CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION
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"57, mostly women and children killed as mob torches train in Gujarat" screamed the headlines of almost all the dailies on 28th February 2002. It ignited an inferno of communal violence. One of the defining images of those few days of insensible and vicious communal violence was the burned and blackened arm of a little child, its tiny fingers curled into a fist, protruding from the remains of a human bonfire in Ahmedabad. This is the India of today, the culture of which in bygone years had elevated non-violence to an effective moral principle. But then, that is the magic of religion. Almost daily crimes are committed around the world, not just in India, in its dreaded name. With fatal results it erects totems and finds willing followers to kill for them. Like Blaise Paschal once said "Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction". For good measure Karl Marx wrote, "Religion is the opium of the masses". The horrible truth about communal slaughter in India is that we are used to it. It happens every so often; then it dies down. Its frequency has deadened our senses.

Religion, as ever, is the poison in the blood (Rushdie, 2002). Historically, religion has always produced violence. From Moses to the Crusades, Henry VIII, Hitler, Kosovo, Gujarat. Today, extremists from every part of the world – be they Islamic fundamentalists, Hindu revivalists, Palestinian "Kamikazes", Jewish hard-liners or Christian right-wingers – are plunging themselves into holy wars of their own definition and making
(Yu Bin, 2002). So India's problem turns out to be the world's problem. What happened in India has happened in God's name. The problem's name is God (Rushdie, 2002). Given the all-pervading role that religion plays in our life, it is a thorny issue to tackle religious intolerance leading to violence.

But the India of today is not the India of the past. There was a time when this country moved a Mogul emperor so much so that it inspired him to claim, "If on Earth there be paradise or bliss, it is this, it is this, it is this..."

India derived its strength from its diversity. With a burgeoning population of a little more than a billion people, representing many languages and ethnic groups, India is an extremely diverse country. It has been home to one of the world's oldest civilizations - dating back more than 3,000 years.

A number of world religions originated in India, and others that started elsewhere found fertile ground for growth here. Probably no other country in the world has given birth to more religions than India. Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism and a number of lesser-known faiths all originated in India. In addition, India has received two great religions of Semitic origin, Islam and Christianity, which have assumed distinctive forms here. An ancient but small Jewish community survives, and India has most of the world's practicing Zoroastrians (Parsis). All considerable proof of India's amazing tolerance of varying metaphysical ideas.

Investigations have revealed no stable society, past or present, without religion and the same applies to India. The ancient civilization of India that flourished from about 2000 B.C. to 1750 B.C. in the Indus Valley known as the
Harappan Culture, was probably destroyed by Aryans, people of the Indo-European language family, who introduced the Sanskrit language, the Hindu religion and the caste system into India. Medieval Indian history is replete with invasions and conquests by Persians, Turks and Mughals. With them came their religions, which got amalgamated into the Indian society. By 1498, the Europeans who arrived in India for trade ended up ruling the country for almost a century and a half.

India's struggle for freedom from the Europeans came to an end on 15th August 1947, when the ancient civilization broke away from the yoke of colonialism to become a newly independent sovereign democracy. But the triumph of freedom was quickly diluted by the tragedy of partition. In human terms the toll taken by the holocaust that accompanied the division of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan will never be reckoned. In the backdrop of violent communal disturbances, it took a toll of many thousands of casualties and caused the largest displacement of masses at any one given time. It can be said that rarely in world history has a new nation been faced with so many problems as confronted India in the final months of 1947, yet rarely has a nation's spirit of achievement been so strong. India met these challenges head on and came out triumphant though it was not an easy process.

Soon after independence, India framed a detailed Constitution in which the ideal of secularism was clearly embodied. The Preamble to the Constitution identified the Indian state as a democratic, socialist and secular republic, by stating that, "We the people of India, having solemnly resolved to
secure to all its citizens, equality of status and of opportunity". Further, Article 15 provides in unequivocal terms that, "The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them". With India being a competing terrain of various religious, ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups, this was a very important move.

Bound by this definition the government since independence has officially remained separate from any one religion allowing all forms of belief equal status before the law. Though in practice it has proven difficult to divide religious affiliation from public life.

Today, Indian society with its multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, multi-religious and multi-cultural groups is no surprise because since ages India has supported a pluralistic society. Diversity has always been the hallmark of India. The magic and mystery of this diversity has allured researchers from ancient times. In this context it should be noted that any study of India requires a deep understanding of its diverse cultures, religions and languages.

So far as can be discovered from pre-historic evidence, religion has figured in human life since the distant past and the same applies to India. Though India is a secular country, Indians are deeply religious. Religion is one of the most important facets of Indian history and contemporary life. On a day-to-day basis within India, the vast majority of people engage in ritual actions that are motivated by religious systems that owe much to the past but are continuously evolving. Thus religion has become an inseparable part of Indian
life, permeating every aspect of life, from commonplace daily chores to education and politics.

