Chapter – 2

Communalism and Communal Violence: Historical Perspective

2.1 Introduction

IN INDIA, communal violence has a long history. In fact, communal violence had started before the arrival of the British rulers in India. The British rulers exploited the feelings of Hindus and Muslims by their policy of ‘divide and rule’. The British obviously did not create the Hindu-Muslim communal problem, but they did exploit it for their own purposes from time to time.

It will be wrong to believe that the British rulers were responsible for religious or communal feuds. However, the British rulers did play an important role in the promotion, spread and growth of communal problem in India. The medieval rulers did not encourage communal violence what the Colonial masters had done.

In India, the problem of communal violence did not grow up suddenly. It is rooted in the past. It is not the product of religion but of the politics of elites of a religious community. It is not only confined to Hindus and Muslims but recently violence against the Christian community has also increased.

The communal violence has continued even after India became Independent. The British sowed such seeds of hatred that today Indians are facing its consequences even after 65 years of independence. The British rulers made religion a tool of hatred instead of love.

It is, therefore, necessary to look into the problem of communalism and communal violence, which can be divided into three periods.
Muslim Period.

British Period.

Post-Independence Period.

The purpose of periodization is only to see the steady growth of communalism and communal violence in different phases of Indian history. By doing this, an attempt has been made to trace the problem in a systematic manner.

2.2 Muslim Period

It is generally accepted view that Islam arrived into India by way of invasion by Muhammad Bin Qasim but this is not true. Islam entered India through Kerala on the West Coast through the Arab traders in a peaceful manner. The region called Malabar in Kerala is Indianised form of *ma’bar* that in Arabic means ‘passage’. The Arabs, in fact, had been trading since pre-Islamic days and then embraced Islam after the last Prophet (pbuh) began preaching. As these Arabs settled as traders on Indian soil, they married the local women in Kerala and their offspring spread in different parts of that region. Thus, this was the real entry point of Islam into India.¹

In Northern India, Islam entered through invasion of Muhammad Bin Qasim, a young general sent by Yusuf Bin Hajjaj, the Governor of Iraq, during the period of Umayyad in the later part of the 7th century; and it has become the sore point in relations between Hindus and Muslims.

India had been invaded by the Arabs, the Turks, the Afghans and finally by the Mughals. In fact, many Hindu rulers invited the Muslim rulers including

Babar in order to settle scores with local rulers. However, in contemporary school textbooks, Babar is projected as invader and strongly condemned. These myths of history increased communal conflicts between Hindus and Muslims.

India has been a multi-religious, multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-racial and multi-regional character for centuries. Forces of tolerance have always been strong in its soil. Besides others, Akbar, the great symbol of tolerance and openness to other religions, had tried to bring the Hindus and the Muslims closer with the bond of love.

The ‘Sufi’ and ‘Bhakti’ Movements acted as bridge builders between the Hindus and Muslims and brought about the birth of composite culture at lower rungs of society. The Sufis believed in the doctrines of *Wahdat-al-Wujud* (i.e. unity of being) and *Sulh-i-Kul* (i.e. total peace and peace with all). Both these doctrines brought about cordial relations with all communities.

The poets, litterateurs and writers also brought about a confluence of thoughts. Dara Shikoh, son of Shahjahan was a great believer in the doctrine of *Wahdat-al-Wujud*. In his book *Majam-al-Bahrayn*, (i.e. Meeting of Two Oceans), he tried to synthesize the two great religions—Islam and Hinduism. He rejects artificial barriers between faiths. Scholars like Al-Beruni and Amir Khusro were other noted personalities in this context.

The Hindus and Muslims influenced each other positively in many areas. However, this was limited to the upper and educated classes of both communities. There were number of differences between two communities. The relations between Hindus and Muslims were never cordial except during the brief period of the Mughal rule. During the later Mughal period (1605-1748), the relations among the Hindus and Muslims were cordial and characterised by goodwill, mutual love and toleration. However, in the time of later Mughals, there were communal clashes on the mass scale.
Therefore, the religion is neither a necessary nor always a bonding element. History is replete with instances of intra-faith wars between the Hindu kingdoms, the Christian nations and the Muslim states and of violent conflicts between different sects of the same religion.

