Communalism in India

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Communalism in India has developed through a long and complex process bearing *burden of history* and *sectarian politics.*

Burden of History

To begin with, the seeds of communal violence were sown by the British implementing the policy of 'divide and rule'. To achieve the objectives of such policy, they introduced communal historiography, whereby the people were looked through the prism of their religion. Communalism arose due to the politics of Muslim Nawabs, Hindu Zamindars and Rajas and the British policy of divide and rule.

Gradually, the Hindu communalists blamed Muslim kings for temple destruction and forcible conversions, while Muslim communalists claimed that they had been the rulers of the country. This burden of history created an atmosphere of mutual hate amongst Hindus and Muslims.

Simultaneous rise of Nationalism and Communalism

In our country, the rise of nationalism and rise of communalism was almost simultaneous. In the 19th century, leaders of various organizations used **religious consciousness** to inculcate modern nationalism amongst the people. This resulted in not only the arousal of nationalism but also of communalism on the sidelines. By the turn of the century, national and communal identities started taking prominent shapes but still, the communalism was in sharp contrast with nationalism. For example, the terms like nationalist Hindus, nationalist Muslims and nationalist Sikhs used to be contrasted with those like communal Hindus, communal Muslims and communal Sikhs respectively. During the initial decades of 20th century, the communalism was overshadowed by the Nationalism because at that time, British imperialism was the main enemy of Indian masses. Thus, Hindu communalism's anti-Muslim plank, and Muslim Communalism's anti-Hindu plank were considered a diversion from the nationalist movement and thus got isolated for the time being.

However, soon afterwards, communal parties, Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha along with other communal formations started creating an atmosphere of mutual hate. The blame is put on British but both Hindu and Muslims also cannot be exonerated for their role in perpetuating violence.

Sectarian Politics and Partition of India

Partition was the final outcome of the British Policy of divide and rule, Muslim communal politics and Hindu communalism. The Muslim League, which was a representative of the interests of the Muslim elite, wanted maximum privileges for the rich Muslims. It stated that Muslims are 25% of the population, but for passing any legislation two-thirds majority is needed, so they should be granted one third representations in legislatures so that they can prevent anti-Muslim legislation. This demand was rejected and Jinnah later emerged as main leader of the Muslim league. Later, the two nation theory came up and the Muslim league put forward the idea of separate nation for the followers of Islam. The Jinnah's party never got more than 3.6 per cent of votes in elections, but was promoted by

the British and instigated by the Hindu fundamentalists of the day. Thus, Pakistan was created out of western and eastern Muslim majority areas of India. During partition, the Muslims, mostly affluent left for Pakistan but a majority of the Muslims in this region chose to live here in India.

Communalism in Independent India

After Independence, the Hindu as well as Muslim communal forces started taking more prominent shapes. Both India and Pakistan started seeing each other as major threats. In 1971, when Pakistan broke up in two, it proved that the *nations cannot be sustained on the basis of religion*. While, Pakistan's leaders chose to align themselves with America, inviting the uninterested Americans to make themselves a pawn; Indian leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru proactively isolated Pakistan from other Muslim countries and the non-aligned world. One of the greater assets for India was that its constitution chose it to be a secular nation.

Jammu & Kashmir Problem

At the time of independence, India was divided into British India and the Indian India which was made up of some 562 princely states. These states were given three options:

- To merge with India
- To merge with Pakistan
- To remain independent.

The princes and kings were given the guidelines to take a decision based on physical proximity and the opinion of people. Most states merged with India or Pakistan based upon those guidelines but the Nawabs of Hyderabad, Junagarh and Raja of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) showed a bit of a hesitation decision making. Hyderabad and Junagarh were merged into India by military action but the Jammu & Kashmir was destined for a bigger problem.

The king of Jammu & Kashmir Maharaja Hari Singh wanted to remain independent. Pakistan wanted to merge Kashmir with itself and so its army invaded Kashmir disguised as tribals. Maharaja Hari Singh began negotiations with India through emissaries asking India to send it's the army to defend Kashmir. Nehru stated that unless some agreement is signed, India couldn't send its army to a state where it has no legal standing. Accordingly, a treaty of accession was drafted with the promise of Article 370 in Indian Constitution for safeguard of the people of the state. According to the accession treaty, India was to look after *defense, external affairs, communication and currency* while the local assembly was given powers to decide on all other matters. Similarly, the provisions of part VI of Indian constitution were not to be made applicable to Jammu & Kashmir and it was allowed to have its own Constitution. On the basis of such accession, India sent its army, but by that time one third of Kashmir was already occupied by Pakistan.

