

## **The Growth of Communalism in India**

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Communalism as a phenomenon needs to be interpreted again and again in the light of fast changing global affairs. Communalism has been a topic of detailed study for the past several years and many research works are done in this field. The most important threat the globe facing is the rising communalism. The western countries having religious singularity were free of this menace in the past. But the incidents happened in the previous one decade show that they are also facing the threat of rising communal problem. India having a population of above 100 crores with a variety of religions is a breeding ground for communalism. The religious pluralism and the contradictions between the faiths tend to create communal identities, which in turn develops to a stage of communalism, when passing through the democratic process. Religion, when deliberately used as a tool for attaining political gains often nourished the growth of communalism. The rising trend of communalism and the violence followed is the major threat posed towards the integrity of nation. So, efficient measures are to be adopted against communalism and its spread in order to check cracks on the social harmony and bondage. Taking into account the history of communal problems in the past, more non-violent methods are inevitable in combating the communal tension which takes place in the new millennium.

The communal riots occurred in Godhra which took lives of more than thousand innocent people, the riots frequently rising up in sensitive areas like Mumbai, Ahamedabad are all of serious concern. The aftermath of a communal riot is nothing but total loss. The loss of life and property in a communal riot widens the gap between the conflicting communities. The increased communal consciousness and the support received from some religious leaders make the phenomenon of communalism more venomous and dangerous. The majority community which alleges minority about their anti-national approach and the minority pointing about the insecurity they are facing in their nation often collides and trigger tensions. The recent trend of communalism which tends to turn into terrorism is a subject which is to be brought under serious analysis. The history of communal problems in India, the causes of communal problems, the factors controlling the momentum of riots, measures to be taken to prevent and to put off riots etc.

Indian society is pluralistic from religious point of view. Here, we have the followers of all the great religious systems. Hindus constitute the bulk of the population and they inhabit in all parts of the country. Muslims constitute the largest religious minority. But the adjustment between the Hindus and Muslims has been a failure several times, resulting in violent communal riots. In the communal riots during the period of independence millions of people were rendered homeless while millions of others lost their property. Communalism was responsible for the division of the country into India and Pakistan. The partition was expected to resolve the riddle, but it failed. There is, yet, to develop the neighborhood living pattern between Hindus and Muslims. The stagnant economy of India during the British rule was an important factor for the growth of communalism in India. It was deeply rooted in and was an expression of the interests and aspirations of the middle classes in a social set up in which opportunities for them were inadequate. The communal question was, therefore a middle class question par excellence. The main appeal of communalism and its main social base also lay among the middle classes.

Prior to this, it would be essential to highlight that although British colonial state was not a theocratic one but still saw religion as a basic unit of division in Indian society. It recognized, legitimized and promoted religious identities in society and politics. Its most crucial role in spread of communal ideology was its introduction of separate electorates for Muslims and Hindus. This provided a further push to the growing separateness among communities as through separate electorates the elected representatives, constituencies and voters got completely divided on communal lines. Although people in some city would have been united and perhaps it might not have witnessed any communal conflict yet at the time of election, election meetings, campaigning, rally, supporters, opposition and so on made people conscious of their religious ideology and thus strengthening the difference from the other. On the basis of the “Two Nation” theory of Jinnah, India was partitioned. Communal politics had played its nasty game during the immediate past of independent India. The “Divide and Rule” policy of the British Government served their colonial interest. The partition of India was the ultimate outcome of their politics. Despite the emergence of Pakistan, a large number of Muslims are staying in India. India has adopted the principles of secularism and equality of the people. But communalism as a legacy of past, is continuing and expressing itself in various form.

Religion in India has become an important agency of political socialization and it is also reflected in the ideology of a number of political parties. A number of communal and sectarian political parties and organisations are present in India. Muslim League, Jamaat—Islami, Hindu Mahasabha, Akali Dal, Vishwa Hindu Parishad are directly or indirectly responsible for the emergence of communalism.

The so called secular political parties also enter into alliance with communal forces for electoral benefit. Candidates are selected by different political parties taking into account the communal composition of the constituency. Some political leaders preach communalism to attain their immediate political goal. They have become leaders and continue to remain as such only due to the adoption of communal and sectarian interest. When political leaders and their organisations are not away from communalism, obviously this spirit will be promoted in the society. Indian Muslims have developed a tendency of isolationism even long after the creation of Pakistan. They remain aloof from the mainstream of national politics. Most of them are not

interested to take part in the secular-nationalistic politics of the country. They insist on to be treated as a separate entity.

With their separate culture and different customs, they have a distinct identity. Some orthodox and biotic organisations not only uphold Islamic fundamentalism, they also demand reservation facilities for Muslims. Their isolation creates a psychological separation and misunderstanding which promote communal tensions in the society. Electoral politics in India has become more expensive and competitive. Different political parties are not hesitating to use any means, fair or foul, for electoral victory. They even create communal tensions and try to take political advantage out of it. Concessions are granted to various minority groups for appeasing them. Each and every party is playing communal card and if situation so demands, is not hesitating to join hands with the communal parties for coming to power. Communalization of politics as a process is supporting the growth of communalism in India.