Since religion occupies such an important position in our life, it is necessary to study it.

Scholars find it difficult to frame a definition of religion that will include every religion, past and present. The word ‘religion’ is derived from the Latin ‘religare’, meaning to bind (i.e. to bind man’s self to God), which can be defined as the recognition of one’s dependence upon a supernatural being or beings for whom certain actions must be performed. Many believe that the idea of the supernatural is universal to religion, though some refuse to agree. But quoting a few definitions can make an attempt.

According to The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, religion is human beings’ relation to that which they regard as holy, sacred, spiritual or divine. Religion is commonly regarded as consisting of a person’s relation to God or to gods or spirits. Worship is probably the most basic element of religion, but moral conduct, right belief and participation in religious institutions are generally also constituent elements of religious life as practiced by believers and worshipers and as commanded by religious sages and scriptures.

Encyclopedia Americana says that religion is the pattern of belief and practice through which men communicate with or hope to gain experience of that which lies behind that world of their ordinary experience.
“Religion is a belief binding the spiritual nature of man to a supernatural being, as involving a feeling of dependence and responsibility together with the feelings and practices which naturally flow from such a belief” states the Webster’s Dictionary.

And finally a simple definition proposed by The New Standard Encyclopedia, “Religion is faith and practices involving the relationship between mankind and what it regards as sacred. It generally includes the belief in the supernatural and a code of ethical behaviour. It may be a private set of beliefs of only one person, or it may be a shared set of beliefs of many”.

Religious feeling typically involves a sense of the sacred, of awe and of mystery. Religions structure themselves through doctrine, myth, ethical values, rituals and other experiences and various forms of outreach.

ORIGINS OF RELIGION

Regarding origins of religion anthropologists believe that the earliest form of religion was nature worship, a form still followed by various primitive peoples today. It was centered on the belief in supernatural forces and the belief that spirits reside in objects of nature, such as stones and trees.

Evolutionary theorists related primitive and archaic religions to later developments. English anthropologist E.B. Taylor (1866) advanced his influential theory that the earliest form of religion was animism, which involved belief in spiritual beings animating all moving things, from ourselves, through rivers and storms to the celestial bodies. Fear of the power of these
beings leads to worship and the evolution of primitive polytheism, which in turn gives way to monotheism.

Psychological views were offered by Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic hypothesis about the origin of the father figure in religion, where God in effect is projected out of infantile experience through the mechanism of repression and the unconscious.

Functional psychologists’ approach to religion is to see how man succeeds in coping with limited situations. Men are confronted with baffling and threatening situations, and phenomena such as death and the terrible, that in some way defy their analytic, emotional and moral powers brought to the limits of their understanding, feeling, rational actions and control of the environment, some undoubtedly are helped by the traditional and ethnic religions in dealing with such existential crises.

In terms of India, the oldest religion was animism, which is still practiced by some remote tribes. However Hinduism has been above all the traditional religion of India. Regarding the development of religion in India a lot of information is available from the remains of the early Indus Valley Civilization in pre-historic times, especially of the Harappa period which offer presumptive evidence of worship of a God with some characteristics of Shiva, of a cult of the Great Mother or Earth Goddess and of phallic worship. Certain trees appear to have been sacred, including the papal. The religious beliefs and practices of the Indo-Aryans are recorded in body of texts known collectively
as the 'Vedas', meaning 'knowledge'. In time their religion and way of life, modified by processes of absorption, developed into Hinduism.

Islamic civilization first came to India when Arabs entered the subcontinent by sea from the Persian Gulf at the beginning of the 8\textsuperscript{th} century. This incursion was followed by the violent raids of Mahmud of Ghazni in the 11\textsuperscript{th} century, and these in turn were succeeded by invasions by other Islamic peoples, who occupied the northern parts of India.

Christianity entered India through the Malabar Coast. Legend has it that St. Thomas traveled from western Asia to Malabar in AD 52. He is believed to have established a number of Syrian Churches, which would perhaps account for Syrian Christianity being the major form of Christianity until the arrival of the Portuguese in India in the 15\textsuperscript{th} century. The first Christian mission to India from a Protestant source came from Denmark, which maintained a small mission in conjunction with its trading post at Tranquebar, in Madras, in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century.

These were the origins and development in India of the three religions dealt with, in the present study.

