COMMUNALISM IN INDIA: 1947-1990

Communalism is a chronic disease, which we have been suffering for a long time and the malady is so malignant, that even after six decades of freedom, it is becoming more ugly and we are not getting rid of it. Before independence, it was only believed that communalism or communal tension was the creation of British policy, of ‘divide and rule’. But the problem of communalism increased after independence and still it is growing. Communalism affects all aspects of life. Although some homo-sapiens have considered it a social evil and tried to control this harmful psyche, but the voice of communalism is not in the descending order, which is dangerous for unity, integrity and democratic system of our country. The partition of India, in 1947, is very sad calamitic event, in the modern history of the Indian sub-continent. This year was the triumph as well as tragedy. Triumph in the attainment of independence and tragedy in the rivers of blood flowing alongside. In this year, amid riots and massacres, ghastly beyond all telling, ushered into the existence new states of India and Pakistan. Some people thought that partition of country would bring about a lasting solution to the communal problems in India and this social evil, would be wiped out of our body politic forever and the menace, which had so far belied all solutions, would not give trouble any more. It was hoped that the state, with all the power and resources, at its command, would secularize and democratize the Indian society, in a fundamental way, would make a complete break with communal politics, a legacy of the Raj; Maulana Azad observed:

When India attains her destiny, she will forget the present chapter of communal suspicion and conflict, and face the problems of modern life, from a modern point of view. Differences will no doubt persist, but they will be economic, not communal.

But the fact was found to be different from hopes. In independent secular India, this virus (communalism), instead of being completely eradicated, again came back with renewed vigour and engulfed the entire society, so much so that it reached a dangerous stage. After independence, both communities felt a feeling of ill-will and suspicion. The Hindus felt cheated and found it, difficult to accept the fact of partition. The Muslims, who migrated to Pakistan, had a feeling of pleasure and a satisfaction of achieving a long
awaited goal. But those Muslims, who remained behind in India, were caught between two contradictory feelings. They were pleased to have freedom from the British rulers, but also had a sense of insecurity and were afraid of a Hindu backlash and had apprehensions, of being discriminated against. The common feeling among many of them that, Pakistan is a Muslim state and India would become a Hindu state, that would not tolerate, the presence of other religious groups, especially the Muslims. This perception shaped the reality of their attitude, whether it was the case of giving equal status to Urdu vis-a-vis Hindi or separate electorates for the Muslims, or depiction of the Congress Party as a Hindu organization, all contained seeds of hate and distrust between the Hindus and the Muslims. The politicians in the post-independent India exploited the acrimony between the two and the religious sentiments for political gains. Communal parties and organizations are today very much a part of our political environment. The communal appeal, is used on a large scale for electoral mobilization in India.

POST PARTITION INDIA AND COMMUNALISATION OF POLITICS

Since independence, India is comprised of numerous religious communities and ethnic groups. It has more than 115 millions population of the Muslims, who are further divided in different sects. Obviously, no state with such a plural society, could be formed on the basis of religion. However, it was not only a compulsion, but also a commitment of the founders of Indian constitution, who converted India into a:

Sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic, to secure to all its citizens: justice, social, economic and political; liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote among all, fraternity, assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of nation.5

