CHAPTER V

UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE OF COMMUNALISM IN INDIA

Communalism as a phenomenon needs to be interpreted again and again in the light of fast changing global affairs. Communalism has been a topic of detailed study for the past several years and many research works are done in this field. The most important threat the globe facing is the rising communalism. The western countries having religious singularity were free of this menace in the past. But the incidents happened in the previous one decade show that they are also facing the threat of rising communal problem. India having a population of above 100 crores with a variety of religions is a breeding ground for communalism. The religious pluralism and the contradictions between the faiths tend to create communal identities, which in turn develops to a stage of communalism, when passing through the democratic process. Religion, when deliberately used as a tool for attaining political gains often nourished the growth of communalism.

The rising trend of communalism and the violence followed is the major threat posed towards the integrity of nation. So, efficient measures are to be adopted against communalism and its spread in order to check cracks on the social harmony and bondage. Taking into account the history of communal problems in the past, more non-violent methods are inevitable in combating the communal tension which takes place in the new millennium. In this chapter an effort is made to trace the origin of the so-called communal problems in India and its ramifications. The communal
riots occurred in Godhra which took lives of more than thousand innocent people, the riots frequently rising up in sensitive areas like Mumbai, Ahamedabad are all of serious concern. The aftermath of a communal riot is nothing but total loss. The loss of life and property in a communal riot widens the gap between the conflicting communities.

The increased communal consciousness and the support received from some religious leaders make the phenomenon of communalism more venomous and dangerous. The majority community which alleges minority about their anti-national approach and the minority pointing about the insecurity they are facing in their nation often collides and trigger tensions. The recent trend of communalism which tends to turn into terrorism is a subject which is to be brought under serious analysis. The history of communal problems in India, the causes of communal problems, the factors controlling the momentum of riots, measures to be taken to prevent and to put off riots etc. are to be studied.

**The Meaning of Communalism**

Generally understood, communalism is rivalry kept and practiced by one community or religion towards another or each other. Bothering only about the well being of one’s own religion and viewing the welfare of another community as a threat is a common characteristic of communalism. The primary feature of communalism is that one community is being viewed doubtfully in every social development. “Communalism can be considered an ideology which states that society is divided into religious communities whose interests differ and are at times even opposed to each other. The antagonism practiced by members of one community against the people of other community and religion can be termed communalism.
This antagonism goes to the extent of falsely accusing, harming and deliberately insulting a particular community and extends to looting, burning down the homes and shops of the helpless and the weak, dishonouring women and even killing persons.”  

Richard Lambert defines communalism as “something colours political behaviour and produces a community oriented outlook.”  

Louis Dumont states that “communalism is an affirmation and assertion of the religious community as a political group.”  

In the words of Satish Sabarwal, “communalism in our sense means the channeling of personal sentiments and actions primarily with reference to the ascriptive group whose boundaries are determined by the accident of one’s birth.”

According to Bipan Chandra “communalism is the belief that because a group of people follow a particular religion, they have as a result, common social political and economic interests.”  

“Some authors have defined communalism as a form of indifference. Condescension, hatred or aggressive attitude to all the members of a religious community other than one’s own, based on a real or imaginary threat from an individual or a group of that community or an actual damage done to one’s personal interest or way of life or to those of one’s religious community.”

Many scholars hold the view that communalism is not essentially a product derived out of religious feelings. Prabha Dixit in her book, ‘Communalism, a Struggle for Political Power’ states that: “Communalism

---

1 Ram Ahuja, Social Problems in India, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 1992, p.104  
2 Zenab Banu, Politics of Communalism, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1989, p.2  
3 Ibid  
4 George Mathew, Communal Road to a Secular Kerala. Concept publishing company New Delhi, 1994, p.11  
5 Bipan Chandra, Communalism in Modern India, Vikas Publishing House Private Ltd., New Delhi, 1984, p.1  
6 Zenab Banu, Politics of Communalism, Popular Prakashan Bombay, 1989, p.10
in India is neither the reaction to anti communalism nor an outgrowth of religious and cultural differences but it is a triangular power struggle of the elite.\(^7\) According to D.E Smith, “communalism is the term used in India to describe the political functioning of individuals or groups for the selfish interest of particular religious communities or castes.”\(^8\) Communal identities are given primacy over any other identity of an individual in a communal minded society. Linguistic, political, regional and other sorts of identities are comparatively irrelevant or of lesser importance in a communally polarized situation. The existence of some sort of antagonism among religions or communities can be termed as situation of communal disharmony. “The term communalism connotes the state of communal disharmony and the reverse situation is not an absence of communal violence but communal harmony. In the strict sense, communal harmony may be taken to mean as a state or condition of peace, normal or good relation and presence of fraternal relations between communities. Regarding Indian situations communal harmony means the persistence of fraternal relationship between Hindus and Muslims.”\(^9\) To define simply “the opposition to each others of religious communities is commonly designated as communalism.”\(^10\)

Communal persons are those who practice politics using religion. To win some personal or political ends, the communal minded persons deliberately connect religion to that particular issue. For example, if the member of a community, who is in competition with his business rivalry

---

8 Gerald James Larson, *India’s Agony Over Religions*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p.191
belonging to another community and the rival business men is supposed to start a new venture in a specific area, problems may arise from the part of the former. The former will intentionally try to block the way of the latter through arousing communal feelings among the public. This can be done in two ways:

(1) By spreading the rumour that the proposed spot which the rival business man intending to open a business or factory is a holy place belonging to a particular religion. Plea will be made that a temple or a mosque or a church should be built there on the basis of some assumed historical importance.

(2) By creating a sense of fear in the minds of the members of the community that the advent of this business or industry will weaken the economic condition of the community and result to the economic domination of other community leading to the deterioration of ‘ours’.

Those who deliberately use the religious sentiments to safe guard the vested interests and those who make religious issues a barrier for the misconduct in public and private life are the real master minds behind the propagation of communalism. “Among leaders, those religious leaders are communal, who run their religious communities like business enterprises and institutions, which raise the cries of ‘Hinduism, Islam or Christianity in ‘danger’, the moment they find that donation into their holy corporations begin to dwindle or their leadership has been challenged or their ideology has been questioned. Thus ‘communal’ is not one man who is ‘a man of religion’ but ‘one who practices politics by linking it with religion.”

---

“K.P. Karunakaran states that communalism in India mean that philosophy which stood for the promotion of the interest of a particular religious community or the members of a particular state.”¹² The communalists assume that the most meaningful distinction among the Indian people on social cultural, economic and political issues is to be made on the basis of such units of religious communities. This distinction overrides all other distinctions. On the other hand all other identities are either denied or when accepted in theory either negated in practice or subordinated to religious identities.”¹³

The communalist tries to divide the society on the basis of religion and they are not doing so for the sole good of the religion, but to attain materialistic benefits in the name of religion. Social activities of the communalists appear on the basis of religion. They limit their transaction as far as possible only with the same community, try to educate the children in the schools run by the community or by members of the community and even try to settle down in areas where the so called community’s people resides in large. The communal minded persons shall not be necessarily religious in nature. The control of the communal organizations, the interested persons who propagate such a divisive ideology in society are usually the elite class in the respective community.

“Communalism is a modern phenomenon and its fundamental causes are secular like competition for share in political power or government jobs. Religion is not its fundamental cause but an instrumental

---

¹² Bipin Chandra, Communalism in Modern India, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1984, p.2
¹³ Ibid
cause because it has great mobilizing power.”

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the father of Pakistan and the advocate of the theory of a separate nation for Muslims (the two nation theory), was essentially a communalist but not essentially a man of religion. M.A. Jinnah did not represent the masses of Muslim population. “Jinnah a product of Lincoln’s Inn in London represented the Muslim elite, not Muslim masses. The ‘orthodox’ Ulama, on the other hand were closer to the masses and represented their aspirations. No wonder the Jinnah and the Deoband ‘Ulemas never saw eye to eye on political matters. They were closer to Indian National Congress than to Muslim League, which was the party of the Muslim elite. They supported the composite nationalism than Muslim separation.”

Similarly many religious persons who are having deep rooted knowledge in religion do not engage in propagating divisive communal thoughts. Those who possessed real knowledge in religion attached themselves to the morals and ethics of religion and kept aloof from acts of communal separatism. “Outstanding theologian Maulana Asad was irreconcilably opposed to separatist politics. He was a great champion of Hindu-Muslim unity and found legitimacy for this unity in Holy Quran. He came up with the concept of Wahdat-e-din, i.e. unity of religions. According to this, laws and rituals might differ but the essence of religion is one…”

The apostles of communalism hold religion as the most important distinction or distinguishing mark in the society rather than any other distinguishing matter like language, gender, politics, etc…. “Religious

---

rigidities were over stressed by the respective elite of both the communities even cutting across the pressures of science and technology in the country. The elites on both sides have made use of religion for securing political and economic ends.”

Religion is deliberately used as a tool for mobilizing communal passions and the spiritual element in religion is not given importance. “Religion in the hands of the communalists is divested of all that makes it vital and eternal; it is reduced to a slogan, a symbol, an instrument to excite passions or to obscure reason- an opiate or a heady wine.”

