



Politics of Communalism in India



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ABSTRACT

Communal violence in India is one of biggest threat for national integration. Communalism has increased the gap among different religions communities of India. Communal atmosphere in India gives a sense of insecurity to life of people. Not only development is hampered but also peace and harmony in societies. Many political parties always try to maintain a sense of communal fear among different sections of religion because it benefit them in election and help the political parties in mobilising the people . A nation can never grow peacefully until and unless peace does not exist in societies. From the era of colonialism, we are witnessing communal riot in India. British's divide and rule policy started the communal violence in India. It indirectly resulted in partition of India and formation of a new state Pakistan. Even after independence we are continuously facing communal violence in our societies. It is a matter of tragedy for us that even after 70 years of independence we are not able to come out from communal violence. There are numerous region for persistence of communal violence in India like some prejudices against each other's religion, no cultural synthesis among different religions, use of religion by political parties for gaining power. People have to understand that ,communal violence is not going to benefit them by any means. It will ultimately led to degradation of societies and development of nation. India's beauties lie in religious plurality not in communal clash.

Keywords: Harmony, Communities, Political Parties, Religion, Peace.

INTRODUCTION

Communalism is a political ideology which advocates markets, private property and land, should be abolished and these should be regulated and owned by community. Generally, communalism is referred an ideologies which emphasises on different identity of groups, religion in relation to other religious group with a tendency to advance its own interest at the cost of others. Communalism in broad sense is attachment of an individual with his or her community.

In ancient India there was no communal feeling among people. They lived with peace and harmony in society. They accommodate each other's culture and belief. There were many sects and religions like Buddhism, Jainism, Ajivika etc. Ashoka followed the policy of religious toleration, equal respect for all religions. This policy of Ashoka was continue forwarded by successive rulers and kingdoms.

During medieval period there were some conflicts among rulers but they were only for gaining power and to become king. There was no communal intention among rulers. Many medieval rulers have set examples of secular ruler like Dara Sikoh, Akbar. Akbar abolished jaziya tax ,established Ibadat Khana where people and

clerics of different religions used to come together for religious discussion to understand each other's religion in a better way. There were few rulers in medieval period who were intolerant towards other religions like Firoz Shah Tughlaq, Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb imposed religious tax on non-Muslim, policy of forced conversion, destroyed thousands of temples, killed Sikh gurus. Still, there was religious harmony and peace in the societies.

Communalism emerged in India during colonial period. The policy of divide and rule by Britishers, created a sense of communalism in societies. In 1905 partition of Bengal and Separate electorate in declaration of Government of India Act, 1909 sowed the seed of communalism in India. Britishers always preferred coalition with Minorities because minorities are always more insecure and can be more permanent partners. In 1906, Muslim League was formed with the support of Britishers. In 1915, V.D. Savarkar formed Hindu Mahasabha against the challenges of Muslim League. Government of India Act 1919 introduced separate electorate for other religious communities. B.D. Savarkar gave the theory of Hindutva, which means India as a Hindu Rashtra. B.D. Savarkar's nationalism suggested that persons' father land and spiritual land has to be one. In later period, British government started to appease different Indian section. In 1932, British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald declared communal award to appease Muslims, depressed class, and other communities, it got support from Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi opposed it. India was divided along religious and caste lines by Britishers, the religious division ultimately led to partition of India. At the time of partition thousands of people were killed in communal riots.