India is defined as above by the Preamble to our constitution in its ideal format. But there are many anomalies and contradictions in reality. There are structures of unevenness and inequalities. As per the outlook, the Indian state is secular, having no discrimination. But social characteristics of society, communalism and misplaced policies of governance, by bureaucratic set up, have defeated the purpose of constitutional values. The state in India, has remained in a statist mode and it could not get rid of the predominance of colonial legacies.6
After partition, Jawahar Lal Nehru and Liaquat Ali, Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan, held a meeting at Delhi and signed an agreement, known as Delhi Pact, on 8 April 1950, affirming the intention of their respective governments, to uphold the rights of minorities, to facilitate movement of migrants and to restore communal harmony, in two Bengals-East Bengal, which went to Pakistan, as East Pakistan and West Bengal, which remained as a part of India. Nehru had deep knowledge, about the historical background. He diagnosed the real implications of communal problem at an early stage and wrote about it, in ample details in his famous works, *Glimpses of World History, An Autobiography* and *Discovery of India*, and in his speeches. He discovered that fundamentally and inevitably, the British policy since the uprising of 1857, has been one of the cause of preventing the Hindus and the Muslims from acting together. One of the major reasons, for communal tension between two communities was economic disparity. They quarreled over paucity of jobs. Each community urged to take away more chances. Moreover, the communal leaders on both sides, represented a small upper class reactionary group and exploited religious passions of masses, for their own ends. The unemployed middle-class Muslims, felt that the Hindus have availed of more government jobs and stood in their way. Therefore, they demanded a separate treatment and separate shares in everything. Politically, Hindu-Muslim question, was essentially a middle class affair and a quarrel over the jobs.

But disapproving, the above mentioned Delhi Pact 1950, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee resigned from the Nehru’s government and eventually launched a new political party, by the name of Bharatiya Jan Sangh, with the support of Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), on 21 October 1951. The newly formed party, the Bharatiya Jan Sangh declared that, it does not recognize the status of majority or minority, it recommended firm policies for dealing with Pakistan. The Jan Sangh was condemned as a communal body, by the Congress party. Replying to the Congress condemnation, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee said;

> If, being communal means having the courage not to sacrifice our national interests at the altar of the notorious Muslim pandering and Pakistan appeasement policy, we are communal, hundred percent communal and proud to be so.
The emergence of Bharatiya Jan Sangh and re-activation of RSS, posed difficult political problems at the national level. They propounded their own Hindutava ideology, it is alleged that its stems are largely from Hindu nationalism and Hindu culture. The Jan Sangh believed that Hindu nationalism is Indian nationalism and Hindu culture is Indian culture. This open pronouncement threw a challenge to the Muslim minority.

The Muslim community from August 1947 to 1960 experienced their political status, as a national minority. During the same period, the Hindus emerged as a powerful and dominative political infrastructure. The Hindu leadership, with the support of some sections of national leadership, made efforts towards the establishment of a theocratic and feudal state in India, providing protection to the Hindus. Even many senior Congress leaders, also in their official capacities, displayed communal tendencies, immediately after independence. For instance, Mohan Lal Saxena (Union Minister for Rehabilitation) ordered the closure of the Muslim shops in Delhi and Purushottam Das Tondon (President of Uttar Pradesh Congress Party) was also considered communal. Regarding Govind Ballabh Pant (Chief Minister of U.P), Mushirul Hasan observes, “made it known that Muslims would not be employed in government jobs or recruited in police. He discouraged the teaching of Urdu and suspended aid to Urdu-medium schools.”

Similarly Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel, assumed that the Muslim officials, would be disloyal and that the Muslims in India, should be regarded as hostages for the good treatment of the Hindus in Pakistan. Patel had even suggested that the Pakistan government should be informed that, if the Hindus migrated from East Bengal, India would expel an equal number of the Muslims from West Bengal. He was also committed to the reconstruction of Somnath Temple. Rajindra Prasad, the then President of India, vehemently opposed the Hindu Code Bill. Due to such communal behaviour of elites and as a result of official industrial policy, small scale industries all over the country, suffered a serious set-back, because large number of artisans working in these industries, were Muslims. The weavers of Bihar and eastern U.P, lock makers of Aligarh, bangle makers of Ferozabad, brassware workers of Moradabad, zari workers and carpet makers of Lucknow and Varanasi and tanners and leather workers of Lucknow and Agra, the government’s axe fell heavily on the Muslims. Similarly, the abolition of the Zamindari Act, too, affected a large sections of Muslim middle classes. The economic
policies of the Indian government made life miserable, for the Muslim masses. They understood, their economic hardship as a kind of deliberate attempt to break their backbone and to drive them out of India. This feeling among the Muslims became more severe because of the communal disturbances as “almost every riot was accompanied by efforts to seize Muslim property and give it to the refugees from West Pakistan”. S. Gopal remarks that

Many Congressmen functioned as they were members of the Hindu Maha Sabha, and the Muslims who had throughout their lives, opposed the League, were now being hounded out by men who had not done a day’s service for the cause of India or of freedom.