The Jammu & Kashmir council of ministers was to be headed by a Prime Minister (in place of Chief Minister of Indian states) and the constitutional head of the state was Sadar-i-Riyasat. In due course, the Prime minister was changed to Chief Minister and Sadar-e-

Riyasat was changed to Governor and gradually the reach of Indian constitution was extended to Jammu & Kashmir. The Pakistan occupied Kashmir, though named Azad Kashmir, has remained dependent practically in all matters on Pakistan.

The dissatisfied Kashmiri Youths prompted by Pakistan led to rise in terrorism and Jihad. The communal angle was given to the social harmony of Kashmir by creating a rift between Kashmiri Pundits and local Muslim population. Pundits left the valley and many of them are living the wretched life in refugee camps in different places in India.

Babri Mosque Demolition

Most serious challenge to the secular idea was posed in 1980s, around Babri mosque. There is a mention of this land in Ayodhya gazette that there might have been a temple in the part of the land where the mosque is located. This reference given by *Mrs. A.F. Beeveridge*, British Gazette writer is casual but some other sources claim that the mosque was built in the sixteenth century by Mir Baqi, commander of the Mughal emperor Babur. The mosque was destroyed by Hindu Fundamentalists in 1992, maintaining that it was built on the ruins of an earlier temple of Rama. This event ensured the series of Hindu-Muslim riots throughout India, belying Ayodhya's very essence as a place of peace.

Minority Appeasement and Communalism

At the time of partition, it was only the elite of the Muslims who left for Pakistan. Officially, Indian government did not ask Muslims to leave the country but as a matter of fact, only poor Muslims and a few professionals and traders were left behind. The status of the Muslims in India in comparison to upper caste Hindus was pathetic. This condition was also highlighted by the Sachar committee appointed by the government. However, equally worse condition was dalits and other oppressed classes.

The successive governments in India have been blamed for Muslim appeasement and it is true in case of security and appeasement of the Muslim critics. However, it is also a matter of fact that Muslims are grossly underrepresented in all sectors of employment and social facilities.

Thus, it is not the democracy alone but a participative democracy that can sustain Indian society. Muslims claim that they are living in a brute force of majority.

Causes of Communalism

There are a number of economic, social and political causes which are responsible for the prevalence of communalism.

Propensity of the Minorities:

- The Muslims either don't consider themselves in the national mainstream or they believe that India was once ruled by them but now they are oppressed.
- Low participation in the secular nationalistic politics and their insistence on maintaining for separate identity.
- The elite among the Muslims and the Muslim clerics have failed to generate the appropriate national ethos.

Orthodoxy

- The orthodox members of Religious communities feel that they have a distinct entity with their own cultural pattern, personal laws and thought.
- Such feeling has prevented them from accepting the concept of secularism and religious tolerance.

Sectarian Politics

- Communalism has flourished in India because the communalist leaders 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.
- Ultimately the partition of the country into India and Pakistan provided further an antagonistic feeling towards each other.

Economic Status

- Communities in Rural India have failed to adopt the scientific and technological education.
- Their educational backwardness and insufficient representation in the public service, causes the feeling of relative deprivation and such feelings contain the seeds of communalism.

Geographical Causes

- 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.

Burden of History

- As discussed above.

Social Causes

- 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 Causes

- 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-feeing.

Provocation of Neighbors

- Our neighbours and some other countries try to destabilize us by setting one

community against the other through their agents.

Impact of Mass Media

- The messages relating to communal tension or riot in any part of the country spread through not only the local and vernacular but the mainstream, English media also.

Communalism and Indian Constitution

Communal violence threatens the secular fabric, unity, integrity and internal security of India and poses a problem of rehabilitation of victims of such violence. The recent outbreak of communal violence in Muzaffarnagar once again reminds us of the *urgent and dire need for a law against communal and targeted violence* not only against the minorities but also the majority. The constitution of India via its **Article 355** says that *it shall be duty of the Union to protect every State against external aggression and* ***internal disturbance*** *and to ensure that the Government of every State is carried on in accordance with the provisions of Constitution*. But this constitutional provision by itself has not been able to check the sporadic events of communal violence in various parts of India.