

Understanding Communalism in Indian Politics: An Overview

Dr. Shivanand Jamadar

Associate Professor, Dept of Political Science, Government First Grade College, Vijayapur, Karnataka

ABSTRACT

Communalism in India fuels Hindu-Muslim tensions, straining unity and social harmony. This paper highlights the serious implications for India's democracy, secularism, human rights, social harmony, national security, and development. The communalism of India is a product of political expediency and conserves vote banks. This paper reveals the historical roots, impact on society, and government initiatives. India's diversity in religion and language safeguards its secular character, ensuring unity and integrity. Casteism divides society into castes, communalism into religious followers, and regionalism into small regions.

Keywords: Communalism, secularism, violence, exploitation, political and religious

INTRODUCTION

Communalism arises either due to power struggle or relative deprivation. Communalism is a term used to denote attempts to construct religious or ethnic identity, incite strife between people identified as different communities, and to stimulate communal violence between those groups. It derives from history, differences in beliefs, and tensions between the communities. Communalism in Indian Politics is as old as the Indian Nation. The nation was born in division and bloodshed. Freedom for the country dawned in the midst of cries and wailing of millions of people affected by the worst communal riots ever. Jinnah got his Pakistan ostensibly for protecting the interests of the Muslim living in the Indian Subcontinent, ironically leaving more Muslims to live in India than the Muslims he had taken under the Pakistani fold. Pakistan became an Islamic state while India remained secular. The leaders who fought for independence never subscribed to the two-nation theory of Jinnah. So India remained an enclave state, taking under its wings all religion without discrimination and as equals.

India is a multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic society. Myriad tongues, different modes of lifestyle, countless mannerisms and many other variations characterize to give it a unique identity and make it a country of almost continental dimensions. It is due to its distinct characteristics that the architects of our Constitution made it a secular state negating any sort of role of state in religious matters. This shows equal reverence for all religions and faiths. In other words, religion is a matter of personal faith with the state's role reduced to the minimum in religious affairs.

But tragic irony is that news or reports of communal violence are regular features in newspapers or news channels. Despite being a secular state lots of lives are lost and property worth crores of rupees is damaged in the violence resulting from religious and communal tensions. A large number of people are injured. Curfew is generally clamped for a few days following the violence in extreme cases. Normal life is badly affected. Law and order becomes a serious problem. "The First World War was accompanied with a rapid increase of industries in India, resulting in a growth of an industrial proletariat. At the same time prices of essential commodities increased. These were factors that contributed to the buildup of the Indian trade union movement. Unions were formed in the urban centres across India, and strikes were organized. In 1920, the All India Trade Union Congress was founded" (M.V.S. Koteswara Rao. 84)

There are two aspects to Indian communalism; unfortunately the Muslim in India blindly supported Jinnah in his demand for Pakistan without understanding how a separate state of Pakistan could protect the interest of the Muslim spread all over India. When Pakistan became a reality, Muslims inhabiting the non-Pakistani part of India were totally disillusioned that they had been so long running after a chimera. Naturally the hardcore Hindus looked upon the Indian Muslim with suspicion keeping in mind their old loyalty to Jinnah and Pakistan. This was one aspect of the communal question. Most of the Muslims were victims of the bogey raised by Jinnah that with Hindu Majority Islam was in danger. But Pakistan was no solution to majority problem because a larger part of subcontinent Muslims remained in India to live with majority Hindus it became evident Jinnah's partition was no solution to the Hindu-Muslim problems he projected and that his efforts were only to fulfill his personal ambition to rule a state of his own.

Although the phenomenon of violence is not new to India yet the decade of eighties has been quite dismal. The major arena of violence includes inter-caste, inter-communal and inter-linguistic. Communal violence is in fact a very common phenomenon in India. A very minor incident can take the form of communal tension often resulting into widespread violence, arson, etc. a study of Enquiry Committee Reports on violence reveals that caste violence and communal riots follow a certain pattern. Very often communally inclined books and publications contribute to the building of tensions. They sow seeds of discords through speeches, whispering campaigns, poster-war, pamphleteering, etc. an atmosphere of mistrust and hate is first created by well known interested groups, organizations, and communal and caste-oriented parties. Then people usually brought from outside the locality, on occasion, use some pretext to create tension by initiation fights, quarrels and intimidation. When the atmosphere is ready, such anti-social elements begin arson, stabbing riots and full-scale violence. Communal violence damages the country far beyond the immediate casualty figures.