Nehru was conscious of such tendencies, amongst certain members of the ruling party. In a letter to Mohan Lal Saxena (Union Minister for Rehabilitation) in September 1949, he wrote that, “communalism has invaded the minds and hearts of those, who were pillars of the Congress in the past.” Nevertheless, he could do little to purge the Congress of such elements. Nehru may be asserted, was committed to secularism but he was also committed to the protection of minorities, particularly the Muslims. Such an approach, later led to contradictions in secularism.

It must here be said that the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, in 1948 brought about a change in the attitude of the people, on the communal question. The Hindu communal elements got isolated. Even then during the first decade after independence, the communal confrontation had the least affect upon the Indian society and general political stability, along with the factors of economic and social developments, contributed a little in diverting the focus away from communal frenzy and we find, a comparatively peaceful environment during this period. The inter-relations of the communities were found tolerable and the conflict level between the two, was also found accentuated, thereafter as the political bikerings fanned sentiments and also partly due to evaporating nationalistic feelings. The very first and major communal riot took place in Jabalpur in 1961, between two manufacturers, one Hindu and the other Muslim. The major reasons for this riot, was acute economic competition between a Hindu and a Muslim bidi manufacturer in the same town. But the Hindi press played an inflammatory
role. It all started with the daughter of Hindu bidi manufacturer falling in love with the son of a Muslim bidi manufacturer. The press propagated, it as a rape case. Many Muslims were killed in these riots and terrorized by the armed police. On 27 December 1963, the theft of a holy relic of the prophet Mohammed from Hazratbal Mosque in Kashmir, caused serious riots in Khulna (now in Bangladesh), from where many Hindu families fled to India. As a reaction to this, serious riots broke out in Calcutta, Jamshedpur, Rourkela and Ranchi in 1964. Also a large number of people lost their lives. The basic roots of communal disturbances were deeply embedded in the sub-optimal, socio-psycho-cultural and religious consciousness, manifested by political leaders, for various self motives. The Muslim political elites were greatly moved, due to the outburst of such communal riots. They thought that creation of Pakistan, jeopardized the prospects of Muslims, who decided to stay in India. In order to protect the interests of the Muslims, their social, religious and political organizations, came into action. Jamiyat-al-Ulama-i-Hind, which was established in 1919, was re-energised in 1948 to

Chalk out the path to be traversed by the community for reconstruction (and to march) shoulder to shoulder with members of other communities, inhabiting the country.

The Jamiyat-al-ulama-i-Hind, worked to defend Muslim Personal Law and opposed any attempt by the state to change or interfere with it. One Muslim party, Jamaat-i-Islami emerged in 1941, pursued a more communal agenda, to deal in the religious phenomenon, especially, to preserve Shariat for Indian Muslims. The other important organization, which has emerged with the name of Anjuman-e-Taraqqi-e-Urdu, became a leading organization, supporting the cause of Urdu language.

S.M. Faridi and Syed Mohammad, both ministers of Nehru’s Cabinet in 1964, established Majlis-e-Mushawarat, in which various Muslim groups and political parties, were undertaken to consult, and plan programmes to secure adequate Muslim representation in Parliament, to preserve Muslim character of the Aligarh Muslim University, and to prevent Parliament from interfering in the Muslim Personal Law. The formation of this organization was seen doubtfully, whether this was another attempt by Muslims to create yet another Pakistan. From the very beginning, the Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS), raised the issue of Kashmir and focused on the problems of refugees, who
were forced to flee from Pakistan. Jan Sangh had a tough policy and argued strictly against Pakistan. Because of this and total support given to it by the RSS, BJS was regarded as an anti-Muslim party. This feeling was further reinforced, when the party demanded for a Uniform Civil Code, for all the Indians. The Muslim took severe action, against this demand and organized the Muslim Personal Law Board, in the late 1960, to protect their *Shariat* law. The Congress government assured Muslims that it would not interfere in their personal law. The BJS considered this act as a strategy of the Congress party. It decried the Nehruvian secularism as “pseudo secularism” because it was favouring people of one religion, while neglecting the claims of the majority religion.\(^{28}\) The Hindus residing in Pakistan constituted a small minority and the prominence of Islam in the governance of country, the leaders of Jan Sangh felt that there was no need to show special favours to the Muslims, who had opted to claim a separate state for themselves and who have no regard for the people, belonging to other religions. They also doubted that Indian Muslims have extra territorial loyalties, with Pakistan harming Indian’s interests.