Jawaharlal Nehru while delivering a speech in Punjab provincial congress in 1928 clearly stated that the Hindu- Muslim antagonism was rooted in the economic exploitation stimulated by imperialism. The role of religion is too less in a communal issue and the economic and political aspirations of both the communities play the major role.

“It is an outcome largely of anger and passion and when we regain our tempers, it will fade into nothingness. It is a myth with no connection with reality and it cannot endure. It is really the creation of our educated class in search of office and employment….. What does it matter to the Muslim peasant whether a Hindu or Muslim is a judge at Lahore? Economic issues run along different lines. There is a great deal in common between the Muslim, Sikh and Hindu (Landlords) and a great deal in common between the Muslim Sikh and Hindu peasantry; but very little in common between a Muslim peasant and a Muslim landlord.”

19 M G Golwalker, *We and Our Nationhood Defined*” quoted in *Religion and Nationalism in Modern India* by Ainslee T Embree, p.48
All phenomenon or happenings in the society are viewed and interpreted by the communalists in connection with religion. Social developments were given communal colour and no chance for a possible communal tension is missed. Undergrowth or malfunction of a community is put on the shoulder of the other community. Skillful hard work and excellence in a field is treated as domination of the rival community and the economic backwardness due to lack of effort is picturised as a result of domination of the rival community. “The communalists blame any personal failure to achieve an objective on the other community. The Muslim backwardness or a Muslim’s failure to get employment becomes the product of Hindu progress or animosity or domination. While the Hindu’s progress was diseased to be constantly thwarted or frustrated by Muslim hostility.”

Communalists are always persons who are having a record of past crimes. The active elements who propagate communalism and take an active part in communal situations are habitually criminals and misfits in a civilized society. Communalists are less popular in society with no social bondage. Commonly they have three qualities:

a) A weak bond with members of other community, little or no contact with them on intimate and equal status basis.

b) A sense of ethnic dissatisfaction, a feeling that they have no control over events affecting their fortunes.

c) A feeling that they are treated badly because of their ethnic background. Through violence they not only express their anger but

---

also extend communication and wield control over other groups. Other crimes they commit in secrecy and isolation, but riots give them the opportunity to come out in the open and indulge in criminal acts without fear or obstruction, condemnation or interference."21

The impact of communalism is depended on the character of the communal problem. Every communal issue is having a conspiracy behind it. They are not essentially a product of immediate provocations. The degree of force used in a particular communal issue is different from one another. Various groups practice communalism in different ways. The extreme level of communalism which is destructive, taking shape of terrorism and the isolated practice of communalism which limits to one’s own community is an example. In the opinion of T.K. Oommen there are many dimensions of communalism and he suggests six important dimensions “assimilationalist, welfarist retreatist, retaliatory, separatist and secessionist. Assimilationist communalism is one in which small religion groups are assimilated/integrated into big religious groups. Such communalism claims that scheduled tribes are Hindus or that Jains, Sikhs and Buddhists are covered under Hindu Marriage Act. Welfarist communalism aims at the welfare of a particular community, say improving living standards and providing for education and health; for example, Christian associations working for the betterment of Christians or Parsi associations working for the uplift of Parsis. Such communal mobilization aims at working only for the members of one’s own community. Retreatist communalism is one in which a small religious community keeps itself away from politics for example, Bahai community which proscribes its

members from participating in political activities. Retaliatory communalism attempts to harm, hurt, and injure the members of other religious communities. Separatist communalism is one in which one religious group wants to maintain its cultural specificity and demands a separate territorial state within the country; for example, the demand of some Mizos and Nagas in North east India or Bodos in Assam. Lastly secessionist communalism is one in which a religious community wants a separate identity and demands an independent state. A very small militant section of Sikh population demanding Khalistan is engaged in practicing this type of communalism.”22 The most extreme form of these are the retaliatory, separatist and secessionist. The practice of this type of communalism leads to virulent methods such as terrorism, communal riots and insurgency.

The Genesis of Communalism

The concept of communalism is not a very old one. Studies in this area prove that communalism was not developed or practiced as an ideology in ancient period or in the medieval periods. “Communalism was not a remnant of the past-a hang over from the medieval period…… Communalism was a modern phenomenon that arouse as a result of British colonial impact and the response of several Indian social strata.”23 “Many have underlined the fact that communalism as we know it is a new phenomenon, far from being of hoary origins, or even of very long standing it is a development of the late colonial period arising concurrently with nationalism if not being brought forward as a counterweight to it.”24

---

22 Ram Ahuja, Social Problems in India Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 1992, p.105
There is no convincing historical evidence for any communal riots in the ancient or the medieval period. In the feudal period when the king was the supreme authority, there was no communalism commonly in practice. Communalism began to spring up only in the colonial and capitalist society and reached its heights in the democratic society. As the basis of communalism lies in the competition for modern achievement and urge for political supremacy, this cannot be traced in the ancient or medieval period. “It is important to note that Indian society was never homogenous throughout the history, it was highly diverse religiously, culturally, caste-wise and linguistically but there was hardly any tension between these groups. It all began with the establishment of British rule in India and so most of the scholars agree that communalism is a modern phenomenon and not a medieval phenomenon.”25 It is true that before the coming of the British, there were some wars between religious groups but they were simply wars caused by political quarrels or by the ambitions of the rulers. Hindus lived in security and peace under Muslim rulers and vice versa. Hindu princes appointed Muslims to high official posts and positions. Muslim princes were also equally generous to Hindus.26

There is very little evidence in the history proving the rivalry of either states or kings in the name of religion. Muslim attacks on India is believed to have started in the 10th century A.D. Muslim conquerors like Muhammed Ghazni and Muhammed Gori were more interested in looting and plundering Indian princely states rather than spreading their religion in the conquered areas. Of course there were destruction of temples, building of mosques over these temples and efforts to convert the natives to Islam

etc. and these factors have given rise to some quarrels between the Hindu and Muslim communities. But these were not at all an enough ground for the origin and growth of communalism as an ideology. The malice of present communal practices was totally absent at that period. On the contrary there are several instances of cordial religious relations between the conqueror and the conquered. “When Sivaji sacked Surat, he brought back the copy of the Holy Quran bearing it reverently on his head.”

The British administration deliberately created rift between the two communities through favouring one against the other. The sphere head of resistance was flattened through offering more concessions and privileges. The Hindu community were generously supported and encouraged at a time when the Muslims rose against the British. Similarly the Muslim community got the patronage of the British when the Hindu nationalism was on the rise. Maulana Asad, a noted Muslim theologian who opposed the British separatist policies wrote in one of his articles… “Indian Muslims blindly followed the policy of the British government….. (They) broke of all relations with the Hindus who were the real active group in the country…..we were warned that the Hindus were a majority and if we went along with them, they would crush us. The result was that the government which should otherwise have become the target of the Muslim’s spears was saved and their own neighbours became their mark instead.”

Studies prove that in the ancient or in the medieval period, the communal or religious identity as a group was totally absent. The consolidation of one community under one religious spirit and keeping

---

hostile and antagonist feelings against another community cannot be traced in the history. The question of religious identity and the union under this religious umbrella was not there because it served no useful purpose. Before the advent of British there existed no religious identities which could unitedly move to achieve any gains. “There were a number of groups or Biradaris which had very diffused identities. Often it was difficult to find out whether he or she belonged to Hindu or Muslim. Until then there was no collective identity like the Hindu identity. It is clear that all India Hindu or all India Muslim community did not exist before the advent of British. It was the British who created such imagined communities.”

Moreover there was no need for a religious gathering or a collective bargaining under the banner of any community. As the feudal society was controlled by emperors and kings and not by democratic set ups the religious distinctions or rivalries had no scope. “In medieval ages neither there was any competition for power as we have in democratic society, nor competition for jobs, as jobs were bestowed by the monarch or the feudal lord according to his whim rather than norms.”