Communal tensions in India sometimes are highly intensified due to the rule of two neighbouring theocratic countries. These countries try to create communal problems in the border states. The communal problems of Punjab and Jammu Kashmir are caused due to provocation of Pakistan. So long as this cross-border factor is not removed, communal problems are likely to stay in India.

### **Communalism is affecting the Indian Politics in the Following ways:**

#### **Failure of Government:**

Both the Union and the State Governments often fail to prevent communalism in the country. Due to lack of prior information, they fail to take any preventive measures. So the communal violence can easily take innocent lives and destroys property. The post-Godhra riot in Gujarat shows the inefficiency of the government to control the communal riot. Failure of immediate and effective steps has been a cause of the continuance of communalism.

#### **Organisation of Political parties on Communal Basis:**

In India, many political parties have been organized on communal basis. The Muslim League, the Hindu Maha Sabha, the DMK, the Akali Dal are organised on religious basis. Political leaders also encourage communalism to get votes at the time of elections.

#### **Selection of Candidates for Elections:**

Political parties, while selecting candidates for the election, give great importance to communalism. A candidate belonging to the majority community in that constituency is given ticket of the party.

#### **Voting on Communal Basis:**

Voters generally vote on communal lines. Besides, communal riots often break out in many parts of the country. After getting elected, the representatives try to safeguard the interests

of their community and ignore national interests. These conditions hinder the progress of democracy in the country.

The above practices foment jealousy and hatred among the various communities living in India and sometimes even lead to communal riots. Therefore, communalism should be recognised as enemy number one of our secular democratic polity.

The strained relations between majority and minority and the insecurity feeling of the minorities in a majority dominated society develop the atmosphere for communal conflicts. The Muslims fail to be intermingled in the national mainstream. Most of them do not participate in the secular nationalistic politics and insist on maintaining their separate identity. The elite among the Muslims have failed to generate the appropriate national ethos. The orthodox members of minorities feel that they have a distinct entity with their own cultural pattern, personal laws and thought. There are strong elements of conservatism and fundamentalism among the Muslims. Such feeling has prevented them from accepting the concept of secularism and religious tolerance. Communalism has flourished in India because the communalist leaders of both Hindu and Muslim communities desire to flourish it in the interest of their communities. The demand for separate electorate and the organization of Muslim League were the practical manifestations of this line of thought. The British rule which produced the divide and rule policy, separate electorate on the basis of religion strengthened the basis of communalism in India. Ultimately the partition of the country into India and Pakistan provided further an antagonistic feeling towards each other.

A majority of Muslims in India has failed to adopt the scientific and technological education. Due to their educational backwardness, they have not been represented sufficiently in the public service, industry and trade etc. This causes the feeling of relative deprivation and such feelings contain the seeds of communalism. The territorial settlement of different religious groups especially Hindus, Muslims and Christians causes in them wide variation in the mode of life, social standards and belief system. Most of these patterns are contradictory and this may cause communal tension.

Cultural similarity is a powerful factor in fostering amicable relations between any two social groups. But the social institutions, customs and practices of Hindus and Muslims are so divergent that they think themselves to be two distinct communities. Psychological factors play an important role in the development of communalism. The Hindus think that the Muslims are fanatics and fundamentalists. They also believe that Muslims are unpatriotic. On the contrary, the Muslims feel that they are being treated as second rate citizens in India and their religious beliefs and practices are inferior. These feelings lead to communal ill-feeling.

Some foreign countries try to destabilize our country by setting one community against the other through their agents. Pakistan has played a role in fostering communal feeling among the Muslims of our country. Pakistan has been encouraging and promoting communal riots by instigating the militant sections of Indian Muslim community. Kashmir youths are trained by Pakistan to destabilize India's internal security by spreading communal venom. The messages relating to communal tension or riot in any part of the country spread through the mass media. This results in further tension and riots between two rival religious groups.

The concept of secularism in India is the best antidote to communalism. In a society where secular values prevail, it's hard for the communalist to sow the seeds of religious fundamentalism. The uniqueness of Indian secularism is that it admits the freedom of religion unlike its western type of avoiding religion. This religious freedom granted in the secular concept, makes the consolidation of religious people under one umbrella. The cultivation of secular ideas in Indian society in a wider sense would definitely check the hazards of communal rivalry. Teaching of secular values especially, Gandhian secular values in the schools and universities and extending the teaching to villages is the key to a secular society. Unlike any other political ideology, secularism is best suited in the Indian social context. The way out of the communal problem rests in the real practice of secularism as envisaged in the constitution of India.

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