During the Prime Ministership of Lal Bahadur Shastri, the Congress leaders were found to be sharing the platform, with leaders of the Jan Sangh. During the 1965 war with Pakistan, Girish Mathur points out, “Civil Defence in Delhi was virtually handed over to the Jan Sangh despite protest by progressive Congressmen, including Indira Gandhi.”\(^{29}\) He also alleges that there was a large scale arrest of the Muslims and even harassment of Muslim government servants.\(^{30}\) When the Muslims were opposed to the Congress Party in 1962, the Congress harassed them. When they supported the Congress Party for which they were being harassed by the Jan Sangh and the Shiv Sena. Ultimately, it all boiled down to their votes. So the Muslims were harassed by different political parties, time to time, for the vote bank. Even when the very first general elections held in 1952, the Muslims were being treated ‘as a vote bank’. This policy of compromising with communal elements continued. For instance Bal Thackeray, publicly declared in 1970, in Robert Mony High School, Bombay that he was proud of *Shiv Sainiks*, who killed CPI leader Krishna Desai, but he was not even arrested nor was the Shiv Sena banned.\(^{31}\) In 1967, *Shiv Sainiks* burnt the head office of Girni Kamgar Union in Parel (Maharashtra), the police stood by helplessly.\(^{32}\) During the late 1960s and early 70s, alleges Dipankar
Gupta, the Shiv Sena was an important ally of the Congress and instrumental in breaking strikes. The compromising and accommodation policy with outright communal forces continued, during the two years of Janata Party rule. It may be noted, the Janata Party, was a conglomerate of various organizations and some of its members belonged to the RSS. It was supported both, by Jan Sangh as well as Jamaat-e-Islami. The Jan Sangh thus came to share power at the centre in 1977. During this period, secularism was also vitiated by text book controversy, when government attempted to decertify certain textbooks, which allegedly did not depict Hinduism, in a sufficiently favourable light. It also attempted to block conversions to Christianity, through limiting the right to propagate religion. Significantly in 1977 elections, Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid, Delhi, shared the political platform with heavyweights of Janata Party, such as Atal Behari Vajpayee.

The second phase of Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister witnessed a swing in favour of using the Hindu card. When she declared Emergency in 1975, no riots took place in country. But the Muslim community alleged to have suffered a lot due to excesses committed during that period, significantly due to the forced vasectomy operations, as the part of aggressive family planning campaigns, by Indira Gandhi’s son Sanjay Gandhi. It was mainly done as the Muslims were said to have transferred their loyalties in the post-Emergency era from the Congress party to the newly formed Janata Party in 1977 elections. During the referred time, Jan Sangh also joined hands with the Janata party. In the year, when Janata Party acquired Janata regime, the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid emerged, as a popular Muslim leader. Many Hindus disliked this fact. The erstwhile Jana Sangh leaders exploited sentiments of the Hindus, by opting out of that alliance and forming a new party in the name of the Bharatiya Janata Party. The communal problem once again resurfaced and there were riots in Jamshedpur, Aligarh and Varanasi and the Muslims suffered a lot in these riots.

