Communalism as A Social Problem in India: Causes, Consequences and Constitutional Perspective

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Abstract

As a social and political force, communalism has long been an obstacle to India's progress toward greater national harmony, constitutional ideals, and representative government. Using a qualitative historical- socio-logical method, this study delves into the evolution, causes, effects, and constitutional aspects of communalism throughout history. British "divide and rule" and other colonial tactics institutionalised religious identities, the article contends, while post-independence political mobilisation, socio-economic inequality, and media narratives have all served to further separate communities. This research examines the processes of community identity formation, politicisation, and maintenance via the lenses of social theorists such as Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, Michel Foucault, and Benedict Anderson. Discrimination, segregation, electoral polarisation, community violence, and the loss of public faith in democratic institutions are some of the social, political, and economic effects of communalism that are further examined..

This study draws attention to the shortcomings in the application and enforcement of constitutional protections and legislative measures meant to maintain equality and secularism. Not only that, but also delves into how both offline and online media contribute to escalating community tensions by spreading false information and hate speech. To counter communalism, the study says, India needs to reform its laws, make its institutions more accountable, regulate the media responsibly, implement inclusive economic policies, and keep up grassroots peace-building efforts to fortify its pluralistic spirit and constitutional dedication to secular democracy.

Keywords: *Communalism, National Unity, Secularism, Constitutional Framework, Social Cohesion.*

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Introduction:

"People face destruction when their historical understanding gets denied and obliterated."

– **George Orwell**

India's long-established communal structures, built on culturally divisive historical tactics. Because the British imperial authority encouraged and exacerbated communalism in India through colonial policies, we may say that communalism in India is a human-caused phenomenon. Despite centuries of religious tolerance, colonisation in India solidified religious differences into political and social barriers. The groundwork for the present-day social influence of communalism in India was laid by the evolution of communal ideology.

India was home to diverse religious communities that often interacted, coexisted, and even thrived together before the British colonial control. As an example, the Mughal Empire is known for its policy of religious tolerance and efforts to bridge the gap between Hindus and Muslims, pursued by leaders like Akbar.[1] Historically, pluralism went beyond rigid theological divisions, just as Emperor Ashoka advocated for harmony and the tolerance of many religious ideologies. I believe there were religious affiliations. Nonetheless, the most prominent indicators of social separation and conflict were not religious differences.[2]

The British colonial policy of "*divide and rule*" purposefully transformed religion from a means of communal identification into a tool of political control. One step toward establishing religious identities as political instruments was the 1871 Census, which mainly used religion as a means of categorising individuals.[3] A hardening of theological differences into categories of distrust and division was aided by these policies. According to Muhammad Ali Jinnah, "*Hindus and Muslims are two different civilizations",* and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who condemned the concept of Hindu-Muslim unity, foresaw the catastrophic repercussions of this fabricated split, culminating in the violent partition of 1947.[4] More specifically, Jinnah's speech was the last straw in a contentious campaign that had the potential to drive a wedge between religious groups in the country and sow the seeds of continued communal strife.[5]

Religious identities are inherently at odds with one another, since the devastating Partition of 1947 left an everlasting mark on the nation. The social fabric was reshaped by this historic event, setting the stage for decades of political manipulation, sectarian violence, and division. We still feel the effects of Partition, and religion has become a prism through which we view our own identities, those of our communities, and our nation. Continual tensions and divides have resulted from its lengthy history as a divisive instrument formed and interwoven into India's socio-political systems.[6]

Religious diversity is only one of the many causes of the communalism that is visible in modern India. Colonial administrative policies and the political mobilisation that followed are also major contributors. Religious identities were institutionalised and transformed into political categories during colonial intrusions, despite India's history of accommodating numerous religious communities. These categories still impact social and political life today. The socio-logical frameworks provided by Durkheim's theory of social cohesiveness and Weber's theory of authority are crucial for comprehending the processes of communal identity construction, maintenance, and political mobilisation.[7] In order to heal communal divides and fortify India's diverse and democratic traditions, it is crucial to acknowledge these historical roots.[8]

Communalism and its Impact on National Unity:

The stability, progress, and social peace of a nation depend on its citizens being united as one. Unfortunately, communalism has emerged as a formidable challenge to this harmony in India. However, religiously strong identities have been reinforced by historical, political, and socio-economic frameworks, which has led to a schism in national consciousness. Although secularism is a constitutional requirement in India, the reality of politics and society is often at odds with this ideal, and sometimes the two can't be reconciled. Through its methods of identity destruction, its application in electoral politics, and the socio-economic ramifications of communal divisions, this chapter explores how communalism has impacted national unity.

Political Exploitation of Communal Identities:

Politicians use communalism as a weapon to rally support for their candidates, rather than viewing it as a mere social phenomenon. The analysis of how political leaders and parties generate narratives that impact public perception can be informed by Michel Foucault's theories of power and discourse. Politics surrounding religious identities shapes public perceptions of religion and society as a whole because, as Foucault argues, power functions through language.

In India, political parties often use communal lines as a means of appealing to voters' sense of identity rather than addressing actual issues. Both the "*Babri Masjid demolition*" (1992) [12] and the subsequent growth of majoritarian politics saw the use of religious feelings for political benefit. The Gujarat riots of 2002[13], orchestrated by then-Chief Minister Narendra Modi, are another example of sectarian polarisation that served a political purpose. We saw how political rhetoric may sow religious divisions during the "*CAA-NRC protests*" (2019–2020)[14], which further deepened existing religious tensions. Rallies during elections that use divisive language, hate speech directed at religious minorities, or the imposition of policies that favour

one particular group while discriminating against others exacerbate religious divisions and make national unity more elusive.