A feudal structure does not have the room to such competition between different communities in economic or political sphere. Nor there is any competition for public offices. Public appointments were based on loyalty to ruling dynasty and not on basis of competition. Also there is no political competition in a feudal society as rulers most often comes to power by force or inheritance rather by conducting elections. As the communalist master brains upholds and propagates, the history of medieval

---

30 Ibid, p.51
India and the wars which fought between different emperors are not of religious nature. The invasions of Muslim rulers were primarily not of religious motives. They fought wars and conquered parts of Indian subcontinent because of their political ambitions rather than propagation of faiths. The wars were not fought on religious grounds. As modern communalist advocates, the intention of a Mughal emperor conquering the land of a Hindu king was not necessarily for subjugation of the Hindus. Again the communalist deliberately conceals the fact that almost all rulers ruled by himself with the help of a ruler from other religious groups “A Muslim ruler had alliances with the Rajputs or the Marathas and a Hindu rebel often challenged the Mughal or other monarchs with the help of Pathans or other Muslims. It is also ignored that rulers of one religion fought against each other as much as the rulers belonging to other religions. Thus Babar fought against Ibrahim Lodhi and Humayun against Sher Shah Suri. Not only this, the son fought against his own father like Salim against Akbar and Khusru against Jahangir. Aurangazeb finally seized power by imprisoning his father and murdering his brothers…. When Aurangazeb fought against Shivaji, it was Mirza Raja Jaisingh who headed his army and Shivaji’s chief of artillery was a Pathan Muslim.”31 The imposition of Jisya—a poll tax imposed on non-Muslims- was considered as a communal harassment of Muslim rulers on the Hindu masses. But studies prove that Jisya was not only imposed on non-Muslims, but on Muslim people also. “When the Egyptian peasants, although Muslim in faith were made exempt from military service, a tax was imposed upon them as on the Christians in

lieu thereof.”32 There is also evidence in history to support the argument that Jisya was imposed only on religious lines. The financial crisis made the rulers to impose such taxes and political ambitions of kings some times made them to withdraw from levying Jisya. “Aurangazeb imposed Jisya not on religious basis…… was not motivated merely by his religious fervor which undoubtedly he did not lack. The depletion of his resources in his costly Deccan wars was no less a contributory factor…… for political compulsions his son Bahadur Shah had entered into a treaty with the Rana of Mewar in 1681 agreeing to abolish the Jisya and to grant other favours to the Rajputs in return for military support whenever he should enter into a contest for the throne with his brothers Asam and Akbar.”33

Often communal feelings are aroused on account of the destruction of religious places. The root cause of the major communal riot in India, The Ramjanma Bhoomi-Babri Masjid issue is of that nature. The Hindu communalist organizations allege that the Babri Masjid is built on the ruins of a temple demolished by Babar at the time of his invasion in 1528 and the so called place is said to have been the birth place of Lord Rama. But the genesis of communal conflicts cannot be traced back to medieval periods. As the Hindu communalists cite some examples of Muslim rulers demolishing Hindu temples, they keep silent about Hindus or Budhist demolishing each other’s place of worship. Those people who claim historical roots for religious animosities and fight over a particular place which is hailed as holy, forgets and neglects the fact that thousands of temples, mosques, churches, Gurudwars, Viharas and Jaina shrines and

such holy places are in the edge of collapse because of lack of maintenance and attention. The so called places could have been in healthy condition if the followers of each religion have gone their regularly. “The Budhist King Harsha of Kashmira systematically demolished Hindu temples and caused the idols to be dragged through the streets and lepers were made to spit and urinate over them. He had appointed an officer for the demolition of the temples called “Devotpadana nayaka.” Similarly many Hindu rulers were destroying Budhist temples. It was a Hindu King of Pataliputra who cut down the ‘Bodhi tree’, beneath which the Goutama Budha attained enlightenment, and constructed a Hindu temple there. Similarly the Jain temples were destroyed by Hindu rulers. It is also ignored that some of the Muslim rulers destroyed Masjids. Mahmud Ghazni destroyed many Masjids in Multan before he attacked Somanath in alliance with the Hindu rulers in Lahore. Aurangazeb destroyed a Masjid when he attacked Adilshahi ruler in Lahore……. Aurangazeb gave jagirs to many temples in Banaraz, Ujjain, etc.”

Mahatma Gandhi who gave his life for the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity went deep into the problem of communalism during his political life. Gandhi keeping in mind the dangerous effects of communalism on society tried to find the roots of communal problem in the past period. He was sure of the role of British in planting and nourishing communalism in India. Even then Gandhi traced back the communal problems and clearly found it was necessarily a product of the British policy and not an inheritance from

the past. He pursued all his efforts to bring communal harmony by keeping
this fact in mind.

“The two races lived at peace among themselves during the Muslim
rule, let it be remembered that many Hindus embraced Islam before the
advent of Muslim rule in India. It is my belief that had there been no
Muslim rule, there would still have been Mussalmans in India, even as
there have been Christians had there been no British rule. There is nothing
to prove that the Hindus and the Mussalmans lived at war with one another
before the British rule……. The late Moulana Mahomed Ali often used to
tell me. “If God”- Allah, as he called God “gives me life, I propose to write
the history of Mussalman rule in India and then I will show through
documents that British people have preserved, that Aurangazeb was not so
vile as he has been pointed by the British historian that Mughal rule was
not so bad as it has been shown to us in British history” and so on. And so
have Hindu historians written. This quarrel is not old; this quarrel is coeval
with the British advent.”35

The Revolt of 1857 is a landmark in the history of Indian freedom
struggle. Nationalist sentiments found its expression in its full fledge. The
British rule was shaken with the war of Independence as Hindus and
Muslims unitedly challenged the British hegemony. At that time the
Hindus and Muslims jointly tried to over throw the English emperor under
Bahadurshā Zafar, the last Mughal emperor. The failure of the revolt made
changes in the existing social and political structure. The feudal structure
of society was changed to colonial. British administration system was
introduced and realizing the danger in the harmony among masses they

Ahmedabad. 1963, p.6
adopted the policy of ‘Divide and Rule’. “To Gandhi communal disharmony in India is the bye product of a deliberate attempt of the British to sustain their rule. They can retain their hold on India only by a policy of Divide and Rule. A living unity between Hindus and Muslims is fraught with danger to their rule; it would mean an end to it.”36 The first important event which generated communal tensions in India was when the language of administration was changed from Persian to Urdu at lower level courts… Some Hindus of Benaraz agitated for replacing Urdu with Hindi written in ‘Devanagari’.

When the British established the colonial rule in India they initially tried to please Hindus and patronized them because they were facing resistance mostly from Muslim rulers. But after the 1857 mutiny in which both community fought shoulder to shoulder, they adopted the policy of divide and rule which triggered the communal clashes. The introduction of English education and the active participation of Hindu community in grabbing western education and the assumption of government offices by Hindu community widened cleavage between Hindus and Muslims. The pathetic conditions of the Muslims owing to their gradual displacement in government offices were the result of Muslim aversion to English education. The percentage of Muslim representation in government jobs began to dwindle and Hindus acquiring modern English education accessed more to government posts. “All sorts of employment big and small were being snatched away from Muhammedens and bestowed on others particularly the Hindus.”37

37 Ibid, p.80
Gradually Muslims are being driven out of the services and Hindus are being recruited in great numbers. It was announced in official gazette that no Muslim should be appointed. Recently there were some vacancies in the office of the commissioner of Sunder bans. Along with the advertisement, there was an official note that none but Hindus need apply.”

The Hindu elite welcomed the British rule as a ‘liberative’ one and began to hold higher offices in administration. The Muslim upper class viewed the foreign rule as a disaster because they lost their power and the retaliation measures of the administration were mainly focused on them. All these factors and some religious misconceptions about taking western education as contrary to Islam and several other factors made them backward in the modern education introduced by the British.

“The Hindus were quick to seize the opportunities for material and cultural advancement that this change in the system of education opened to the country as compared to Muslims. The Hindus who had been for ages under Muslim rule had no dislike for the language of their new rulers. As they learned Persian and Urdu under the Muslims, so they learned English under British.”

“Sir Syed Ahmed Khan a great thinker and educationalist urged Muslim elite to go for modern education to better their future. Thus the Hindu and Muslim elite began to compete for British jobs and political favour. This widened the cleavage between the two elite. The British fully exploited this in their favour.”

The relations between the Hindus and Muslims were not a matter of concern before the advent of foreign rule. The introduction of

39 Ibid, 1986, p. 79
modernization in administration and educational fields resulted in a social revolution in India. The entire social structure underwent some basic structural changes. “The reforms introduced by the British rulers in the political and administrative set up created such conditions in which the collision of economic and political interests of two communities was inevitable. The new social order created conditions of direct clash of interests between the Hindus and the Muslims for monopolizing administrative and economic power.”\(^{41}\) Thus the introduction of limited democratic platforms and the appointment to higher British offices led to conflict between elites of various communities. At the same time, the Hindu and Muslim masses remained aloof from these controversies and co-existed without such hostilities. The uneducated masses mainly agriculturist, peasants and small shop keepers were not interested in jobs or political posts.