After the expiry of one party dominance, during which the Congress had been in power in both at the Centre as well as most of the states, the Congress first attempted to find a base among the core minorities. After 1980, with the rise of community consciousness among the Hindus, Indira Gandhi followed a soft line, favouring the Hindus, to secure their votes. Similarly, the reliance upon Hindu card, was seen in Jammu and Kashmir elections of 1983. In these elections, the Muslim majority of Jammu and
Kashmir, voted for the National Conference under the leadership of Farooq Abdullah, while the Hindu majority voted for the Congress under the leadership of Indira Gandhi. Immediately after the army action in Punjab (1984), she said openly that, the Hindu dharma was under attack and made an impassioned appeal to save, the Hindu sanskriti from the attack that was coming from the Sikhs, the Muslims and the others.\(^38\)

Indira Gandhi won Hindu passions and tried successfully to woo minorities continuously. The rise of Sant Bhindranwale in Punjab, is an example of it. Indira Gandhi’s assassination in 1984, caused a widespread bloodshed and anti-Sikh riots throughout the country. Notwithstanding indications of top-level involvement, three successive governments have failed to bring the culprits to book.\(^39\) Indira Gandhi was “strategically secular”, in the words of Shahabuddin, “could be tactically communal when the situation so demanded.”\(^40\) The defeat of Congress I, in the elections of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh in 1983, brought a change in Gandhi’s attitude towards the RSS. A deal was struck between her and Bale Sahab Deoras (the RSS chief) in 1980. The Sikhs were already against the Congress. She, then began to patronage the VHP and Ekmata yatras. Even, she inaugurated Bharat Mata Temple, in Haridwar built by efforts of VHP.\(^41\) It was all well calculated move to develop a ‘vote bank’ of majority community.

Rajiv Gandhi also followed his mother’s vote bank theory. He tried to appease Muslim fundamentalists, by enacting Muslim women and protection of Rights on Divorce Bill.\(^42\) Secularism, during the tenure of Rajiv Gandhi’s rule, was vitiated through violence against one particular community. In close succession, followed the agitation by the fundamentalist Muslims in the wake of Shah Bano’s judgment. This was related to the Supreme Court’s judgment in favour of Shah Bano, who sought the help of Court to receive maintenance grant from her husband, who had divorced her. The Muslim woman, Shah Bano proceeded a case, in the Madhya Pradesh High Court. The Court adjudged the payment. Shah Bano’s husband filed a petition in Supreme Court against this judgment. The Supreme Court delivered its judgment, upholding High Court judgment and felt that Section-125 of criminal code makes provision for divorced wives, if divorcees have no other source of income, or until they remarry or die, this provision should be equally applicable to be Muslim divorcee women. This section in their view, was applicable to the Muslim husbands also. Before pronouncing this judgment by the Supreme Court, the
text of *Holy Quran* was consulted, translated and also the commentaries on it by the well known Muslim authorities, were published by Board of Islamic publications of Delhi.  

Actually, Shah Bano’s case was not first occasion, in which Supreme Court has given a verdict, favouring claim of a Muslim divorcee for maintenance grant from her former husband. Earlier, the Supreme Court Judge, in 1970, V.R Krishna Iyer, had already ordered to husbands of divorcee Muslim women to pay maintenance grant, under Section-125 of Criminal Procedure Code. These cases were Tahira Bai vs. Ali Hasan Firduli Chothia and Faizumbi vs. Khader Ali. No objection was raised, in those cases by the Muslim community. But Shah Bano’s case provoked great turmoil and protest, introducing political angle to social and humanitarian question. The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLIB), Jamait-ul-Ulema, Jamaat-e-Islami, leaders of Indian Union Muslim League, Majlis-e-Mushawarat and Janata Party leader Shahabuddin, strongly rejected to this judgment and considered it as gross interference in the Muslim Personal Law. In their view, Supreme Court had no right to interpret the *Holy Quran*. In this way, Supreme Court was held guilty because firstly, it had interfered in the Muslim personal law and secondly, it had tried to interpret the *Holy Quran*. The decision pronounced by Supreme Court was conceived by the Muslims as an attack on their Shariat Law. The Muslim political and religious organizations, launched a countrywide agitation, against the judgment and pressurized the government to withdraw the judgment. Under this agitation, numerous conferences and rallies were held at many places. It was the biggest protest, by the Muslim community, after freedom in India. Muslim leaders believed that their (Muslim community) identity was at stake. This incident served the cause of uniting the Muslims and bringing them under single banner in the name of religion. The referred judgment continuously hammered into the Muslim mind that the divine Shariat was in danger and it is their religious duty to protect it. A large rally was organized in Delhi and in this rally, Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid used venomous language, to denounce the attacks on Muslim religion and culture and revealed his fears that such attacks will further harm the Muslims and make them more antagonistic. The judgment provided chance to Muslim leaders to provoke the community and emphasized the distinctive identity of Muslim community. They used this, to reinforce the Muslim political identity and to organize them around a common symbol. As Shahabuddin wrote, “Ours is not a communal fight. It only amounts to
resisting the unacceptable process of assimilation, we went to keep our identity at all cost.”