The first reference to tension between Hindus and Muslims could be found in Ibn Batuta’s travels to India during the second half of the 14th century. He noted, “There was a colony of about 4,000 Muslims at Mangalore ruled over by Ram Deva living in the suburb alongside the town.” He further says that frequent conflicts broke out between them and the town people, but the Sultan ensured pace between them because of his need of merchants.²

In 1713, according to Khafi Khan, there was what may be called a religious disturbance, which took place at Ahmedabad in Gujarat.³ This is regarded as the first riot before the British presence in India became effective. The incident turned so serious that the Sultan had to intervene in the matter.

Rustam Ali in his book Tarikh-e-Hind, written in 1759, described a conflict in Delhi that contained within it seeds of a major communal riot. On Friday, rioting took place, and in the Jama Masjid area 17 people killed, and a steward of the King, Sher Afghan Khan wounded. Still, in spite of the fact that an important government functionary seriously wounded, the rioting did not spread, nor did it last for more than one day and neither did the state encourage it in any way.⁴

In the 18th century, communal violence took place in Kashmir (1719-20), Delhi and Kashmir (1729), Ahmedabad (1730) and in the Vidharbha region of

---
³ Id. at 35.
Maharashtra (1786). In the beginning of the 18th century, the Mughal Empire collapsed, a martial Hindu renaissance spread across India, bringing with it, a wave of Hindu-Muslim bloodshed. Britain’s conquering presence had forced its *Pax-Britannica* on the warring sub-continent but the mistrust and suspicion in which the two communities dwelt remained.

While explaining the relation of Hindus and Muslims and communal violence in India during pre-British rule, Hugh McPherson wrote:5

- The differences, which separate Hindu and Muslim, are essentially religious. They may be reinforced by historical tradition, by political rivalries or by economic contracts, but for the great masses of the population it is religious issue that counts. Such purely religious causes explain most of the communal disturbances of which we have record in the earlier years of the British rule. Before that, Banaras (now renamed Varanasi) had been a storm centre, since Aurangzeb built his famous mosque there on the site of an old Hindu temple. In October 1809, there was a sudden outbreak of great intensity, when a Hindu mob stormed the mosque and put to death every Muslim of the neighbourhood who fell into their hands. Order was not restored until some fifty mosques had been destroyed and several hundred people had lost their lives.

It is important to note that it is clash of interests and stakes, which brings about communal tensions in society and not clash of religions. In medieval period religious communities were not politically organized, they were distinctly different yet not hostile to each other, as they did not cater to political needs.

### 2.3 British Period

It is not true to say that communalism and communal violence developed only after the British presence in India became effective. In India, the

---

communal conflicts between the two communities based on religious and other issues already existed even before the advent of Muslims in India. The religious conflicts between different beliefs also existed at that time. The communal differences were already important aspects of Indian society when the British gained control of India.

The British official record and historians like Christopher Bayly have furnished some evidence. In the Varanasi Gazetteer of 1907, a description of the riot of 1809 has mentioned:

- The only disturbance of the public peace occurred in 1809 and the following year when the city experienced one of those convulsions, which had so frequently occurred in past owing to the religious antagonism of the Hindu and Mussalman (Muslim) sections of the society.

In his work, “The Pre-History of ‘Communalism’?—Religious Conflict in India, 1700-1860”, Bayly puts forward a theory of the continuity of communal riot. According to him, the traditional of communal skirmishes were much older than the effective British intervention in Indian society. He mentions many incidents, which according to him; resemble the communal riots of Colonial times.

In 1816, a treaty was signed between Bahu Begum (wife of Nawab Shujadullah and the mother of Nawab Asafuddaullah) and the British Resident that the maintenance of peace in Ayodhya would be the responsibility of the East India Company, but the British refused to take any steps in this direction. The Babri Masjid dispute was most useful to the British policy of ‘divide and rule’ because primary differences of Indian society lay embedded within it.