The formation of Indian National Congress and the wave of national movement under Indian National Congress is another factor for the rise of communalism. The British realizing the mass support gained by INC sacked Muslim leaders like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. “The ground work for the rise of communalism in the 19\(^{th}\) century was prepared by Sir William Hunter, Mr. Beck and Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. Syed Ahmed Khan set up many Muslim organizations. Meantime Sir Syed followed a hostile attitude towards congress for interests of Muslims. He openly and widely propagated the idea of separate electorates with weightage. A meeting of Indian Muslim leaders was called at Dacca. They met there on 30\(^{th}\)

December, 1906 and resolved to establish a Muslim political organization of Indian Muslims came to be known as Muslim League.\textsuperscript{42}

To usher nationalist movement, freedom fighters like Thilak deliberately using Hindu idioms and symbols to draw Hindu masses to national movements, celebrating Hindu festivals as national celebrations and the emergence of Hindu educated class in the leadership of Indian National Congress etc… made the Muslim elite class more separatist. So they kept aloof from Indian National Congress and viewed it with suspicion. “Sir Syed Ahmed Khan did tent to take a rather partisan stand as a Muslim and regarded the Indian National Congress as a Hindu party and felt that India was not a nation. Thus he wrote to Badaruddin Tyabji, a retired Bombay high court Judge who thought it is necessary to join Indian National Congress: “The fact that you took a leading part in the congress at Madras has pleased our Hindu fellow subjects, no doubt but as to ourselves, it has grieved as much.”\textsuperscript{43}

“It is not the religion or respective religious beliefs that make hostilities between Hindus and Muslims. It is only the competition for elected posts and powers. Muslim theologians like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Shibli N’ Umani, Maulana Huzain Almed Madani, who were all religious personalities of international fame, never approved of Muslim League and separatists. The ‘Jami-at-al-Ulam-i-Hind’, an organization of the theologians of the Deoband School supported the Indian National Congress. They upheld the ideology of composite nationalism rather than

\textsuperscript{42} N. Jayapalan, \textit{The Origin and Growth of Communalism}, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1997, p.97

\textsuperscript{43} Azgar Ali Engineer, \textit{Communalism in India – A Historical and Empirical Study}, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1995, p.43
separatism." Throughout the course of freedom struggle the British tried as much as possible to create communal rift between the majority and the minority communities. The introduction of limited democratic measures and elections to provinces intensified the communal feelings. The prospects of freedom increased during the forties accelerated the urge for political power in turn increased the communal struggle between two communities. The fear in the minds of Muslims created by the British master minds about the domination of the majority community also gave fuel to the separatism and communalism. At this juncture, the two nation theory was raised by Jinnah. The partition of country and the formation of Pakistan is said to have been on the basis of religion. “Jinnah’s concept of Pakistan was not theological one. He envisaged a secular bourgeoisie state rather than Islamic State. Hamaz alavi, a Pakistani sociologist stated that “Pakistan was created by the Muslim ‘Salariate’ i.e. salaried men.” The minority consciousness and insecurity spread among the minorities created more communal atmosphere. Away from the idea of religious intolerance and differences, some theorists have approached communalism as phenomenon developed from a Majority-Minority problem. “According to Humayun Kabir, there was no clear cut existence of a minority before the advent of democracy and the consequent birth of democratic institutions and decentralization of power has developed multicenter of power.”

The origin of communal problem and its growth can only be accounted to the economic and political interests of the two major communities in India. In India, the term communalism is widely used to connote the conflicts between

---

44 Sarveppally Gopalakrishnan ed. *Anatomy of Confrontation-The Babri Masjid Ramjannahbhoomi Issue*, Viking Publishers, New Delhi, 1990, p.113
Hindus and Mussalmans. The other communities were less engaged in conflicts between them, even though there are instances of some. So the genesis of the phenomenon of communalism is definitely a product of the last two centuries, only after the invasion of the British. Their rule and policies intensified the growth of communalism. The political freedom and the rise of communal parties have made the situation like today. The gradually developed form of communalism which took its origin in the 19th century is now in an aggressive and destructive nature. The communal problems are the product of the interplay of the economic and political policies pursued by the British government. The seeds of communal hatred sown in the minds of both communities are still growing. The general feature of communalism for the past two centuries is that the beneficiaries of communal conflict are always the elite and middle class of the society. The poorer sections suffer terribly and they are actually the losers in a communal tension. The communal politics practiced by the political parties share the responsibility for the ongoing communal disputes and controversies. A detailed study of the history reveals the fact that communalism is a modern phenomenon which took its origin in the British colonial period and gained momentum at the time of freedom struggle and reached its heights at the time of partition.

“The real roots of communalism thus lay in the competition for jobs and governmental favours between the elites of two communities. Religion was not the substantive issue; of course religion does play a role in community formation and consciousness rising. But it was not at the root of genesis of communalism.”

47 Azgar Ali Engineer, Communalism in India – A Historical and Empirical Study, Vikas publishing House, New Delhi, 1995, p. 46
The Causes of Communal Conflicts and Violence

Communalism is a very complex phenomenon. If the menace of communalism is not bridled at the right time it will spread like poisonous gas and take the lives of thousands. Serious efforts have been made in the past to prevent and to control communal conflicts. The attempted interpretations are commonly focused on solving the problem in the top level, bringing the situation under the control of law. The history of communal conflicts in India is generally the history of Hindu-Muslim rivalry. In order to resolve the age long difference and hostility between the two communities is not an easy task. Resolutions made previously by means of enforcing laws and suppression has proved futile in the background of frequent recurrence of conflict between the two communities. Peaceful methods could only bring about lasting peace and harmony. To find a remedy for the mounting communal violence and its destructive after effects, a scientific approach is needed. “There is no legal solution to these issues because the legal solution touches only the externals and cannot reach the heart of the problem.”48 A lot of factors constitute the existence of communal conflict. If the problem is to be solved and communal harmony is to be ensured, the causes of communal problems should be dealt in depth. Although it appears that the reason behind a communal trouble is religious in nature, the detailed analyzing of incidents uncovers other reasons and causes.

Apart from religious factors, there exist numerous other causes for the occurrence of a communal problem. Historical distortions and false interpretation of history, the majority-minority problem, economic disparities

and imbalanced economic growth, role of political parties to gain political ends, lack of communication and misconceptions, efforts for conversion, social factors widening the gap are all the major causes which trigger a communal conflict. A detailed view into the factors which cause communal conflicts could only find a suitable peaceful resolution for the problem.

**Religious indifferences and misconceptions:**

The two religions of India which are accounted for the communal problems are having opposite faith and belief. Hinduism is a religion giving importance to outward experiences in worship. Islam rejects all types of rituals. Even though two religions teach the worship of God, the ways and methods extremely differ from one another. Some principles of Hinduism and Islam are viewed as very contradictory. Where Hinduism accepts the worship of God symbolized in images and erect temples in which idols are adored, Islam strictly rejects any sort of idol worship. No picture or symbol is used for worship in Islam. “Islam is sternly austere in its puritan rejection of music at the time of prayer. Hinduism by its metaphysical speculations and its accommodation to the crude idea of masses makes room for a pantheon of deities and heroes in its conception of the unseen and external. Islam arising from the bare solitude of Arabian desert has avoided metaphysical subtlety and insistent on the majestic unity of God, transcendent and omnipotent.”

The Hindu religion is having a number of Gods and the Islam worships the one and only God. The Hindu practice of idol worship is against the beliefs of Islam and they view Hindus as idolaters. “Islam

---

regards all idolaters as sinful. It refuses to allow any image worship and condemns idolaters as subject to divine wrath.”

The study about Hindu-Muslim problem in India reveals the fact that the contradictions in the religions have contributed to it in a great extend. Islam celebrates the festival Bakri-id by killing a goat and this has been a custom for centuries. This practice has got religious sanctions for them. But commonly cows are also slaughtered during this festival. Cow-slaughter is a thing which Hinduism opposes because they consider cow as a sacred animal and call it ‘Gomatha’. This slaughter of the sacred animal of Hindus agitates the illiterate Hindus almost beyond imagination. Cow protection societies were formed by Hindu organizations and forcible measures were taken against cow-slaughter. “In 1882 Swamy Dayananda Saraswathy founded ‘Gaurakshini Sabha’, a cow protection association and published ‘Gokarunanidhi’, a book which aims to rouse the Hindus against, beef-eating Christians and Muslims and to encourage them to petition government to stop cow killing.”

Muslims regarded this as a ban on their religious freedom. The Hindu militants even attempted to force Muslims not to kill the cow on the occasion of Bakri-id has led to violent communal riots in Punjab, U.P and Bihar. “When the followers of Islam lead a cow in a sacrifice along the main street with a sacrificial garland over its neck marking it out for slaughter, riots may take place.” Since the Hindu revivalist movement in the beginning of the 20th century, the Hindu identity rose to high degrees.

---

They considered the matter of cow slaughter as an attack against the religion and on the other hand, Muslims viewed cow protection as a ban on their right to practice their religious ritual. Communal riots broke out in the name of cow protection and the problem was not easy to tackle as both parties stick to their dogmas. The forceful attempts to prevent cow slaughter lead to mass man slaughter.

