

“Communalism in India: A Threat to National Integration: Issues, Challenges, and Solutions”

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Abstract

“India is a multi-racial and religious society with huge conflicting interest among different socio-political entities in society. The concept of communalism gains importance in Indian discourse after emergence of western colonial rule in India. The idea of communalism spreads in the minds of intellectual communities during freedom struggle and after British empire’s assurance for Indian with regards to the self-rule. Many religion oriented institutions started to propagate more importance should be given to their communities in case of independence to India. Different communities of India played one role in rising the feeling communalism in India. Besides this the British policy of divide and rule, the influence of religion, the economic and educational backwardness of Muslim communities and role of communal based organization and leaders are the main agents of communalism in India. Besides this some remedial and solutions are also suggested at the end of this research paper”.

Key Words: Communalism, multi-racial, divide and rule, Muslim, communities,

1. Introduction

‘Communalism’, we mean the opposition of religious communities of each other. It is an ideology, which emphasises identity of a religious group in relation to other groups and often a tendency to promote its own interest at the other's expense. Communalism is the antagonistic assertiveness in political, social and economic spheres by one aggregation of individuals against another after being organized along religious, caste or other ascriptive lines. In other words, communalism means to believe or to propagate that the socio-economic and political interest of one religious, caste or an ascriptive group are dissimilar, divergent and antagonistic to those of another. (Chandra, 1984)

Communalism is perversion of religion from a moral order to an arrangement of contemporary political convenience, from a sublime faith into a mean tactic of politics, from a spiritual end to a wicked immoral means. Communalism exploits both religion and politics and is born out of a real or an imaginary fear of the other communities, either due to ignorance or due to misrepresentation. Communalism is opposed to secular change. It seeks to convert religiosity into political bellicosity. (Puniyani, 2003)

Communalism is basically an ideology of political allegiance to a religious community as a primary and decisive group in the policy. Therefore, communalism is a political strategy opposed to nationalism as a process of integration of multi ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual communities. Communalism is opposed to secularism as a pattern of socio- cultural co-existence. It is opposed to rational civic basis of party formations and political system. It is opposed to humanism and compassion taught by all great religions and by all great philosophies. (Chandra, 1984)

2. The Emergence and Development of Communalism in India

It is widely realized that communalism in India was born, nurtured and promoted by the British imperialism as a deliberate design to sow dissensions. It served the colonial administration to 'divide and rule' and therefore the prevailing religious differences were first used to project the social and cultural variations and then to promote political divisions by treating Indians not as Indians but as members of religious communities. (Chandra, Bipan, 1984)

British imperialism in India perceived India essentially as a conglomeration of two major formations, the feudal principalities and religious communities. For a century of indirect rule (1757-1857) and another century of direct colonial rule (1857-1947), the British administrators exploited the inbuilt divisions and tensions existing between feudal principalities and religious communities. These were the two categories used mostly for representation at durbars, ceremonies, giving of titles and awards, nominations to local bodies, municipalities, legislatures and in the Viceroy's Executive Council. (Chandra B. , 2009)

The type of politics, approved, tolerated and encouraged by the British imperialism was only Communal Politics' (as opposed to secular and national politics). A voter was classified as a Hindu or a Muslim, etc., and so was a candidate and a representative. It is in this historical context that communalism came to acquire the meaning of being opposed to national identity, of being against the secularization process, of being too narrowly and negatively attached to one's own religious community and that too essentially for political benefits. (Chandra B. , Communalism in Modern India, 2004)

Separatism in politics and politicisation of religious communities has been the two most damaging blows, which the British colonial administration dealt to the emerging body politic of India. It should be realized that it was this structure, style and process of politics, which eventually resulted in the vivisection of the nation and the partition of the country. (Chandra B. , India's Struggle for Independence, 2016)

3. Socio-Economic Background for the rise of Communalism

Asghar Ali Engineer has analyzed the phenomenon of communalism the socio-economic perspective. (Engineer, 1984). The fight between Shivaji and Aurangzeb was not religious in nature but a perspective struggle-reflecting crisis of the feudal system in that epoch. (Chandra., 1990). The emergence of communalism during the British period was mainly centered on the question of share in the lovers of offices. From the very beginning the Muslim league was fighting basically for greater share in the power structure and not on any substantial issue of theological or even broadly of religious nature. (Chandra B. , Communalism in Modern India, 2004). The Muslim elite in U.P. who had fought the battle for a separate nation migrated to Pakistan-their dreamland. (Robinson, 2007). In this situation then prevailing most of those left in India belonged to the lower classes, small landholders, poor peasants and landless labourers in rural areas and artisans, petty traders and other lumen element in urban areas. (Bipan, 1987) The Muslims who chose or were compelled to remain in India have no ambition, or sense of competition with the Hindus. ((Austin, 1966) In absence of such a competitive conflict, communalism-a socio-economic phenomenon-could not have sustained its growth in an organized way. (Chandra, Bipan, 1984)