6 Rai, supra note 4 at 26; see also the District Gazetteer of Varanasi 207-08 (1907).
7 Rai, ibid.
8 Id. at 20. (In 1816, she entered into an agreement with the East India Company, according to which Faizabad and Avadh came under the influence of the Company for the purposes of revenue collection and policing).
During the first half of the 19th century, there were several communal disturbances in North India. C.A. Bayly of Cambridge University reports that these occurred at Varanasi (1809 & 15), Koil (now renamed Aligarh) (1820), Moradabad, Sambhal and Kashipur (1833), Shahjahanpur (1837), Bareilly, Cawnpore (now renamed Kanpur) and Allahabad (1837 & 52) and other places. Among the causes of these clashes was the downgrading of the Muslim state functionaries, and the consequent declines of Muslim dominance, following the British conquest of the area.9

In the 19th century, country witnessed a marked increase in the frequency of communal riots. Therefore, it is important to note that in India, communal disturbances were regular feature before the arrival of the British.

Prof. Donald E. Smith is of the view that:10

➢ British obviously did not create the Hindu-Muslim communal problem; they did it for their own purpose from time to time.

Jawaharlal Nehru also views it that:11

➢ It is easy to criticize and blame others and the temptation is almost irresistible to find some excuse for the failure of one’s plans...of course the British Government in the past and present have based their policy on creating divisions in our ranks...To ignore it and not to provide against it in itself a mistake in one’s thought.

The unity shown by the Hindus and Muslims during the revolt of 1857 became an eyesore to the British. Even after the failure of the revolt, the bond between the two communities remained undisturbed. Sir Syed Khan and Mohan Roy worked hard to maintain the relations of Hindus and Muslims.

---

10 Supra note 5 at 86-87.
11 Id. at 87; see also Jawaharlal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru: An Autobiography 136 (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1989).
Thus, they adopted the policy of ‘divide and rule’, which becomes amply clear from the words of Lord Elphinstone, the British Governor of Bombay (now renamed Mumbai), who said, “divide et imperia was the old Roman motto, and it should be ours.”\footnote{Ravindra Kumar (ed.), \textit{Problem of Communalism in India} 3 (Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1990).}

Under the ‘divide and rule’ policy formulated by Lt. General Coke, the rulers always emphasised the difference, not similarities.

When Lord Bruce Elgin was the Viceroy of India (1862-63), the British Secretary of State Mr. Charles Wood wrote to him from London:\footnote{Mahmood Bin Muhammad, “Ethos of Secularism”, 14(360) \textit{Nation and the World} 21 (December 1, 2006). See also Bharat Dogra, “Tolerance: Lessons of History”, \textit{The Hindustan Times}, March 30, 1995.}

\begin{itemize}
\item We have maintained our power in India by playing off one party against the other and we must continue to do so. Do all you can, therefore, to prevent all having a common feeling?
\end{itemize}

Similarly, George Francis Hamilton, Secretary of State for India, wrote to Lord Curzon that we should so plan the education text books that the differences between community and community are further strengthened. Lt. General Coke of Moradabad said that the principle of the government should be to ‘divide and rule’.\footnote{Dogra, \textit{ibid}.}

Thus, the British rulers found \textit{divide et impera} to be useful motto and division of the Indian people along religious lines to maintain and to preserve the British Empire rather than to protect or promote one community and its interests against another community.

In the medieval period, the state did not directly interfere with the day-to-day life and social observance of its citizens. After 1857, the state had started intervening in everyday life through various institutions. The abolition of East India Company’s rule in 1858 and the introduction of many half hearted
democratic measures promoted a number of caste and communal conflicts. In 1880, the principles of separate electorates implemented in Punjab increased the communal problem.

The common causes of communal violence have been cow slaughter, religious processions and playing music before mosque. From 1870 to 1895, communal violence was reported from Bareilly and Pilibhit (1871), Malabar area (1873, 1885, 1894 & 1896), the Central Provinces (1889), Nasik (1894) and Porbandar (1895). From 1881 to 1893, nine communal strife occurred in Punjab, of which the Multan (now in Pakistan) riot of 1881 was severe.