Islam rejects all sorts of music and noise at the time of prayers. Silence is an essential factor in the Islam worship. It is a customary practice in India that a noisy procession stops the noise when it passes by a mosque. The Hindu festivals and celebrations are always accompanied by loud music and beating of drums. When the procession from a temple goes through the road nearby a mosque and hesitates to stop the music, the Muslims gets agitated and attempt to stop the procession using force. This gives way to clash between the two communities. As the tension occurs near a mosque the intensity shoot up and often lead to communal riots. The religious ritual of one community opposed by the other could definitely flair up communal riots. The intoleration towards another faith take the shape of reaction, which often invites retaliation turning to violent clashes. The performance of religious rituals which deliberately or not deliberately causing inconvenience to other communities is a common reason for communal clashes. “The Muslims perform Namaz in their mosques when the crowd sometime overflow into the compound or the steps of the mosques and even on the public road or streets, the Hindus began to retaliate by holding ‘Maha Arati’. The phenomenon associated with Namaz’ is more witnessed in cities like Mumbai because the cities are crowded and roads are very often touching the walls of the mosques, temples or churches. Such actions not only create a law and order problem
but also some sort of bitterness among the communities leading to even communal riots.\textsuperscript{53} The music before mosque has been reason for a number of communal riots in India… The Hindu religious practice of singing ‘\textit{Bhajans}’ and ‘\textit{Keertans}’, praising the God or Goddess is a usual scene in India. Music and drum beats are unavoidable factors of Hindu religious culture. When these types of rituals interrupt or irritate the silent worshipers, the spirit of communal feeling is raised and ugly scenes are followed. This problem is also having origin in the conflicting beliefs and customs of the two religions. When the Hindu people hold the opinion that they are leading a procession only through a public road without provoking any one and not damaging any property, what right is there for the Muslims to block their way and stop their religions proceedings. The Muslim mind responding to the Hindu act results in communal clashes because the Muslims regard it as their religious commitment to do so.

The Hindus consider Islam a religion of foreign origin and views it as a creed highly intolerant to other religions. Islam is a strict monotheist religion and keeps condemn towards the polytheistic nature of Hinduism. The non believers are called \textit{kafirs} by Islam. Worshipping of earthly things, animals and trees which the Hindu culture follows is in direct contrary to Islam. “Hinduism does not pin its faith on a single book or on a single prophet. It has no particular founder or scripture…”\textsuperscript{54} Hinduism is like a federation of difference of religious creeds, theological schools and sectarian faiths that have survived in India from ancient times… Islam on the other side has got a powerful and rigid structure having only one God

\textsuperscript{53} Sarto Esteves, \textit{Nationalism, Secularism and Communalism}, South Asia Publications, New Delhi, 2001, p.15
and one scripture. Where Hinduism believes in *Karma* and rebirth Islam denies the idea of rebirth.

Apart from all these, the ongoing practice of both communities makes the cleavage more widened. Orthodox Hinduism regards it a sin to take food from a Mussalman and considers it as an impure thing. Inter-dining which can help a lot to avoid the harm of communalism is absent due to this reason. The misunderstood principle of ‘*Jihad*’ which is a matter of concern and suspicion for the Hindus over Islam is another factor of communal tensions. The misinterpretations about the idea of *Jihad* and the quoting extracted from Holy Quran justifying the holy war on non-Muslims also has given rise to Hindu animosity towards Islam.

The communalist fever spreads more effectively when the *Mahabharata* or *Ramayana* is wrongly interpreted. Examples are cited from the tales and epics to justify the use of physical force to subjugate the invaders or evil doers. The lesson of *Mahabharata* misunderstood as the victory of sword, and the theory of *Jihad* to defend one’s religion, is enough to flair up communal conflicts.

**Economic Disparities:**

Economic disparities between the two religions also contribute to conflict. The early British period was something which paralyzed the economic structure of Muslim society. Deprivation of government jobs and the transfer of traditional powers enjoyed by Muslims to Hindus such as collection of land revenue etc. made a widened gap between the two. In the post partition period the economically sound and well placed Muslims who held major offices and having ownership over land assets flew to Pakistan. The Muslim minority who stayed in India were not economically secure.
The survival of the Muslim community after the partition was something tough. The attitude of the majority community was not favourable for the Muslims to flourish in the economic field. The economic backwardness of Muslims due to illiteracy, lack of skills in professional area etc was analysed as a result of the Hindu isolation and domination. As free India progressed on the economic front with successive five year plans reducing the poverty line of its people and improving agricultural and industrial development, the economic condition of Indian Muslims deteriorated. “A study on data collected from 150 central government offices in 14 states showed that out of 75,953 employees there were only 3,346 Muslims, i.e., 4 percent.”55

The progress of one community was viewed with unpleasantness and the collapse of the opposite side was gladly welcomed in the communal atmosphere. The economic advancement made by the Muslims is alleged to be a result of Pakistani assistance. The Hindu advancement is observed as a domination and exploitation over Muslims. The communal tensions were arising out of this type of economic ups and downs of both communities. The vested interest groups having economic motives trigger the communal conflicts in order to gain through a riot. The Jabalpur riot is an example. “The apparent cause was the elopement of a Hindu girl with a Muslim boy. This brought strong religious cultural prejudices between two communities. The Muslim boy was the son of a local ‘beedi’ magnate, who had succeeded in establishing control over local beedi industry. His Hindu competitors were very sore over this development. It was not insignificant that the beedi industry belonging to the Muslims in Jabalpur suffered

heavily during the riots.” Economic tensions between the two communities lead to social tensions which can easily be turned into communal tension by exploiting certain situations on the occasion of religious festivals.

Economic distrust between different strata of society has taken the shape of communal conflicts in many areas during the pre-independence period. Several communal riots are having a background of economic issues. Through clever actions communal colour is given to divert the issue and to escape from the real problems. The economic relations among peoples of different religious identities paved way for communal conflicts. The distrust of peasants against land lords and money-lenders most often took to a stage of communal clashes. “The Mappila peasant uprisings of 1921 against land lords and colonial authorities could be given a terrible communal twist by the mullahs primarily because the class cleavage and antagonism in Malabar ran along religious lines—the rebellious Muslim Mappilas were tenants and their land lords and money lenders Hindu.”

The employment opportunities in Arabian countries, which were abundant in numbers due to the petroleum based industry, provided handsome jobs mostly for Muslims in the last quarter of the previous century. The foreign money and its luxurious utilization attracted more to the gulf countries. A chunk of the opportunities were snatched by Muslims as it was easy to get a placement for Muslim in a Muslim country. The foreign money made revolutionary changes in the society especially in some pockets were the Muslim population attained unbelievable economic

---

57 Bipan Chandra, Communalism in Modern India, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1984, p. 59
growth. The one sided progress of the society leaving the others in the previous ordinary stage created situation of intolerance. The economic upper hand gained by the Muslims with the help of ‘Arabian Salaries’ widened the gap between Hindus and Muslims in many parts of India. Religious feeling evoked to react against the other community was the method used by the so called communalists. “Although the real cause of conflict was economic competition, the increased degree of spending on religious activities like construction of more mosques, Madrasas and Maktabas were construed as a flow of Arab money to India to strengthen the Muslim fundamentalists. Such propaganda could easily cause a greater degree of hostility among Hindus and Muslims.”

Research done regarding the development of communalism has proved its connections with the vested interested peoples. The intolerance, jealousy and its gradual evolution to antagonism and to communal conflict is all bearing economic motives. Religion is used as a tool to mobilize the destructive action against the opponent. The smooth social condition in which Muslims secured economic heights alarmed the majority community in many places and viewed them with suspicion. “An analysis of communal riots brings out the true motive behind their outbreak; in most cases this view is not so much religious as economic. The worst occurrence has taken place in Bombay, Surat, Ahmedabad, Malegaon, Aurangabad, Moradabad, Pune, Meerut, Aligarh, Jamshadpur, Bhiwandi and such commercial centers where Muslims have managed to come up economically. In the aftermath they were practically wiped out.”

---

The Historical distortions:

The Historical distortions and the false interpretations of history which created hostile thought in the minds of both the communities, Hindu and Muslim. The writing of history has not been in the true sense as the historians who recorded the history at times had to keep the interest of their patrons. As almost all historians were receiving patronage from the emperor or the rulers, the writing of their history, not all of them but most of them, were having prejudistic approaches and tried to glorify their religion and to humiliate others. “The attack of the west was however directed more against Islam than Hinduism because it has always viewed the former as its eternal enemy. Apart from denouncing the religion as false and describing the Muhammed as the devil, it projected Islam as the religion of violence. Simultaneously with the British rulers, the western propagandists and then serious commentators as well, impressed up on the Hindus that their reconciliation with the Muslims was not possible because Islam give only two choices to non-Muslims: the Quran or the Sword.’’

The deliberate efforts of the British in bending the history for their smooth functioning of administration resulted in creating communal consciousness among the Indian society. The writing of history in communal lines by praising and cursing rulers by giving them religious ferment was the style of British historians in order to create antagonism in the minds of peoples. Conscious efforts to create division in the society were carried out by the British historians. “Some important Indian historians were caught in the communal trap laid by British historians. In keeping with the colonial policy of exploiting the religious sentiments of the Hindus against the

---

60 Rafiq Zakaria, The Widening Divide - An Insight into Hindu Muslim Relations, Penguin Books New Delhi, 1999, p.191
Muslims during the nineteenth century, British historians and archeologists charged the Muslim rulers with a uniform uninterrupted record of destruction of Hindu temples and persecution of the Hindus so that in contrast British rule might appear in a favourable light.”61

These types of propagations only add oil to the typical communal atmosphere prevailing in India. The distorted writings in history about the invasion of foreign rulers and classifying them on the basis of religion are visible. The wars fought between kings to maintain their territory or to conquer a nation was picturised as wars between Muslim and Hindu kings. Even the peoples of respective nations are coloured on the basis of religion or caste and not on the basis of Nationality. “The books that the children use and have been using for generations in schools and colleges spoke not very much of ‘Indians’ but of Hindus and Muslims; of Hindu rulers and Mughal emperors; of Shivaji’s battles and Muslim wars; of various religious communities and not of Indian society or Indian sons and daughters.”62 A sense of nationality which is to be inculcated in the minds of children and youth is thus replaced by colourful stories of religious struggles and revenges. This leads to the observation of current affairs in the light of communalist thoughts.