The judgment affected the political clout of those Muslim leaders who belonged to the Congress Party. For example the General Secretary of Jammiat-e-Ulema-i-Hind, Maulana Asrarul Haque Quasmi, was boldly defeated as the Congress candidate by Syed Shahabuddin of Janata Party, in Kishanganj (Bihar) by-elections for the Lok Sabha held in December 1985. Even in Assam elections, Muslim voters distanced themselves from the Congress Party. Fearing further electoral reverses, Rajiv Gandhi government passed a Bill in Parliament, in February 1986 to exempt the Muslim community from purview of Section-125 of criminal procedure code, though he was strongly opposed by Hindu leaders. The Bill was adopted on 5 May 1986. The Hindu religious groups found that government move to nullify the judgment as “capitulation to the Muslim forces.” They felt that government had clearly gone back from its duty to uphold judiciary and constitution. Some even went to the extent of saying that government had subverted the constitution under electoral compulsions. Even a prominent Muslim leader in the Cabinet of Rajiv Gandhi, Arif Mohammad Khan, resigned in protest against the resolution of the referred Bill.

The leaders of the Hindus as well as the Muslims were able to mobilize public opinion, on this issue and aggravated this situation. The VHP in Uttar Pradesh used this occasion to reorganize itself and made consultations with few intellectuals and former civil servants and made them ready to influence the government to ensue a Uniform Civil Code, for all communities. Their leaders agreed that proposed Bill goes against the cherished values of secular India, Rajiv Gandhi succumbed to the pressure of the Muslim groups resulting in the enactment of Muslim Women Act, 1986. Moreover he allowed to open the locks of the Babri Masjid, to appease the Hindus. Subsequently, he permitted VHP to perform shilanyas in Ayodhya and even launched his 1989 election campaign, from Faziabad, with the promise of Ram Rajya. Although, from 1986 the year of Shah Bano Case, to 1992, the year of Babri Masjid demolition in Ayodhya, the Bharatiya Janata Party also dominated the ideological agenda. In 1989 elections, the BJP strongly identified itself with the temple issue for electoral purposes. The impact of entire process was one of strengthening and reinforcing communalism.
In this way, political parties played an important part to provoke communalism among various social and religious groups. They had been acting so as to divide the public opinion and successfully win the elections. The BJP always provoked the religious issues and used it, and the Congress Party always communalized these issues. After independence, separate religious identity developed among the Hindus and the Muslims, the political parties began to give it a political colour. The whole phenomenon may be clarified by following figure.

**Fig. 2: Growth of communalism in India after independence**

- **Partition in 1947**
- **Creation of two states (India & Pakistan)**
- **Rivalry between Hindus & Muslims (Due to the riots during partition and migration)**

- **The insecurity feelings among the Muslims [Sense of discrimination from the Hindus]**
- **The communal ideology of the Hindus (eg. India only for the Hindus)**

- **Changing demands of Muslims (e.g. Urdu language, preservation of Muslim Personal Law, job reservation, a minority status of Aligarh Muslim University)**
- **The demands of the Muslims were totally opposed by the Hindus**