In some cases the state police often the PAC are charged for being partial in favour of particular community. Now it has been established that like in other organized activities, money-power, muscle-power and brain-power of the controlling authority that give direction are also used in riots. Enquiry commissions also point out the negative role of politicians, police and local officials, certain types of newspapers and media, commercial elite and business interests in several riots in India. "The specific pip charge was that they as communists were seeking "to deprive the King Emperor of his sovereignty of British India, by complete separation of India from Britain by a violent revolution." Pages of newspapers daily splashed sensational communist plans and people for the first time learned, on such a large scale, about communism and its doctrines and the aims of the Communist International in India" (Ralhan, O.P. 139)

But what is communalism? Communalism is basically an ideology of political allegiance to religious community as a primary and decisive group in the polity. Communalism envisages a religious community alone as its base and the universe of its political ambition and action. It perceives other religious communities as enemies within a polity and within a nation. In simple words, communalism is a political strategy opposed to nationalism as a process of integration of multiethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual communities. Communalism is opposed to secularism as a pattern of socio-cultural co-existence. Communalism negates rational civic basis of party formations and political system. It does not give importance to humanism and compassion, love and brotherhood preached by every religion, it follows no ethic, ideology or morals. It strives for divisions within a polity and a nation on religious lines. In India it implies religious conflicts.

Communalism is not unique to India. It was born, nurtured and promoted by the imperialists as a deliberate design to sow dissensions just to gain political advantage. It were the Britishers who first exploited the prevailing religious difference and projected the social variations, promoted political divisions by treating Indians basically not as Indians but as members of religious communities. The British also played communal politics by promising favours to religious communities. A voter was classified as Hindu or Muslim, etc. and that communalism came to acquire the meaning of being opposed to national identity. "S. A. Dange of Bombay published a pamphlet in 1921 titled Gandhi Vs. Lenin, a comparative study of the approaches of both the leaders with Lenin coming out as better of the two. Together with Ranchoddas Bhavan Lotvala, a local mill-owner, a library of Marxist Literature was set up and publishing of translations of Marxist classics began. In 1922, with Lotvala's help, Dange launched the English weekly, Socialist, the first Indian Marxist journal" (Sen, Mohit, 34)

Communalism culminated into the historical event of partition of India. The country was bifurcated on the communal lines at the times of independence. Even after the exodus of the British from India, communalism continues to be present in Indian society. It is partly because of old traditions and partly because certain elements in our body-politic continue to use communalism to divide the Indian nation. It mainly serves their sectarian or sectional interests. With parties and leaders even if not communal outright have encouraged communal feelings by catering to the demands of religious communities for the sake of winning votes and popularity votes are sought on communal ground. Very often to serve their ends communal passion is inflamed. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Indian Prime Minister said, "Communalism is Indian version of fascism." (Ralhan, O.P. 122) He said that while all communalism is bad, we must remember that minority communalism is born out of fear while majority communalism takes the form of political reaction. He cautioned that there must be no compromise on the issue of communalism as it is a challenge to Indian nationhood and the Indian nationality.

Today, communalism in Indian, in its varied forms, has acquired a very dangerous shape, and social co-existence. It is an affront to India's nationalist identity and a fatal blow to India's emerging secular culture. It poses great challenge to our democratic political stability. It is a big blow to our glorious heritage of humanism and composite culture. It is high time that communalism needs to be recognized as an enemy of secular democracy.

It will be of particular importance to note that communalism is disastrous for the stability, unity, national security, development, pride and patriotism of the people. Communalism generates not only false consciousness but seeks to counterpoise on false premises. It makes one citizen against another thereby weaken the thread of national fraternity. By

making use of religion in politics, joint endeavors for vital common objectives eradication of poverty, removal of diseases, spread of education; housing, etc are fragmented and frustrated. There is an urgent need for mass awakening of citizens in all walks of life to restore national consensus on unity, integrity, secularism and democracy, equal rights and a just humane society.

To combat the evils of communalism, we need to mobilize cross-section of society involving the intelligentsia, the media, NGOs and create an awareness that communalism is not only anti-national but is anti-human also. It needs to be recognized at individual, collective and national level that communalism is a big threat to basic human values of life, to the working of state and the society as a whole. In addition, for combating the menace of communalism appropriate and effective instrumentalities should be employed as a concerned, simultaneous action, covering these areas of national life, namely legislature, executive, judiciary and electoral system, administration at every level central, state and local level, political parties, socio-cultural associations, trade unions, youth and women organizations, educational institutions and citizens individuals and functionaries as well. The moral basis of *sarva dharma sambhava* should provide the centre of our public life. Most of all it is the spread of education among the people that can check the growth of communalism. Thus, every segment of society should join hand together to fight evil tooth and nail.

The second aspect of the communal question was, the Muslims continued to entertain a fear of the majority community, already sown and nurtured by Jinnah. Nehru beautifully described the situation. He said, 'true Communalism is real, false communalism is political reaction. Any India declares itself a secular state assuring not only Muslims but all other communities' equal citizenship rights with Hindus. So the majority – minority discrimination was done away with besides, special safeguards were provided for the minorities in the Indian constitution.