Even though the kings fought each other to secure their Economic ends, the wars fought are described as an art of humiliation of one religion by another. The killings in the wars which are usual in any war situation are characterized as religious harassment. Cruelties at time of war are also

61 R S Sharma, *Communal History and Rama’s Ayodhya*, Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1999, p.11
62 Sarto Esteves, *Nationalism, Secularism and Communalism*, South Asia Publications, Delhi, 2001, p.60
given justification by quoting some verses from Quran about dealing with non-believers and aggressors. Muslims as said in history have fought and killed Hindus who did not covert. Imposing of Jizya, making the soldiers slaves, abusing and raping of women, all are accompanied in writing of history with religious background. “In history rulers are not divided according to their motives, but to their religions. It is assumed that all Muslim rulers were wicked and that their religion required them to be fanatical, aggressive and violent similarly all the Hindu rulers were tolerant compassionate and guided by Dharma, the Hindu period was the Golden period and conflict started only after Muslims captured power.63

Religious achievements are connected with the Muslim invasion and capture of power in India. Tolerance between religions disappears when biased written history is read and understood. The Muslim biased writings in history claims that before the advent of Muslim rulers India was a land of uncivilized Barbarians and the Muslims made them civilized “Muslim historians glorify Muslim rulers for subjugating the ‘Kafirs’ and putting them in their place. The Muslim kings are also glorified as ghazis who bravely fought for the spread of Islam.”64 Religious biased history written by some historians to protect the interests of the then rulers and the colonial masters have resulted in creating hatred among the multi religious population in India.

The widespread notion of demolition of temples by the Muslim kings and destruction of idols keeps the fire of communal feelings in Hindu mind. Moreover erecting hoardings of kings and warriors, who fought

64 Ibid, p. x
against Muslim emperors, at a conference of Hindu communal organization and praising them as the savior of Hindu religion often makes Muslims insulted. The picturing Shivaji as a hero and Akbar as a villain could only help to spark communal conflicts. “The wars that were fought by the Ghoris, Khiljis, Thuglaks, Lodhis and the Mughals in India were all for the furtherance of their family fortunes. None of them was for Islam and none was so proclaimed by any of them. And yet the rulers were Muslims, their wars are described as jihad by historians.”

The Ramjanma Bhoomi – Babri Masjid issue is a recent example of the result of distorted history and its use for political fortunes by the power hungry communal politicians. Such historical incidents lead to a situation of communal violence, repression and revenge.

Majority-Minority Relations and the Insecurity Feeling of the Minorities

The strained relations between majority and minority and the insecurity feeling of the minorities in a majority dominated society develop the atmosphere for communal conflicts. The identity of majority community and minority community has been the product of British colonial period. Before the advent of British there was less minority consciousness among Muslims or other religious groups because democratic process was absent at that time. In Democracy the majority holder is the ruler and the law maker. In a country like India where Hindus account for the 80 percent of population, the minorities mainly Muslims do feel insecurity. To ensure the social well being and unity, the majority community should not turn against the minorities. In the words of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: “It is for the majority to

---

realize its duty not to discriminate against minorities, the moment the majority lose the habit of discriminating against the minority, the minorities can have no ground to exist. They will vanish.”

The majority communalism openly staging their adversity against minorities and condemning them as foreigners and traitors further complicates the problem. The Sangha parivar headed by R.S.S. and its related organizations such as Bajrangdal, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishat, Sivasena, Yuva morcha, Bharatiya Janata Party, Vishva Hindu Parishat etc… are making the cry that Muslims are anti nationals and they should be wiped out of country. The communal grouping of this fanatical Hindu communalist and their programmes and propagandas against Muslim had given rise to the phenomenon of Muslim fundamentalism. There are frequent references made by the sangh parivar that Hinduism is equal to nationalism and minorities are irresponsible group of people who claim and enjoy undeserving privileges without being patriotic and not working for the nation. “The feeling that Muslims are Pakistani agents was re-inforced during the Indo-Pak war. Rumours were rife then that Muslims employed in government service were involved in espionage activity for the Pakistan government. No one was beyond suspicion, so much so that there was a wide spread rumour–not denied by any one–that Nawas Mehdi Nawasjung, the then governor of the state Gujarat was a spy.” After the destruction of Babari Masjid the Muslim minority felt more insecure and minority communal groupings started spreading when the Sangh Parivar declared that their next target are Kashi, Madhura and Benaraz.

---

66 Quoted by M.V. Pylee in “Accommodating the Minorities”, in Indian Express. 18 January, 1991
The minorities have anxieties about themselves living in the midst of the so-called majority. Whatever places they go and wherever they approach, in schools, colleges, government offices, they experience the isolated feeling in the midst of majority. The anxiety turns into antagonism when the communal champions propagate poisonous ideologies. M.S. Golwalker, the founder of R.S.S. in his book, ‘We or Our Nationhood Defined’ states like this:

“The Non Hindu races in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language must learn to respect and hold in reverence to Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e., of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, for less any preferential treatment—not even citizen’s rights. There is at least should be no other course for them to adopt. We are an old nation, let us deal, as old nations ought to and do deal, with foreign races, which have chosen to live in our country.”

Hindu communalists want to even amend the Constitution of India. They have virtually declared war on Indian Constitution; it wants to make Hinduism as the religion of India and of all the Indians; others will be known as ‘Mohammadi Hindus’, ‘Christian Hindus’ etc. The minorities particularly if they are religious minorities will have to embrace Hinduism they will cease to enjoy any rights in the country.

The approach towards the minority even denying their virtual existence as citizens and condemning another person as foreigner and

traitor only because he practices a different religion other than Hinduism, definitely creates the alienated feeling. This leads to fundamentalist ideologies being developed in opposition to majority community dominance. “The Muslim minority consciousness also be attributed to the practice of Hindu revivalism which encourages the Muslim minorities to organize on a communal basis and once some Muslims did so, Hindu revivalism added fuel to the fire which inturn reinforced Muslim activity. Hindu agitation for Nagri Script agitated the Muslims to resist against it. Hindu campaign for a Hindu university encouraged Muslims to demand one. Hindu opposition for separate electorates for Muslims only made Muslims call for them more vehemently.”55 Thus the Hindu Muslim majority-minority consciousness has been a dominant factor in the growth of communalism in India.

The attitude of some Muslim leaders and organizations supporting Pakistan in a cricket Match against India, Hailing Osama Bin Laden, Saddam Hussain etc as heroes, call for observance of Jan-26-1987 as black day by Delhi `Imam, the Muslim terrorist acts killing innocent peoples through suicidal bomb attacks, printing Indian maps in which Kashmir deleted from it… all these are enough for the Hindu communalist to demoralize the minority community. The rigidity of Islam in practices and the lack of communication with the other communities raise suspicion about the religion. The Muslim gathering under fundamentalist organizations with Arabic names and their propagation of ideas secretly through Madrasas have also helped to raise the fingers of Hindu communalist against them.

Social Problems

The behaviour of the society is based on the culture prevailing in that society. Social imbalance due to unequal growth of population can be pointed as a factor constructing the growth of communalism. A reason for the Hindu distrust towards Muslims is that the latter’s refusal to use family planning measures and the subsequent result of the growth of Muslim population. The Hindu communalists propagate the view that the hesitation of Muslims to adopt measures of family planning is because they are having a hidden Agenda to multiply their strength. Vishwa-Hindu parishad made it as a campaign against the social non-commitment of Muslims and published many pamphlets. One of the pamphlet states like this.

“In order to appease them, the Muslims of India have been allowed to marry four wives; a practice now disallowed even in Muslims countries. As a result the population of Muslims in India which stood at 25 million at the time of partition has shot up to nearly 100 million, where as the population of Hindus has only doubled since then. According to the findings of the UNO, 25 years hence the Hindu count will shrink to less than 50 per cent of the country’s population since their growth rate is 23.69 per cent as compared to 30.85 per cent in the case of Muslims.” These types of misinterpretations create fear in the minds of Hindu masses and the Muslims view it as a propaganda deliberately spread against them. The practice of polygamy in Muslim society is another offense in the eyes of Hindus points out this practice as a measure to increase Muslim population. Social relations are strained when inter-religious marriage is attempted. A Hindu boy and Muslim girl if decides to marry and live together the religious rigidity acts on

---

them which leads to conflict between two communities. Several social factors thus contribute to the communal situation.

**Political Factors:**

Political factors are the primary things causing communal tensions in the present society. The political factors include religion based politics, polarizing society on communal lines to gain electoral victory, partiality of political parties towards one community, supporting a communal organization in their fanatic acts etc…..