In 1893, major communal violence took place in Azamgarh district over cow sacrifice. The riots that followed spread over a very wide area, encompassing United Province [now Uttar Pradesh (UP)], Bihar, Gujarat, and Mumbai and claimed 107 lives. There were 22 riots in Bihar, affecting the districts of Saran, Patna and Gaya. The largest number of deaths occurred in Mumbai.\textsuperscript{15}

In fact, two factors contributed effectively to divide the common people along communal lines. The rising cow protection from early 1880s and the frequent incidence of communal violence made the common people think more and more in communal terms. There was a forceful communal thinking and systematic nurturing of communal atmosphere behind these issues.

The partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon on October 16, 1905 into two zones—Eastern and Western Bengal, was another instance of creating a gulf between Hindus and Muslims. The British rulers wanted to cut the very source of Indian nationalism and to divide the people of the region into two separate communities.

\textsuperscript{15} Supra note 9 at 150. For the details of the story see J.R. McLane, Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress 314-21 (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1977).
After establishment of Muslim League in 1906, gulf started appearing between Hindus and Muslims and several riots took place in areas, and places, which later on became part of East Pakistan. Communal violence took place in Comilla (now in Bangladesh) on March 4, 1907. The most serious riot took place in Jamalpur district. The series of these riots spread in other states of India also.16

Lord Minto wanted to inflame communal disharmony between Hindus and Muslims along with introducing the constitutional reforms. Thus, in 1909, the British rulers introduced ‘Moreley-Minto Reforms’, which propounded the principles of separate electorates. Under these reforms, a Muslim could vote only for a Muslim candidate and Hindu only for a Hindu candidate ‘Montague-Chelmsford Reforms’ introduced in 1919, again reinforced the principles of separate electorates. These reforms largely affected the communal harmony.

Development such as the ‘Partition of Bengal’ (1905), ‘Moreley-Minto Reforms’ (1909), the ‘Indian Councils Act (1909)’, ‘Montague-Chelmsford Reforms’ (1919), the ‘Communal Award (1932)’, and so on, are examples how the British systematically created rift between Hindus and Muslims.

Mahatma Gandhi wrote an article in Harijan where he described the real nature of communal violence in India. He stated that:17

- It seems to me that much of this violence is an expression not too much of communal suspicion and hatred, but of the long pent up resentments of the masses against oppression due to the English land holding systems, usurious money lending and heavy taxation…The masses always suffer some oppression and, therefore, have resentments which flare up on a shift of control or may be exploited by selfish leaders.

---

16 Aziz Burney, India Lose Freedom: Gujarat 2002, The Turning Point of Indian History 6 (Indian Publishers’ Distributors, Delhi, 2005).

Mahatma Gandhi’s statement carries much truth. The strong anti-imperialist resentments accompanied by mass support were often misdirected and termed as the Hindu-Muslim problem.

Some historians hold socio-economic and cultural factors as explanation of communalism and communal violence from the early part of the 20th century. Those highlighting cultural factors hold that some of the cultural practices played an important role during the British period in the rising of communal feeling between communities.

During the period between 1858 and 1919, severe communal violence occurred in the country in which some occurred in places where no earlier history of communal clashes discord. In the 20th century, the picture of communal violence gradually changed.

The Government of India in the memorandum to the Statutory Commission Reports mentioned riots in East Bengal in 1907, Peshawar (now in Pakistan) in 1910, Ayodhya in 1912, Agra in 1913, Shahabad in 1917 and Katarpur in 1918. During this period, the communal violence was planned, organized and well financed by socio-religious organizations, property owners and bureaucrats. From the point of view of damage suffered, the riots of Bareilly, Pilibhit, Mau, Mumbai, Nasik, East Bengal, Peshawar, Ayodhya, Agra, Shahabad and Katarpur are remarkable.

The effect of Hindu-Muslim unity against Jallianwala Bagh massacre and its joint struggle in ‘Khilafat’ and ‘Non-Cooperation Movement’ (NCM) had a clear effect on the graph of communal violence occurring in the country. During 1919 and 1920, not a single incident of communal violence took place in the country.