In order to understand the socio-economic basis of communalism in post partition India, it must be remembered that the Muslims in India failed to produce a viable capitalist class. The ruling classes among the Muslims were predominantly feudal and feudalism continued to lose ground in independent India. The capitalist class in India remains almost exclusively Hindu. Thus, there was no question of competition with concerned. However, the expanding economy did throw up a class of petty bourgeois among the Muslims in medium-sized towns. (Asghar, Engineer Ali, 1984)

Communalism in post-partition India struck stronger roots in medium sized towns. The communalism in modern India is a product of competition between petty-bourgeoisie classes in medium-sized towns. However, it is not to suggest that these are the only factors responsible for outbreak of communal violence. (Pandey, 1990)

There are several others, besides these. Of late, anti-social elements have also been playing a significant role. Smugglers, illicit liquor dealers, unlicensed arm manufactures; all of them seek political patronage and receive readily as the help swell support for the political parties through terror tactics. (Dipankar., 2004)"The socio-economic basis of communalism, thus, can be very well understood from the analysis given above. The ruling

classes in the developing and crisis-ridden economy would always try to promote ethnic and communal conflicts to confuse and intersect with class conflict. (Engineer Ali Asghar, 1984,)

4. Main reasons for the rise of communalism among the main communities in India

Jawaharlal Nehru once described communalism as the Indian version of fascism. He said, while all communalism is bad, we must remember that minority communalism is born out of fear, while majority communalism takes the form of political reason. However, he added, “There could be no compromise on the issue of communalism or Muslim communalism, as it is a challenge to Indian nationhood and Indian nationalism.” (Pandey, 1990)

The main reasons and factors which have encouraged the development of communalism in contemporary India which have been traced out as follows:

4.1. Education and Economic Backwardness of the Muslim Community

During the British rule in India Muslims were educationally and economically more backward as compared with the Hindus. It was hoped that after independence when equal opportunities have been provided to all, the Muslims going to educational, technical, medical and other professional institutions is much less than their population. The result is that they are educationally as well as economically backward. This economic disparity between the two communities has been creating wide gap and many misunderstanding; one community feeling that it is being constantly exploited by the other or that the richness of one is only at the cost of other. (Asghar, 1984,)

4.2. The Role of Communal Organizations and Political Parties

The Hindu Mahasabha, Muslim League and the Akali Dal are some well known communal parties in India. They not only represent particular communities but also thrive on communal politics. Their leaders often use them to create communal tensions so that they may fish in troubled waters. (Chandra B. , Communalism in Modern India, 2004) Besides the communal parties, there are non-political organizations like Bajrang Dal, VHP, Jamaat-e-Islamic Sevak Sangh (ISS), the All-India Conference of Indian Christians and Panthic Committee. These organizations declare that they have nothing to do with politics but they have the backing of the BJP, the Muslim League and the Akali Dal. They encourage the half-educated and communally sensitive elements to indulge in communal fight in the name of religion. (Asghar, Engineer Ali, 1984) “The emergence of communalism and the consequent threat to communal harmony in Kerala owe much to the increased activities of two fundamentalist organizations, the RSS and Islamic Sevak Sangh (ISS) of the Hindu and Muslims respectively.” The ISS is widely perceived as a Muslim Counterpart to the RSS. (KN, 1989) *The rapid rise of the Islamic Sevak Sangh in Kerala is vitiating the atmosphere of communal amity in the State.* (Panikkar, 1997)

4.3. Minority Appeasement Strategy of Political Parties

The caste-based politics in democratic India also help perpetuating the communal cleavage. Lust for vote-catching on the part of nearly all the political parties adds fuel to the fire. The ‘en bloc’ voting of the Muslims to the congress is attributed generally to the pro-Muslim policies of the congress government in power, and to the tendency of the congress leadership to appease the Muslim in all possible ways. Neither the stern action is taken against the well-known anti-Hindu and anti- national leadership of the Muslims, nor does the government take initiative in the matter of reforming the Muslim personal law. (Asghar, Engineer Ali, 1984)