India is a multi-religious country in which every religion is having the right to profess practice and propagate the religious ideologies. The practice of mixing up religion with politics or using religion for the sake of political gain is a reason for conflict between communities. The communal parties, without having any ideology or a vision about the future of the nation, try to control political arena through propagating religious ideologies. To win elections, the political parties get on the chariot of religions and appeal to the public to vote them to power. India has witnessed the disaster of depending on communal politics. The political aspiration finding its success through religious propaganda creates fear and distrust among other communities. To make sure the success of the party, the entire society is being poisonsly communalized and divided. By arousing such a religious ferment among the masses, by creating religious identities among the voters, such political parties get benefited. Political parties working for the attainment of *Hindu Rashtra* and the support of minorities rendered to some other parties against this agenda, divides the society. For Indians, religion is a highly emotional and sensitive subject. People's response is unpredictable if something is heard to have happened against their faith. The communal parties exploit this nature of the Indian
society and appear in the public as the apostles of one particular religion. This mobilization of communal ideologies in politics benefited the BJP in elections. It had only two Loksabha seats in 1984. Through ‘Rathyatras’ propagating ‘Hindutwa’ in a narrow sense and making proclamations to build temples on the places of mosques strengthened the party base. After the demolition of Babri Masjid the BJP and allies after 15 years came to power in India with BJP alone having 189 seats. These all years the BJP Lead Sangh Pariwar was indoctrinating the Hindu minds “the specter of Hinduism in danger” “Hindu are becoming a minority” “Hindu have lost self respect in their own land’, ‘Hindus are humiliated by foreigners’ and such gimmicks are dinned into the years of the ignorant and given an authenticity by power hungry communalists.”

The issue of Ramjanmabhoomi- Babari Masjid was upheld by the BJP and its allies and it was carried on through the political campaigns of the party. The demolishing of Babri Masjid started a series of communal riots. The Muslim minority on the other hand openly supporting the political rivals of BJP and rallying themselves behind them worsened the conditions. The political parties who are supposed to work for the national integration thus work against it. The hunger for political power creates communal problems. The Bhiwandi communal riot is an example. Bhiwandi in Maharashtra was a centre of powerloom industry with Muslim domination in ownership and labourers. The Municipality of Bhiwandi was receiving high revenue income through octroi from passing trucks as the town was situated on Bombay Agra national high way. Some Muslims having amassed much wealth wanted to get a hold in the political set up of

57 Sarto Estevis, Nationalism Secularism and Communalism, South Asia Publications, New Delhi, 2001, p.212
Bhiwandi, challenging the traditional leadership in Municipal administration. This led to a major riot in 1970. The main reason behind the riot was the political aspirations of one community and their resorting to communal politics.

The government sponsored communal conflicts in which the state machinery itself takes a partisan stand in favour of one religion generates considerable amount of hatred and violence. This partial nature of governments further aggravates the minorities especially the Muslims which leads to communal violence and sometimes to terrorist activities. The Muslim controlled parties like the IUML, INL, and PDP which are operating in Kerala are having roots in Muslims dominated districts like Malappuram and Kozhikode. The Hindu community views these parties with suspicion, as they are only committed to safeguard the interests of Muslims only.

Communalism is a polarization, polarization of one community against the polarization of another. The communal politicians cleverly exploit their polarization and transform the polarized emotions to votes. Deliberate efforts are made to keep the society in a polarized situation so that the consolidation taken place results in the election victory. The administration machinery the police and the media is often used to mobilize the so called separatism. Then only emergence of minority saviors and champions of Hindutwa ideals could prevail. “The Hindu champions could not survive for a day every problem is attributed to Islam and as a result Ram has become an antidote to Babar.”68 The Muslim communalists cleverly hide the facts in history that there were

---

68 Sarto Estevis, *Nationalism Secularism and Communalism*, South Asia Publications, New Delhi, 2001, p.74
fights among the Muslim rulers to capture power. The Mughal emperor Aurangzeb captured power by killing his brothers and imprisoning his father Shah-jahan. Shah-jahan who built the marvelous Taj Mahal in contentment wrote the following words.

“Praise be to the Hindus in every matter
Specially in the manner they provide water to their dead
But, thou my son, what a marvelous Mussalman you are
That even in life, thou depriveth me of a drop of water.”

Deliberate attempt to spread communalism and the illegal favour done to please a specific community can be seen in the destruction of Babri Masjid. The role of the government officials and police in the destruction of Babri Masjid is visible from the words of Rai, the head of the border security force, present there at Ayodhya. He says there are historical evidence about the inaction of police and other government forces in the event of destruction. He states like this:

“In 1990 when Mulayam Singh Yadav’s government was in power, 300 men protected Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. Though around a hundred frenzied persons climbed the domes, they could not damage it. Two years later on 6th Dec 1992, we had a situation where the entire force of the U.P. police, CRPF and Indo Tibetan Border force exceeding 20,000 were guarding the structure. The video cassette recording by the intelligence Bureau clearly documents that not more than 3000 to 4000 Kar Sevaks were within close proximity of the Mosque. In such a scenario could no effective action have been taken? The reason why no action was taken lies elsewhere. The same cassette shows policemen rejoicing with their hands held high in victory when Babri Masjid was destroyed. The district
Magistrate and the other officials where dancing with delight. That is why the Kar Sevaks could not be stopped."58

Communalism in India is often generated by the political minded people to capture power or the ruling class to maintain their power. Religion is very cleverly used by the political master brains to reach the desired end. Appeasement and harassment policies adopted by political parties towards religious groups are a major factor which creates communal antagonism in the society.

**Conversion and Religious Reformist Movements:**

Normally conversion is understood as “formal or ritualistic affiliation of a person to a different faith by one means or another, say by preaching merely or even by force or fraud or material inducement.”69

Conversion and religious reformist movements also made the division between the Hindu and Muslim community wider. The Hindu revivalist movements emphasizing on the glorification of Hindu culture and religion sometimes crossed the limit to humiliate other faiths by praising the Hindu Kings and picturing the Muslim kings as invaders. The Arya Samaj founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswathi in 1875 was a social reformist organization but kept religious ideologies live in the agenda. “Dayananda’s Arya Samaj vigorously rejected Christian and Muslim ideas together with Christian and Muslim missionizing and asserted that the ancient Hindu veda is the only authentic scripture.”59 The Brahma Samaj of Rajaram

---


59 Gerald James Larson, *India’s Agony over Religion*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p.130
Mohan Roy, Sree Ramakrishna mission established by Swami Vivekananda also advocated the revival of Hindu culture. Another reformist and national figure was Aurobindo Ghosh. He equated nationalist struggle for freedom with a profound religious mission. In one of his early speeches he proclaimed. “Nationalism is not a mere political programme, nationalism is a religion that has come from God.”

The overstressing on Hindu revivalism which in turn developed into a movement of conversion disturbed the communal harmony. The movement started by Dayanand Saraswathi was an offensive one against other religions. He developed a special purification ceremony called ‘Shudhi’ by means of which Hindus who had been converted to Islam or Christianity could be re-converted or re-admitted into the Hindu tradition. The Muslims viewed this as an attack against their religion. “This not only agitated the Muslim mind but also forced the community to counter such movement by way of ‘Tabligh’. This opened up another area of confrontation between the Hindus and Muslims.”

To the communalist Hindus conversion seemed so intolerable. The high caste Hindus who declared themselves as the apostles of Hinduism could not bear the adivasis, Harijans and other Scheduled Caste Hindus converting them to Islam or any other religion. The mass conversion of the so called scheduled caste Hindus to Buddhism Jainism or Christianity is common, nowadays. This conversion is not intended to attain the superior spiritual bliss. “But if a depressed classman converts himself to Islam, he is

60 Gerald James Larson, India’s Agony over Religion, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p.131
able to get rid of the social disabilities undergone by him previously and is easily able to move freely with others whose recognition he can easily perceive.62 The caste Hindus could not tolerate the situation as the conversion of the scheduled castes or tribe into Islam is a double blow to them. The Harijans treated by them as untouchables and neglected cease to be under their boots now. The other thing is that they have joined Islam, the religion which they oppose most and condemn as foreign. The forceful efforts to reconvert the converted Hindus have given rise to communal riots in several parts of the country.

The missionary works undertaken by the Catholic Church especially in the tribal areas and the Protestants and Evangelists operating their institutions in South Indian states are said to have involved in conversion. The conversion made from one faith to another by means of persuasion and material inducement invites communal conflict. Rejecting the faith in which one previously believed and embracing another faith accompanied by open declaration that the previous was inferior and the latter one superior naturally arouses communal animosity.

**Secularism as an Antidote to Communalism**

Communalism has been understood as the antagonism kept against another community. The opposite of communalism in India is considered to be secularism. The term secular and the concept of secularism gained relevance in the post-independence period. Before independence, the term used opposite to communalism was nationalism. “The term ‘secular’ with its corresponding Latin word ‘saecularis’ literally means worldly rather than spiritual, not relating to religion or bound by monastic restrictions. It

---

means the spheres of secularism and religion are distinct, independent, exclusive and separate without penumbral zones.”