Anyhow, India being a parliamentary democracy, vote bank politics became the prominent factor during the time of election. Muslim as a community because a solid vote bank, deciding the fate of candidates in constituencies where Muslims in the general looked up to major political party. Congress of safeguarding their interest, The situation continued as long as Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi were at the helm of affairs. In the mean time Hindu communal party Janasangh, and later its avatar Bharatiya Janata Party started shipping up Hindu chauvinism and making Muslim to look suspect in the eye of the Hindus. In this efforts the Hindu communal Parties were strongly supported by the disciplined outfit Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) when P.V Narasimha Rao was the Prime Minister, BJP leader L. K Advani started a Rath Yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya, rousing Hindu passion to build Ram Temple at Ayodhya in the place of Babri Mosque, where lord Ram, the Avatar of Vishnu was supposed to be born. This created a communal divide between Hindu and Muslims which led to the destruction of Babri Mosque by a section of frenzied Hindu on August 6, 1992. The demolition of the Mosque alienated the Muslims from the congress as they believed the central Congress government under the premiership of P V Narasimha Rao failed to protect the Mosque from being destroyed by the Hindu communal bigots. . The Muslim masses are in need of right kind of social leadership and not political masters to exploit them as vote banks. The BJP supposedly espousing the cause of the Hindu is more interested in widening the communal divisions than in integrating the two major communities Hindu and Muslim as one homogenous national society. The job of the congress, the senior most political party, becomes very important in this context and it should live up to its secular characters as envisaged by Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi. Indian Culture is a mosaic of composite culture and no religion can claim exclusive right over it.

It was unfortunate the Muslims entertained such a perception. The chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Mr. Kalyan Singh running a BJP government gave an affidavit in the supreme courts assuring that he would protect the Babri Mosque at all costs and also gave a written assurance to the central government to the same effect. And yet on the day of the Babri Mosque was to be attacked, the central government stationed an army contingent near the Babri Mosque as a measure of precaution. It is alleged the central government ruled by the congress need not use the Army to prevent demolition. Critics of the line miss a point. When the state government had given an assurance to center and gave an affidavit to Supreme Court that the mosque could be protected, the Army cannot act unilaterally without the permission of the state government. Besides when an unruly mob had encircled the mosque with demolition to demolish it, any action by the Army would have resulted in the loss of hundred of lives and at the same time the demolition would also have taken place.

The Muslim community has the BJP as anti-Muslim but their was directed against the Congress because they were confident the Babri Mosque would be protected by the Central government. The Muslim opinion gradually started migrating to other parties for support and safeguarding. In such a political milieu, minority vote bank politics has come to the fore in all electoral calculus. Consequently communalism got entrenched in the functioning of the political system. Naturally it has its impact on the social life of the people. The accusation that the minorities are pampered too much is not without substance. It has become a political compulsion and an administration policy. With the result communalism has taken the driver's seat in the process of governance. What is the source because of entrenched communal politics the

leadership thrown up by the Muslim community has developed a vested interest to keep the Muslim population under their control to get leverage in bargaining for position of power? No doubt the Muslim masses in India live in backwardness and poverty. What they need is education and self confidence to compete in an open society. The leadership of various Muslim are parties are not interested ameliorating the living condition of their people rather they are interested, in keeping them in ignorance, feeding them with religious shibboleths. That is why even after five decades of Independence, Muslim enjoying equal citizenship with others have not progress much.

CONCLUSION

Communalism is the belief that people who share a religion must also share a common social, political and economic destiny and that the interests of that religious group should be pursued at the expense of other religious groups. Communalism, by contrast, is a political movement that uses religious identity to mobilize people for social, economic or political power. Communalism can take different forms in politics such as the laws favouring one religion over the other, communal violence and campaigns based on religion. This leads to people of one religion turn against people of other religions, which is harmful to society. Political exploitation of Muslim masses continues unabated while their social condition remains law and static.

REFERENCES

1. M.V.S. Koteswara Rao(2003) *Communist Parties and United Front – Experience in Kerala and West Bengal*. Hyderabad: Prajasakti Book House
2. Kapoor, Deepak (2009). *South Asia Defence And Strategic Year Book*. Pentagon Press.
3. Pandita, Rahul (2011). *Hello, Bastar : The Untold Story of India's Maoist Movement*. Chennai: Westland (Tranquebar Press).
4. Ralhan, O.P. (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Political Parties* New Delhi: Anmol Publications
5. Sen, Mohit(2002) *The Dange Centenary in Banerjee, Gopal (ed.) S.A. Dange – A Fruitful Life*. Kolkata: Progressive Publishers