4.4. Electoral Obligations in the country

Today our politics is purely “Poll Oriented” or “Voters Centered” and elections have become ends in themselves. Selection of candidate for a particular constituency is generally made after considering the relative strength of different castes and communities residing in that constituency. Communal loyalties of the voters are covertly and sometimes even overtly, appealed at the time of propaganda campaign. For example, throughout the election campaign of BJP-Shiv Sena combine in Maharashtra Lok Sabha and Assembly elections (1989-1990), the recurring theme was Hindutva or anti-Muslim propaganda. In addition, of course, the Ram Janmabhoomi - Babari Masjid controversy was exploited to the hilt. It served as if there was an understanding between the Congress and the BJP on this score. Both had planned their election strategy cleverly. (Hasan, 1993) The BJP apparently carried out very aggressive propaganda on the Ram-Janmabhoomi issue and took out Ramlila Rath Yatra, which resulted in violence. The Congress administration deliberately let the violence spread. By doing this the Congress wanted to play a double game. The Hindus would feel that the Congress did not use its administration to ‘suppress’ Hindus and Muslims would feel that the aggressive BJP is responsible for communal violence and only the Congress could protect them. Rajiv Gandhi started his campaign (November 1989 Lok Sabha elections) from Faizabad by promising ‘Ramrajya’, which completely put off Muslims. The idiom which Mahatma Gandhi had used in a very positive sense, Rajiv Gandhi had used most cynically to improve his chances for winning the elections. The Congress (I) had blatantly sought votes in the name of Christianity during the Mizoram Assembly elections in January 1989 and had campaigned to seek support for a “Christian government”. (S, Partha Ghosh, 1999)

4.5. Communal ideology in, Newspapers, History books and Educational materials

The circulation of such openly communal newspaper is also responsible, for the growth of communal forces. These newspapers often pass on news, which cause communal tensions. The textbooks on history written by different scholars have also helped perpetuating the communal tensions. (Asghar, Engineer Ali, 1984) In fact, Indian civilization and culture depend very much too both the communities of people. “The Hindu and Muslim Communities came to imbibe each-other’s thoughts and customs; and beneath the ruffled surface of storm and stress, there followed a menial current of mutual harmony and toleration in different spheres of line.” (Azad, 1959) However, the interpretation of history by many historians has been one-sided, though not completely erroneous. Allauddin Khilji, Mahmud Ghaznavi, Aurangzeb and other Muslim rulers have been consistently figured as anti-Hindu in the history textbooks for the Hindu students and the pro-Hindu policies of these rulers as well as their reverence for Hindu qualities and culture have been purposely omitted from reference. Likewise, the historical events have been misinterpreted by the Muslim scholars as well. (S, Partha Ghosh, 1999) The textbooks in Pakistan are written in the same vein. Mohammed Bin Qasim and Mahmud Ghaznavi are glorified for destroying Kafirs. Shivaji is described as a person ‘who believed that all kind of deceit and treachery was fair in war’. Gandhiji and the Congress have been criticized for their Hindu leanings and lastly, the Muslim refugees who fled to Pakistan have been ‘sympathetically’ referred though references to the Hindu refugees have been purposely omitted. (Cohen, 2011) These history books inject communal passion in the minds of school children and produce a generation with a distorted version of our history and heritage.

4.6. Division and Fragmentation among Muslims

The communal groups among the Muslims also are working against the goal of communal amity. They represent the Muslim opinion in this country as far as the Muslim grievances are concerned. A feeling of economic backwardness and a discontent that the benefits of modernization in terms of governments jobs, business and education opportunities, etc., have not been enjoyed by the Muslims promote separatist tendencies among them. (Asghar, Engineer Ali, 1984) The Muslims feel that there is an organized success in pushing the minority interest to a subsidiary position, There is no change in the anti Hindu bias of the Muslim League. Its consistent opposition to reform the Muslim personal Law and the recent statements of its leaders

on Vande Mataram and the Aligarh Muslim University (Amendment) Act are sufficient proof to explain its traditional separatist outlook. (Asghar, Engineer Ali, 1984)

4.7. Hindu Conservative views

After the partition of India many among the Hindus forcefully argued that since the Muslims had got their homeland, India which was now left behind, should be the land of the Hindus. The Hindu Mahasabha is not reconciled to the partition of India and is committed to the establishment of Akhand Bharat. (Asghar, Engineer Ali, 1984) The Jana Sangha, which was created in 1951, is influenced by the ideology of Hindu revivalism. The RSS always blames Muslims for any communal riot in the country and refuses to see the other side of the picture. "Islam will have to be Indianised if Indian Muslims are to become nationalists." (MAK, 1986) In the Shiv Sena Journal, Bala Thackeray writes, "Hindus should not only remain Hindus, but be fanatic Hindus and dedicated crusaders of the religion." All these 'communal forces' among the Hindus have resented the concept of 'secular India' and demanded of the government 'to take steps to ban cow slaughter all over India, to introduce Hindu religious, ethical and spiritual teachings in educational institutions and to propagate the tenets of Hinduism through such mass media as the press and radio.' (Asghar, Engineer Ali, 1984)