The concept of secularism in the West is a product of the struggle between church and the princes. The urge for political rule rather than the supreme political power of the church resulted in furious battle between the two. The economically and socially strengthened mercantile bourgeoisie aspired for political power allied with the princes. They aspired for a secular role as the church rule had no room for secular, democratic, scientific values as the church rule considered the power as divine inheritance. Secularism emerged in the Western Europe as an opposite ideology to the church hegemony and as a protest against wars and massacres in the name of religion. Secularism in the west is originated as an anti-religious principle. The Oxford dictionary defines it as “The doctrine that morality should be based solely in regard to the well being of mankind in the present life, to the exclusion of all considerations drawn from belief in God or in a future state.” The term secular is defined as “Worldly or material, not religious or spiritual” in Oxford advanced learners dictionary of current English.

“In Roman empire, diverse religious beliefs and practices were generally tolerated as long as they did not become politically dangerous ….that is religious diversity made toleration necessary, if peace were to be maintained within the state.” The Indian concept of secularism is not necessarily a rejection of religious practices. The Indian culture is deeply religious and Indian society cannot be separated from religious beliefs. The

logical attitude of getting rid of religion all together was too Utopian for Indian society, when many religions were deeply entrenched. So the more practical answer was not opposition to religion, but the removal of religion from public affairs, the separation of the state from all faiths, the insistence on religion as a private matter for the individual with no bearing on civic rights and duties and freedom for the profession of diverse forms of religious worships, provided they did not come into conflict with each other."73 Getting rid of religion altogether from the society is rather avoided. There is room for every one to practice one’s religion, provided that the practice does not come into conflict with one another. ‘In Indian context, secularism means equal respect for all faiths and the state keeping itself impartial in not preferring to one another. Secularism in India does not stand for the abolition of religion, but only for the separation of state and religion.

While accepting the identities of various religious groups and their freedom to propagate, secularism limits all those practices to the private life and negates every idea of mixing religion in the public life. In a country like India where hundreds of religions exist, limitation of religious practices to private life is necessary. Majority communalism is more dangerous when it takes on virulent forms because the state’s coercive apparatus may often be controlled by a majority in a democracy. “Minority’s communalism is equally anti-secular and fraught with potential for explosion. The only way of life

---

India can adopt is on the lines of secularism in the sense of friendly relations among all religions and their followers.”

The secularist idea in India is highly tolerant towards other religions, does not deny the freedom for individual to practice religion and ensures equality for all religions. “It is not devoid or hostile to spiritual or religious values. It acknowledges the universally accepted dictum that, in a democracy man must have a right to practice his religion.” The state becomes secular when it keeps aloof from patronizing or opposing any particular religion. In an ideal secular state, freedom will be given to every one of its citizen to practice propagate and profess one’s religion. The Indian constitution guarantees the fundamental right to the citizens of India that every one will be given equal protection before law. The ‘article 15’ of Indian constitution clearly states that there will be no discrimination in India against any citizen on grounds of religion, race caste, sex or place of birth. The supreme court of India has made an observation regarding the nature of secularism in Indian constitution.

“Religious tolerance and equal treatment of all religions and protection of their life and property and of the place of their worship are an essential part of secularism enshrined in the constitution. We have accepted the same goal not only because it is a historical legacy and a need of our national unity and integrity but also a creed of universal brotherhood and humanism.”

---

74 Sarto Estevis, *Nationalism Secularism and Communalism*, South Asia Publications New Delhi, 2001, p.127
75 Ibid, p.95.
76 Sarto Estevis, *Nationalism Secularism and Communalism*, South Asia Publications New Delhi, 2001, p.182
The basic characteristics of Indian secularism are tolerance towards religions, right of religious freedom and the state keeping impartial in the matters of religion. These basic characters of secularism holds the nation united even in its vast religious and cultural plurality. Our country is a ‘Secular Democratic Republic’ and not a theocratic one like Pakistan. Interfering in the matters of citizen’s religious beliefs, not compelling to join or withdraw from a specific religion, not imposing religious education in the schools and colleges, not levying taxes for the promotion of a particular religion, not declaring one religion as the official religion, not keeping any hostility towards a religion all makes the state a secular one. A secular state guarantees equality of its citizens and freedom for the religions

“Freedom of religion means the individual is free to consider and discuss with others, the relative claim of differing religions and come to his decision without any interference from state. He is free to take up or reject any religion and he has the freedom to practice, profess and propagate. The state cannot dictate the religious belief on an individual or compel him to profess one particular religion. However in a secular state, the state can regulate the manifestations of religion in the interest of public health, safety or morals.”

Secular governments are entrusted with the duty to protect each and every citizen’s right to uphold his religious identity. When the governments consciously or unconsciously fail to perform this duty, its secular nature fades and communal colours appear. Even before the making of the constitution, the Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru

---

in a speech to the nation broadcasted hardly 4 days after independence, on 19th August 1947 said like this: “Our state is not a communal state, but a democratic state in which every citizen has equal rights. The government is determined to protect those rights.”

Religion is a private matter of every individual. He has got the right to believe and propagate; but not at the cost of co-religious and their beliefs. The secular ideology negates all forms of religions hostility and upholds the principle of religious toleration and recognizes the identity of every religion. “Secularism therefore is not anti God, it is not atheism, it is not anti-religion or anti -religious, it is not Godlessness; it is not irreligious.” Jawaharlal Nehru spoke in this connection ‘A secular state does not mean an irreligious state. It only means that we respect and honour all religions, giving them freedom to function’. The government of India is a secular one and has not been indifferent to religions, but has attempted to treat every religion in the country in equal status. D.E. Smith defines a secular state like this: “secular state neither is a state that guarantees individual and corporate freedom of religion, deals with the individual as a citizen irrespective of religion, is not constitutionally connected with a particular religion nor seeks either to promote or interfere with religion.”

The Basic characteristics of Indian Secularism can be stated as follows.

---

79 Sarto Estevis. Nationalism Secularism and Communalism, South Asia Publications New Delhi, p.82
80 Rajeev Bhargava, Secularism and its Critics, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998, p.178
• Freedom of religion
• Exclusion of state from religious matters
• State not being anti-religious
• Citizenship not depended on religious identity
• Equality of every individual under law.

Secularism is an essential factor which should be practiced in the political arena. Secular politics ensures the protection of the nation’s unity and integrity. An atheist nature is not needed to maintain secularism. But bringing religion to politics and using religious connections to gain in politics is contrary to the spirit of secularism. As we know communalism often springs up from manipulated politics. Secularism is not a negation of religions, but at the same time it does not allow religion to be a deciding element in the state affairs. As Ainslie T. Embree puts it “Advocates of secularism in India always insisted that far from being hostile to religion, they valued it.” But Belief in God, practicing a religion, preaching its principles are not against secularism. But bringing religion to public places, trying to propagate one’s religious principles in government institutions, practicing of religion annoying other religionists are contrary to the principles of secularism. This may arouse communal feelings which can lead to tensions between communities. Ensuring freedom and at the same time limiting the freedom for religious expressions are the essence of Indian secularism. Sarveppally Radhakrishnan’s observations in this regard are to be noted:

“When India is said to be a secular state, it does not mean we reject the reality of an unseen spirit or the relevance of religion to life or that we exalt irreligion. It does not mean that secularism itself becomes a positive religion or that the state assumes divine prerogatives. Though faith in the supreme is the traditional basic principle, the Indian state will not identify itself with or be controlled by a particular religion. We hold that no one religion should be accorded special privileges in national life or international relations, for that would be violation of the basic principles of democracy and contrary to the best interest of government and religion. No person should suffer any form of disability and contrary to the best interest of government and religion. No person should suffer any form of disability or discrimination because of his religion, but all alike should be free to share to the fullest degree in the common life. This is the basic principle involved in separation of church and state.”\textsuperscript{82}

Protection and fearless living ensured to minorities and other depressed class is an essential requisite for a society to term it secular. “Secularism in India means a policy that, of necessity and \textit{ex professo} allows all religions to function and operate according to their specific vision and ethos.”\textsuperscript{83} Indian secularism does not reject religion and spirituality rather spirituality becomes the foundation of secularism and it only means equality of religions in the eyes of the state. It does not mean special privilege to any religion nor does it mean anti religion and all that it


\textsuperscript{83} Sarto Esteves, \textit{Nationalism Secularism and Communalism}, South Asia Publications New Delhi, 2001, p.102
The concept of secularism in India is the best antidote to communalism. In a society where secular values prevail, it’s hard for the communalist to sow the seeds of religious fundamentalism. The uniqueness of Indian secularism is that it admits the freedom of religion unlike its western type of avoiding religion. This religious freedom granted in the secular concept, makes the consolidation of religious people under one umbrella.

The cultivation of secular ideas in Indian society in a wider sense would definitely check the hazards of communal rivalry. Teaching of secular values especially, Gandhian secular values in the schools and universities and extending the teaching to villages is the key to a secular society. Unlike any other political ideology, secularism is best suited in the Indian social context. The way out of the communal problem rests in the real practice of secularism as envisaged in the constitution of India.

---