- **Reformation of Muslim religious org. (e.g. Jamiat-ul-ulma-i-Hind, Jamaat-i-Islami etc.)**
- **Hindu religious org. (RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal etc.)**

- **The alliance with these religious organizations by political parties (e.g. BJP and Congress) for electoral motives time to time.**
- **Provocation of Hindu-Muslim sentiments by politicians.**
- **Communal violence time to time**

At the cost of life of thousands of people, the government and the power continuously shifted from one hand to the other.
The figure shows that a big gulf exists between the Hindus and the Muslims. This has increased to such an extent, which cannot be filled and efforts not made, to fill up the gap. But the gap has been made wider, by the politicians. Undoubtedly, there are differences of the religious ideologies and the cultures, between the two, but the political elites have created more differences from time to time, with the support of the religious organizations. India has dozens of such organizations and millions of people are members of these organizations. Many communal riots occur every year in India and in each riot the lives and the property of people are damaged and the minority communities have suffered more. The roots of all are in electoral politics. The compulsions of the electoral politics compel the leaders of almost all political parties to evolve a strategy, that could bring them political power in the shortest possible time. According to Prabha Dixit, communal politics is essentially linked with the question of the distribution of power. It should be viewed therefore, as a political problem, rather than as a problem of religious sensitivity.

THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY AND THE CONGRESS: ELECTORAL SCENE

The electoral politics in India is very dirty. The nexus between the electoral process and the communal considerations is often an open secret. In the guise of majority-minority dilemma, the political parties have found a way to change the religious communities into the political communities. The devil of elections has supplanted any issue and made communalism acceptable in varying degrees. Modern politics is the game of numbers, in which the power stands into the hands of those, who acquire the highest number of votes in a backward society, where behaviour and attitude of people is governed by emotions and prejudices rather than reason. Moreover, in such phenomenon, the society is fragmented into numerous groups on religious, ethnic, or casteist bases. With use of such divisions, the politicians generally win votes by playing a strategy with one group against the other one. This trend had been adopted by almost all the successive Prime Ministers, the leaders and the politicians. It is not only about so called communal parties like the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Muslim League, who disrupt the peaceful atmosphere of the country, by raising provocative slogans, but also the so
called secular or overtly non-communal parties like the Congress. The Congress Party remained in power from 1952 to 1977, continuously and its electoral base was the minority groups, including the Muslims and the Hindu scheduled castes. In 1967, in several states of the country, the coalition governments emerged. In such states the Muslims were in large numbers and it realized that the outcome depends on the way Muslims voted en bloc. It was hoped that they would swing the election results. This opinion affected the party strategies and logistics. No party could afford to ignore such a large percentage of votes and each party adopted a strategy, to win the favour of Muslim voters. In this regard, Paul. R. Brass, observes about Muslim votes;

The belief that the Muslims can be mobilized to vote en bloc for the party or a candidate perceived to be their protector leads to a competition for the Muslim vote, which is often the largest or the second largest potential voting block in U.P. The heavy concentration of Muslim votes in several places encourages competition among the various political parties for the mobilization of Muslim vote. However, Muslims and scheduled castes are considered to be the committed vote banks of the Congress Party. When this committed vote bank remains solid and the opposition is fragmented, a huge Congress Party landslide occurs, but when the opposition is united and major defection occurs among the Muslims and scheduled castes, then a big non-Congress victory is always likely.

Thus, all political parties tried their efforts to gain the use of this solid vote bank, to change the balance of power. Since 1967, when signals had come from various facts that Muslims were not happy with the Congress Party, then this fact was realized that in large constituencies, their votes were more and the political parties tried to attract them. Undoubtedly, they could swing the polling result in 1971, 1974 and even in 1977. The Muslims in 1980, were sought after in the most blatant fashion. They were discarded in 1984 and wooed again in subsequent years. The following table denote Lok Sabha elections and performances of the Congress Party and the BJS/BJP from 1952 to 1991.
Table 2