After independence, up till 1960 there was no major communal riots in India but the haunted memory of partition was continued. Jawaharlal Nehru had played very important role in controlling the communal riot because Nehru had banned many communal organisations and he tried his best to give secular orientation in policies of government. In 1960s, even at time of Nehru some communal incidents took place like communal riot of Jabalpur in 1961. Others communal riots of this period are Ranchi-Hatia riot 1967, Ahmedabad riot 1969. In 1960s, emergence of linguistic politics and opposition of Hindi as official language, these indirectly increased communalism in India. In 1970s and 1980s there was increase in communal violence. During the time of Indira Gandhi use of religion and caste increased, because congress government was weakened. One of the worst tragedy of her time was Operation Blue Star which led to assassination of Indira Gandhi and it was reason for anti-Sikh Riot in 1984, which claimed thousand of life. Period of Late 1980s and 1990s were worst for communal riots. After the assassination of Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi became Prime Minister. Supreme court has given a judgement in Mohammad Ahmed Khan vs Shah Bano Begum and other in 1985, which validated the judgement of Madhya Pradesh High Court and ruled that Muslim women have right to get maintenance for life and not just for iddat period. This judgement created a controversy, a large section of Muslims opposed this judgement and they called it interference in their religious affairs. Although supreme court's judgement was appreciated by liberal Muslims. All India Shia personal law board supported the judgement of supreme court. Congressed government perceived this judgement as loosing vote of Muslims. To appease Muslims, Congress government overturned the judgement of supreme court by bringing Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986. It restored the earlier position that is maintenance by husband only for iddat period. This new act of government was validated by supreme court in Daniel Latif case, but directed that maintenance has to be fair and reasonable. Critics see this act of government as policy of pseudo-secularism, which is against the constitution of India. Demand for Uniform Civil Code was raised by some Hindu Organisations. Within few years, Rajiv Gandhi government witnessed many factions within Congress Party. To consolidated Hindu votes, Rajiv Gandhi government allowed the opening of lock of Ram Janmbhoomi. During V.P. Singh government, in 1989 ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri

pundits in Kashmir valley started by radical Islamic terrorism. Kashmiris pundits were forced to leave the Kashmir valley. They became refugee in their own country. V.P.SINGH government implemented Mandal Commission Report which gave twenty seven percentage reservation to Other Backward Class (OBCs). This step of V.P.Singh made Bhartiya Janta Party more insecure out of fear of loosing Hindu votes. To consolidate Hindus in its favour BJP started politics of Hindutva. BJP raised the issues of Ram Janm Bhoomi and construction of temple of lord Ram at Ayodhya. Thus politics of *Mandal* and *Kamandal* started. Senior leader of BJP, Lal Krishna Advani announced Rath yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya. The Rath yatra of Lal Krishna Advani made a tense environment in the country. Rath yatra led to demolition of Babri Mosque in Ayodhya by karsevaks. It was a serious jolt to Indian secularism. After demolition of Babri mosque, Mumbai riot took place in January 1993 in which more than nine hundred people were killed, just after two months of Mumbai riot, on 12 March 1993 Mumbai serial bomb blast happened in which two hundred fifty seven people died and more than fourteen hundred people were seriously injured. This serial blast was done by the gang of Dawood Ibrahim to take revenge of Mumbai riots in which majority of Muslims were killed. There were many other incidences of communal violence in India like Gujarat Riot in 2002 in which majority of people were Muslim, who were killed in riot. Gujarat riot, has taken after burning of a train in which 58 karsevaks were burnt, at Godhra Railway station, who were returning from Ayodhya. Other communal violence was in Assam in 2012, Muzaffarnagar violence in 2013.

Some scholars believe that communal violence in India does not take place suddenly, Paul Brass is one among them. Paul Brass has analysed the nature of communal violence in India. He writes, communal violence in India are well planned, and from the communal violence every political party gets benefit, so political parties want communal atmosphere to remain in air. Paul Brass says there are some stages in communal violence. In preparatory stage different set of works are assigned to people. They also do rehearsals, weapons and chemical which are going to be used in communal violence, all these are assembled. Second stage, is precipitation stage, when violence took place, then few men add fuel in the fire by giving patronage to rioters and they intensify the riot. When communal violence ends, now it is explanatory stage, in which political parties and groups of some section of people start blaming each other for their political benefit.

Louis Dumont writes Hindus and Muslims are two antagonistic religion for each other, they can not live in harmony and peace with each other. This makes essential condition for communal violence, so there is bound to take communal violence. Bipin Chandra observed that religion is used as an instrument by political elite class for political advantages.