4.8. Self - Interest -Driven Politics in the Parties:

One of the major causes of communalism is the act of political opportunism. Despite its well-known commitment to secularism, the Congress leadership has often made alliances with communal parties thus giving political respectability to communalism. (Hasan, 1993) The government first gave in to Muslim fundamentalists on the Shah Bano case and later it equally blatantly gave it to Hindu fundamentalists. Both these acts were used for election propaganda. It was pure political opportunism. No conviction was involved in either case. It was neither convinced of the superiority of personal law in situations of Shah Bano case, nor of the case of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad that Lord Rama was born at the site where the Shilanyas ceremony was performed. (Asghar, The Shah Bano Controversy. , 1987) This was nothing but appeasement of the Hindu and Muslim fundamentalists for political gain.

5. Main inferences of the study

Today, Communalism, in its varied shapes, has acquired a very dangerous form and alarming proportions in India. It disrupts the pattern of co-existence in our multi-religious fraternity. It is an affront to India's nationalist identity and a tragic setback to our evolving secular culture. (Asghar, Engineer Ali, 1984) It is subversive of our democratic political stability. By killing each other in mindless communal strife we are in effect killing ourselves-killing our glorious heritage as enemy number one of secular democratic polity. (Hasan, 1993) No concerned citizen could and should overlook fact that Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communalism today was jointly and several become a disastrous factor-weakening the stability, development, nation security, pride and patriotism of the people. (S, Partha Ghosh, 1999) Communalism generates not only a false consciousness but seeks to counterpoise one citizen against another and thereby weaken the structure of national fraternity. By bringing religion into politics, joint endeavours for vital common objective! Removal of poverty, eradication of disease, availability of education, employment, housing, etc-are fragmented and frustrated. ((Hasan Zoya, 2005)

6. Solutions for the Eradication of Communalism in India to bring Peace and Harmony in the Country:

Communalism in India is an elephantine problem. It is impossible to root it out from the country. At best it can be contained; and that too with a collective effort. The places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 has been enacted to maintain the status quo of places of worship as it existed on 15th August 1947, so as to avoid any new controversies relating to such places. Ministry of Home Affairs has set up a Rapid Action Force charged with the special task of quelling communal riots. The following remedies have been suggested for eradicating communalism. (Asghar, Engineer Ali, 1984)

6.1. Banning communal organization and imposing community fine in the riot affected areas are considered the two important remedies of the problem.

6.2. The best hope of achieving composite nationhood in the immediate future lies in a balanced development of the two communities. Alternatively, infusing this consciousness a two prolonged policy would have to be followed: one of humanizing Hinduism further and the other of fighting the backward movement within the Muslim community itself by introducing necessary changes in its laws. The Muslim and other groups must be brought up to par economically with other communities so that their sense of security is enhanced. So long as the two communities are not brought up to par with each other, Muslims will continue to be obsessed with the need for their separate identity and the Hindus would continue to suspect their extra territorial loyalties. (Asghar, Engineer Ali, 1984)

6.3. Both communities should learn to separate religion from politics.

6.4 The law-and-order machinery should be depoliticized. The District Magistrate and S.P. be made directly responsible or communal riots and such other occurrences in the areas under their jurisdiction.

6.5. In pockets where communal riots, looting and arson were found to be chronic on an analysis of the past trends and figures, preventive measures should be adopted to eradicate group tensions. (Hasan, 1993)

6.6. Positive measures include educative efforts to inculcate among the people mutual respect and tolerance towards all the religious.

6.7. Removal of communal orientation in textbooks and reading material prepared for schools.

6.8. Instructions to T.V., radio and media to avoid coverage of news and views likely to promote communal prejudice and hatred. (MAk, 1986)

6.9. Educational institutions and even business enterprises should serve as ‘agencies’ to extend this message, to all the communities. These institutions should encourage the joint celebration of festivals among different communities. Further, the textbooks to be prescribed for the schools should include only such lessons which emphasise the contributions made by all the religious communities in the making of the Indian culture. (Asghar, Engineer Ali, 1984)

6.10. Communalism is the enemy of progress, social change, and democracy and of federal nation state building on rational scientific lines and above all of human decency, compassion and human fraternity. In our struggle against communalism, we should mobilize a wide cross section of our people including genuine religious persons, women, youth, professional groups, especially media persons because communalism is both anti-national and anti-human. (Asghar, Engineer Ali, 1984).

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