Religion is such a universal phenomenon that no tribe or people in the world, however primitive or highly civilized, have been found to be without religion or without belief in God. It is the most amazing phenomena in the history of mankind. But the irony of it is that though it is a supremely integrating and unifying force in human society it has also proved a catastrophic force. All through the history of man most of the bloodshed
caused has been in the name of religion. To spread their religion, missionaries have explored unknown continents. It has been the root cause for many wars. One of the most famous examples is the Crusades during the Middle ages. The crusades were military operations launched by the Catholic Church and Catholic political leaders against non-Catholic powers or heretical movements but most were directed at Muslim states to reclaim the Holy Land. When Muslim cities were captured by Christian crusades, it was standard operating procedure for all inhabitants, no matter what their age, to be summarily killed.

The Reformation Movement in Christianity was followed by a series of religious wars between Catholics and Protestants. Another example is Hitler’s vile dream of establishing Aryan supremacy in the world. History is thus replete with violence, wars and bloodshed caused by religion. In this sphere India has not been far behind though religious tolerance has been one of the traditional social values in the country.

Thus contorted and disfigured by human thought for centuries, religion has become a glibly used device for justifying some of mankind’s most horrendous deeds- wars have been fought in its name, thousands have been killed or have sacrificed themselves in the name of religious honour, the list is virtually endless. As Harry Emerson aptly wrote “One of the major tragedies in the world today is the fact that the great religions, which ought to help unite mankind in mutual understanding and goodwill, divide mankind instead and add to our humanity’s disunion, their own special prejudices, animosities and
dogmatic fanaticisms.” It is indeed a sad fact that there is nothing religious about religion today.

Historically, India has been pluralist not since post-modernism but for centuries it has been benevolent to all the religious communities. This is evident from the writings of various writers like Max Weber who said “It is an undoubted fact that in India, religions and philosophical thinkers were able to enjoy perfect, nearly absolute freedom for a long period. The freedom of thought in ancient India was so considerable as to find no parallel in the west before the most recent age.”

Donald Eugene Smith an eminent American Indologist is also of the same opinion, when he wrote, “Various schools of thought propounded the doctrines of agnosticism, atheism, and materialism. Jainism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Islam were permitted to propagate their teachings, build their places of worship, and establish their respective ways of life. The struggle for freedom of conscience in Europe and America, stretching over many centuries, has no counterpart in Indian history. From the earliest day this right seems never to have been denied.”

This proud support of pluralism has helped India weave a rich and complex socio-cultural tapestry. The mosaic of the Indian socio-cultural situation is composed of segments constituting language, and dialect groups, religious communities, denominational sects, castes and sub-castes, regional and sub-regional, ethnic formations and defined culture patterns. With a representation of almost all the major religions of the world, India is not only
multi-religious but also a polyglot society. 18 languages are recognized as the major languages of India. Besides, there are hundreds of languages and thousands of dialects. Thus in terms of socio-cultural diversities, India is bigger than a country, larger than a nation and more than a mere state. It is a defined civilization with all its varieties. Centuries of co-existence of its many segments have given it an impress of ‘Unity in Diversity’.

As Shashi Tharoor (1997) aptly put it “The singular thing about India is that you can only speak of it in the plural. This pluralism emerged from the very nature of the country; it was made inevitable by India’s geography and affirmed by its history.”

Nehru (1938) beautifully described India’s pluralism, when he wrote, “Like the ocean, she received the tribute of a thousand rivers, and though she was disturbed often enough and storms raged over the surface of her waters, the sea continued to be the sea. It is astonishing to note how India continued successfully this process of assimilation and adaptation. It could only have done so if the ideas of a fundamental unity were so deep rooted as to be accepted even by the newcomer, and if her culture were flexible and acceptable to changing conditions.”

This plurality and diversity of India has been its strength as well as its weakness. On the one hand the varied sub-cultures has enriched India producing a unique mosaic while on the other hand the various social divisions and cleavages have embittered inter-group relations with recurrent eruption of communal violence.
With a massive population of varied groups, maintaining peace and harmony is an onerous task. The total population of India is 102.8 crores (Census 2001) of which 80.5% are Hindus, 13.4% are Muslims, 2.3% are Christians, 1.9% are Sikhs, .8% are Buddhists, .4% are Jains and remaining .6% makeup other religious groups including Parsees. Hindus are in majority while Muslims form the largest minority group. Very few are aware of the fact that India has the world’s second largest Muslim population. Even the Christian population in India is larger than that of many European countries.

When one nation is home to such diversity, which defies formulations, there are bound to be differences. These numerous differences and social cleavages cause an ever-widening gap between these various groups. Understanding this and the potentially divisive nature of religion as well as the fact that religious conflicts could be the bloodiest, the founding fathers and freedom fighters of modern India professed and championed the cause of secular values, unity and brotherhood between different groups. Inspite of their valiant efforts the centuries old animosities and tensions within and between the religious communities, at times exacerbated by poverty, class, ethnic differences, and most often by trivial provocations and issues have erupted into periodic violence throughout the country’s post-independence history. These regular communal flare-ups have continuously eroded and damaged the fragile relation that exists between these groups.