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During the first two decades after partition, the Congress turned from being a mass movement. It proved an increasingly corrupted party and patronised. Organizationally, it also proved an electoral machine, to be cranked up around in various local, regional and national elections. But seen in a nation wide perspective, there is a distinct decline in the popularity of the Congress party, as evidenced in the number of seats gained and percentage of votes polled in the Lok Sabha elections. In the first elections, which was held in 1952, it received forty five percent of the electorate, which came to a low of 37.5 percent in 1991 elections. In fact, the situation further worsened in Lok Sabha elections, it lost not only majority, but also the polling percentage. Its performance was noted as the best in 1984, it won 415 seats as well as 48.1 percent of the popular votes. In 1989, it got 197 (39.5%) seats, while in 1991 elections, it improved its number of seats to 232, still lacking a clear majority. Its polling percentage went down to
37.5. As against this, the Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS), in the beginning, achieved only 3 seats and 3.1 percent votes in the 1952 Lok Sabha elections, and Jan Sangh supported alliance reached an astounding figure of 295 seats (as part of Janata Party coalition) with 41.3 percentage of the popular vote in 1977. Along with this party, the BJP could win 119 seats, with the popular votes of 21.9 percent in 1991 elections. In the next elections held in 1996, it improved its position and emerged with the largest number of seats (161 with 20.2% votes), although not yet gaining a majority. In the next elections (1998), it won 182 seats thus replacing the Congress as the dominant party.

The elections of 1984 were the turning point for the Bharatiya Janata Party, it could win only two seats. L.K Advani replaced the moderate A.B. Vajpyee, there was a change of orientation. Between 1984 and 1989, the BJP was to attain a notable success in spreading its pernicious message, since the Muslims being twelve percent of the total population and generally representing poorer and illiterate class of the society, a message of direct domination by the Muslims over the Hindus cannot be possible. 59

After partition, India faces twin problems of the economic backwardness and the dangers to its national survival. These problems were closely related to each other one having the bearing on the other. Although Indian constitution, described country as a secular state, but it remained in theory only. In practice all political parties indulged in the vote bank politics. In the process of selecting the candidates, the parties took into account the numerical preponderance of a caste or religious community and generally gave tickets to those, who belong to the dominant group in constituency in question. Even the Congress which had struggled too much for independence, under the guidance of Gandhi and Nehru, followed this strategy.
ENDNOTES AND REFERENCES


5  Preamble to the Indian Constitution.


13  Ibid,p.147.


Following independence for India, the post-colonial government led by Jawahar Lal Nehru completed the codification and reform of Hindu personal law, process that had been begun by British. According to the British policy of non-interference, reform of personal law should have arisen from a demand from the Hindu community. This was not the case, as there was significant opposition from various Hindu politicians, organizations, and devotees who saw themselves unjustly singled out as the sole religious community whose laws were to be reformed. However, the administration saw such codification as necessary in order to unify the Hindu community, which ideally would be a first step towards unifying the nation. They succeeded in passing four Hindu bills: the Hindu Marriage Act (1955), Hindu Succession Act (1956), Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act (1956), and Hindu adoptions and Maintenance Act (1956). These continue to be controversial to the present day among women’s religious, and nationalist groups. For details see, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/hindu-code-bill.


32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.


Promila Dandavate, President of the Mahila Daksha Samiti, recalls that she had warmed Rajiv Gandhi while pleading with him to drop the Muslim Women's Bill that, "if the government succumbs to the pressure of them fundamentalists now, the day is not far when a section of the Hindu fundamentalists will come forward to demand the right to burn widows on the pyre of their husbands in the name of the religious freedom. See Swarup, H.L. and et. al., “Women's Political Engagement in India: Some critical Issues”, in Nelson, Barbara J. and Chaudhry, Najma (ed.), *Women and Politics Worldwide*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994, p.376.

The Babri Masjid was locked in 1949, after idols were surreptitiously placed in it. The locks were opened on February 1, 1986, on the order of the District Judge, Faizabad, in Asghar Ali Engineer (ed.), *Babri Masjid/ Ramjanam Bhumi Controversy*, Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1990, p.213.


Dixit, n. 10, p.215.


59 Ibid, p.46.