Other general reasons of communal violence are slow development of economy. Slow development of economy is not able to meet the expected demand of people. There is no proper understanding of each other's religion. Sometimes activity of one particular group of religion is perceived as a provocation by some section of people of a particular religion. Like religious procession led by Hindu groups in Muslim majority areas particularly near mosque, few narrow minded Muslims think that it is a threat to Islam and not acceptable in Islam, they take procession as a provocation, between these some antisocial elements start throwing stones, clash erupts and resulted into communal riot. Similar case is with some sections of Hindus. When Tazia (murryham) procession passes through Hindus dominated areas, few section of narrow minded Hindus think that Muslims are challenging them, and they create hurdles in passing of procession, then clash starts this ultimately led to communal riots. There are many instances where the root cause of communal violence were religious procession. Feeling of deprivation by one religious community against other is also one reason of communal violence, like high literacy rate, life standard, percentage of people who are doing job etc in one religion are perceived by other religious community as a form of deprivation. Political parties also play the

role in creating atmosphere of communal violence through their provocative speeches. Appeasement of one religious community for vote bank politics by some political parties give a sense of being ignored to other their religious group, like a section among Hindus people think that congress and some other political parties always appease Muslims, they think that they their Hindu religion is being ignored. Some Hindu nationalists live with certain mind map against Muslims, like a section of radical Hindus think that Muslims are supporters of Pakistan, they don't love India, they support Pakistan in India –Pakistan cricket match. These false allegations against Muslim community as a whole increases the gap between Hindus and Muslims. Some new phenomenas which led to creation of communal atmosphere are *Ghar waspi* programme. It was started by some radical Hindu outfits, which tried to bring non-Hindus to Hindu religion through religious conversion. Hindu radical groups claimed people in *Ghar wapsi* programme converted to Hinduism, voluntarily, whereas some alleged that it was forceful. Love Jihad is another new issue where Hindu outfit groups claim that Hindu women are being trapped by Muslim youth by pseudo name of Hindu, and after marriage, her Muslim husband forces Hindu wife to convert into Islam. Mob lynching of Muslim in suspicion of carrying beef in truck or consumption of beef. Some Muslim youths are being radicalised by radical Muslim outfit organisations. There are many cases from Kerala where radicalised Muslim youth have joined ISIS.

In India the problem of communalism has severely impacted the religious harmony and peace in societies. There is urgent need to take to curb communal violence. There must be synthesis of cultural values of different religions in India. There is need of religious interaction among different religious communities. Each one should respect to everyone's religion and its values. People in India live with certain religious prejudices against each other's religion. It is time to shattered these prejudices and move forward. There is need to give value education to children in schools. They should make aware from different culture of different religion. Values of respect for each other's religion, equality and fraternity, tolerance, must be promoted in schools. Only rational teaching of History should be allowed in school. In History, it should not be taught as an invasion of Muslims and Christian over Hindus in different period of our past. Religious heads of different religions should interact among themselves. Government should come with a comprehensive law to check communal violence. Persons responsible for communal violence must be punished within a very short period of time, then government will be able to send a strong message in the society against communal forces. The Representation of People Act, 1951 should be amended and many new provisions should be added in Model Code of Conduct to make these effective enough to prevent use of communal politics during elections. Medias should also promote communal harmony and they should not be biased against any religion.

CONCLUSION

Political parties should also understand that gravity of communal politics, They must follow ethics in politics. Political parties should not forget what Mahatma Gandhi has said that ethics and politics should not be separated. A nation can never develop if its societies repeatedly witness communal violence. Communal violence creates a constant fear among societies. Secular educations should be provided and fraternity should be promoted in societies. We should understand that communal violence will never pave the way for development of nation. Communal violence disturbs the fabric of peace and harmony in societies. There is need of peaceful coexistence of all religious communities in societies. We must strive to preserve the idea of India.

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