Though religious communities have had a history of occasional strifes in India, this phenomenon of communalism, such as it is found today, is of recent
origin traceable to the British policy of divide and rule (Sociological Bulletin, 1990). In the hands of the British, a primordial antagonism between Hindus and Muslims dating back centuries became the ‘master narrative’, even though there was evidence of their co-existence. Primordial antagonism was not the ‘truth’ about Hindus and Muslims. It was constructed and promoted as such by the British, partly because it suited them to split India into its two largest religious groups, and partly because the natives, argued the British, could not constitute a modern nation, they could think only in terms of pre-modern religious communities (Varshney, 2002). With almost 10,000 incidents of communal violence only between 1954-1985, which left around 7,319 dead and injured around 51,063 and between 1950-1995 only in Hindu-Muslim riots 7,173 persons were killed, we have in a way proved the British right (Rajagopal, 1987).

Every year scores of violent clashes between Hindus and Muslims occur in diverse parts of the country. Dozens of innocent persons lose their lives in these incidents. Many more are seriously injured and become homeless. Many more lose all their meager possessions besides lives and limbs. Diverse types of incidents of Hindu-Muslim communal violence in different parts of the country year after year together present a dismal picture of man’s inhumanity to man. Communal rioting has been on the increase after the mid to late 1970’s. This trend is visible in the rising violence peaking in 1992, when the mosque in Ayodhya was destroyed. Between 1990 and 1993 India went through its worst phase of Hindu-Muslim violence since the partition in 1947.
Some of the trends visible after a study of the communal riots is firstly that communal riots especially Hindu-Muslim riots are primarily an urban phenomenon. The share of villages in communal riots has been proven to be minuscule. Secondly within urban India too, Hindu-Muslim riots are highly locally concentrated. This can be noticed in the table with the number of deaths in India’s most riot prone cities, which are Bombay, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Meerut, Aligarh, Baroda, Delhi and Calcutta. These cities account for almost 45.5% of all deaths in India in Hindu-Muslim violence between 1950 and 1995 (Varshney, 2002).

Table 1. : India’s most riot-prone cities

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>India’s most riot-prone cities</th>
<th>Deaths 1950-1995</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bombay</td>
<td>1,137</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>1,119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyderabad</td>
<td>312</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meerut</td>
<td>265</td>
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<td>Aligarh</td>
<td>160</td>
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<td>Baroda</td>
<td>109</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>93</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calcutta</td>
<td>63</td>
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In just over 50 years, if one country can witness communal violence of such magnitude causing so much of loss of life and leaving such a large number of persons injured, it becomes imperative to study the process of communal riots and its causes. In this context since the social perception of the different religio-cultural groups play an important role, it is important to
understand the self-perception, inter-religious perception and attitudes of these groups so that necessary strategies can be evolved.

Being a social being, man has an overriding need to associate himself with other. His interactions with other individuals and groups satisfy this need. Thus in any given social situation other persons around him play a key role. They influence his behaviour, which in turn acts as a stimulus that evokes responses from them. It is a highly complex process though it sounds simple. Different individuals behave differently in similar situations. Even our own behaviour is not easy to understand. Just as we can be puzzled by what others do, so can we be puzzled by our own actions. Since the persons around us play a significant role in our life, we are faced with the complicated task of understanding them, including their intentions, motives etc. Many a time we seek to know about others so that we can better understand ourselves. This active process or set of processes through which we seek to know and understand others is called social perception. Since social perception is one of the most basic and important aspects of our daily social life we put in extra efforts to understand other persons. This we accomplish by trying to decipher the non-verbal cues provided by them and secondly through attribution process.

Non-verbal cues like facial expressions, eye contact, body posture and movements give us valuable information about the current feelings, moods and emotions of the other persons. But precise knowledge of others’ current moods or feelings is only the first step in social perception. In addition we try to understand the lasting traits of the others and know the causes behind their
behaviour. This interest largely stems from our basic desire to understand cause-and-effect relationships in the social world. We seek such information through the attribution process.

Attribution processes are the cognitive processes through which perceivers interpret the actions of other people (and in some cases their own actions). We are not content merely to observe other people, we try to explain their past behaviour and predict their future actions. Like Fritz Heider (1958) wrote all human beings have two strong motives, the need to form a coherent understanding of the world and the need to control the environment by being able to predict how people are going to behave.

Since the content of perception is dynamic in determining the behaviour of groups towards each other, that is, in promoting inter group harmony or inter group conflict, the study of perception is crucial in understanding the structure of the social environment and modifying if necessary. The present study is an attempt in this direction.