On the other hand, one could argue that communal voting patterns signifiere representational identity rather than Y obscurantist political manipulation. Some argue that minority groups should utilise identity politics as a means to protect their rights and advance the interests of the majority in democracies. What this shows is the nuance of communalism, in which religious identity is used as a political weapon by both majority and minority groups.

Media's Role in Amplifying Communal Divisions:

The media plays a significant role in shaping popular perceptions of communal identities and political narratives. Newspapers and media have a history of being criticised for glamorising community conflicts that do not genuinely exist. Prejudices, stereotyping, and biased reporting on community events in the media can influence voting results. The gulf between different groups of people has grown even wider on the internet. The quick spread of false information and hate speech on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp has intensified communal violence. In order to gain political power, political parties and interest groups use these platforms to promote contentious narratives and galvanise certain communities.

The social, political, and economic ramifications of communalism are severe, and it breaks the unity of the nation. Public policies that are crucial for development in the long run are distorted, political polarisation increases, social integration declines, and democratic ideals are eroded. The quality of governance and constitutional values are impacted when communal identities are politicised, which in turn causes vote-bank politics, electoral polarisation, the degradation of secular government, and lower public trust in democratic institutions. Using Émile Durkheim's theory of social cohesion and Karl Marx's perspective on economic marginality, this chapter analyses the social, educational, psychological, political, and economic impacts of communalism. It seeks to understand how communalism causes social fragmentation and how excluded communities are kept out of society. This discussion delves further into the topic by referencing the Ayodhya (Babri Masjid) judgement (2019), the 2020 Delhi riots, and the 2002 Gujarat riots to show how communalism has affected social relations, political discourse, institutional responses, and patterns of coexistence in India. Furthermore, the chapter delves into the ways in which communalism, together with caste and class systems, exacerbates economic exclusion, social discrimination, and political marginalisation.

1-Economic Consequences:

Economic marginalisation is a common cause of conflicts among communities. The Sachar Committee Report (2006)[16] highlights the disparities in economic possibilities,

financial isolation, and literacy rates experienced by Muslims in India. A vicious cycle of poverty and social unrest is perpetuated by this economic isolation, which in turn intensifies communal animosity. Businesses close, people are forced to leave their homes, and investor confidence drops when communities experience violence. According to reports from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) [17], regions hit hard by sectarian violence tend to see a decline in economic activity, which in turn hinders both the short- and long-term prospects for improvements to infrastructure and the creation of new jobs.

Community polarisation impacts labour markets and the process as a whole. Because of this, businesses may be reluctant to recruit residents of areas seen as politically unstable. By doing so, such economic gaps will be further entrenched. Results from the National Sample Survey (NSS) [18] show that religious minorities face social prejudice and a lack of financial resources, which contribute to lower economic participation rates compared to the national average.

2-Social Consequences:

Communalism entails dividing society in terms of housing, schools, and public areas. There are now religious ghettos in major cities like Delhi and Mumbai, where members of various faiths live in segregation due to prejudice and fear. Slowing cross-societal interaction, this segregation adds fuel to the fire of prejudice and stereotyping. The fact that interfaith marriages are uncommon in India (as reported by the Pew Research Centre in 2020)[19] adds weight to the argument that societal cohesion is hindered by entrenched communal barriers.

Community violence has contributed to the marginalisation of women, particularly those from minority groups. Research conducted by "*the National Commission for Women*" (NCW) [20] shows that women residing in areas impacted by riots have extra socio-economic challenges, like limited access to healthcare and education. As a result, communal violence has an emotional impact on the general population, causes distrust to grow between different groups, and makes social healing more challenging.

3-Political Consequences:

The political ramifications of communalism extend beyond electoral mobilisation and have significant implications for legislation, international relations, and governance. Governments can practise sectarian politics if they use official channels to show favouritism toward a certain religious group. As a result of religious extremism, democratic principles are eroded, and retaliatory community politics gain support.

A prime illustration of this is the proliferation of anti-conversion legislation in many Indian states; detractors argue that these laws disproportionately target religious minorities and impede religious liberty. Disputes among India's religious minority

have a disproportionate impact on the country's diplomatic ties with its neighbours, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Legal and Constitutional Framework:

Articles 14, 15, 25, and 28 of the Indian Constitution guarantee "*religious freedom, equality, and protection from discrimination, and they also establish secularism as a basic value*".[21] Another piece of legislation that forbids political parties from appealing to voters' religious beliefs is the Representation of the People Act, 1951.[22] However, judicial interventions and policy reforms are needed since weak enforcement and political meddling have made legal measures alone insufficient. Despite its introduction with the intention of strengthening legal frameworks, the Communal Violence (Prevention, Control, and Rehabilitation) Bill has been plagued by bureaucratic inefficiency and a lack of political will in its execution. Sceptics contend that biased enforcement occurs when such laws are used as a political tool instead of being enforced impartially.[23]

Conclusion:

Therefore, it may be concluded that communalism is a significant threat to India's constitutional ideals of secularism, equality, and national integration. This study illustrates that communalism arises not solely from religious difference but from historical legacies, political manipulation, socio-economic disparities, and the growing impact of traditional and digital media on public perceptions. Colonial policies entrenched religious identities, whilst post-independence electoral politics, selective law enforcement, and economic inequalities have perpetuated communal differences.

Thus, the legal restriction is only half of the solution to communalism; other parts include holding institutions to account, fostering inclusive growth, and encouraging citizen engagement. Preserving democratic integrity requires stepping up efforts to enforce electoral and constitutional laws, regulate hate speech and disinformation, expedite adjudication of cases involving communal violence, and promote responsible media practices. Reforms to education that promote constitutional ideals, interfaith discussion, and respect for other groups are equally crucial. One way to lessen social alienation and increase national cohesion is through grassroots peace-building activities, economic inclusion, and equitable access to opportunities.

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