this very modern crisis has its roots in an odious, dangerous filament of our history.

The violence of inclusion and the violence of exclusion are prosecutors of a convulsion that could alter the foundations of India, and rearrange its meaning and its place in the world. The Constitution calls India a secular, socialist republic. We use the word ‘secular’ in a slightly different sense from the rest of the world – for us, it’s code for a society in which all religions have equal standing in the eyes of the law. In practice, India has been neither secular nor socialist. In effect, it has always functioned as an upper-class Hindu state. But the conceit of secularism, hypocritical though it may be, is the only shard of coherence that makes India *possible*. That hypocrisy was the best things we had. Without it, India will end.

In his May 2019 victory speech, after his party won a second term, Modi boasted that no politicians from any political party had dared to use the word ‘secularism’ in their campaigns. The tank of secularism, Modi said, was now empty. So, it’s official. India is running on empty. And we are leaning, too late, to cherish hypocrisy. Because with it comes a vestige, a pretence at least, of remembered decency.

India is not really a country. It is a continent. More complex and diverse, with more languages – 780 at last count, excluding dialects – more nationalities and subnationalities, more indigenous tribes and religions than all of Europe. Imagine this vast ocean, this fragile, fractious, social ecosystem, suddenly being commandeered by a Hindu supremacist organization that believes in a doctrine of One Nation, One Religion, One Constitution.

I am speaking here of the RSS, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, founded in 1925 – the mother ship of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. Its founding fathers were greatly influenced by German and Italian fascism. They likened the Muslims of India to the Jews of Germany, and believed that Muslims have no place in Hindu India. The RSS today, in typical RSS chameleon-speak, distances itself from this view. But its underlying ideology, in which Muslims are cast as permanent, treacherous ‘outsiders’, is a constant refrain in the public speeches of BJp politicians, and finds utterance in chilling slogans raised by rampaging mobs. For example, *Mussalman ka ek hi sthan – Kabristan ya Pakistan*, Only one place for Mussalman – the graveyard or Pakistan. In October this year Mohan Bhagwat, the supreme leader of the RSS, said, ‘India is a Hindu *rashtra* [nation], it is non-negotiable’.

That idea turns everything that is beautiful about India into acid.

For the RSS to portray what it is engineering today as epochal revolution, in which Hindus are finally wiping away centuries of oppression at the ends of India’s earlier Muslim rulers, is a part of its fake-history project. In truth, millions of India’s Muslims are the descendants of people who converted to Islam to escape Hinduism’s cruel practice of caste.