18 Report of the Indian Statutory Commission 97-107 (Kolkata, 1930), vol. IV, part 1; see also Wilkinson, supra note 9 at 150.
In 1921, the Moplah riots took place in the Malabar Coast in Kerala. The outbreak was essentially a rebellion against the British Government with the aim to establish the kingdom of Islam by overthrowing it. The outbreak reflected the existence of both agrarian exploitation and rural poverty. In 1922, riot broke out in Multan, where large numbers of people were killed.

In 1923, new militant movements like the Shuddi Movement started by Arya Samaj under the leadership of Swami Shradhanand and the Tanzeem and Tableeghi Movements started by Muslims added fuel to the scale of communal violence. Thus, serious communal disturbances broke out in Bengal, Punjab, Sindh and UP on Muharram celebrations. This year violence occurred in 15-20 places; the more important of which were Amritsar, Lahore (now in Pakistan) and Saharanpur.

In 1923, V.D. Savarkar propounded his thesis of ‘Hindu Rashtra’. While defining the meaning of the world ‘Indian’, V.D. Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), argued that India consisted of one nation—the Hindu nation, with Muslims forming a foreign element in the land. This further increased communal tensions between the two communities.

There were terrible communal riots throughout the country from 1923 to 1927, which greatly affected the freedom movement. The year 1924 saw some major outbreaks in Allahabad, Calcutta (now renamed Kolkata), Delhi, Gulbarga, Kohat (now in Pakistan), Lucknow and Nagpur. The riot of Kohat was very serious in which about 155 people died.

In 1925, the extreme Hindu Mahasabha came into existence and designated itself as Hindu Party caring for Hindu interests only. Communal antagonism between the Hindus and Muslims became intense and widespread throughout the year. In 1926-27, Bengal, Bihar, Punjab and the UP were worst affected areas.
The leaders of Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha actively used communalism to promote their class interests. Communal violence was the most effective weapon that they never hesitated to use, in order to prevent unity of the working class of Hindus and Muslims.

The major riots of Kolkata and Mumbai in 1926 and 1928-29 respectively resulted in very large number of casualties and damage to property. In Kolkata, in a series of three riots, 141 persons killed and 1,296 injured; in Mumbai, the death toll was 117 and the injured were 791. In 1928, communal violence was also recorded from Bangalore, Surat, Nasik and Hyderabad.

In 1931, there were serious communal rioting in Agra, Varanasi, Kanpur and Mirzapur. The Kanpur riot was very serious in terms of loss of life and property. This was the first major riot that occurred in the UP. In this riot, a patriot and advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity like Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi was killed. The Anti-Money Lending Bill in Punjab and the Bengal Tenancy (Amendment) Bill of 1928 clearly marked that the functioning of the administrative machinery could not escape the evil of communalism.

The ‘Civil Disobedience Movement’ (CDM) launched by Gandhi in 1930 gave rise to riots and disturbances all over the country. The period of CDM witnessed repeated occurrence of communal violence. In March 1931, CDM was withdrawn, the same situation was created that we have witnessed in 1858 when the revolt proved unsuccessful, or in 1922 when the NCM was withdrawn. Again, the country was caught in the grip of communal forces. Communal violence reappeared on national scene in Varanasi (1931) and Mumbai (1932) and Alwar and Bundela in Hissar district (1932).

\[^{19}\text{Wilkinson, id. at 150-151.}\]
In 1935, The Government of India Act was passed which provided for separate electorates for Muslims, Sikhs, Indian Christians, and Europeans and broadened the franchise to women and to small percentage of the ‘untouchable caste’, which further intensified the communal situation.

In 1937, communalism entered into extreme or fascist communalism based on lies, hatred and violence. Consequently, one religious group was incited to hate another religious group. Therefore, the phase of mutual hatred and malice and separation on religious grounds began.

From 1939 to 1941, communal violence was recorded from Asansol, Delhi, Kanpur, Varanasi, Kolkata and Meerut (1939), Sindh and Sukkar (now in Pakistan) (1940), Kolkata, Ahmedabad and Mumbai (1941).

If we take only the major riots between 1924 and 1940, the total number of persons killed was 1,175 and the injured 7,615. In the 1940s, the major riots were part of the movement for partition and the scale of communal violence enormous. By then communal riots had become an instruments of politics.\(^\text{20}\)

In 1940, the Muslim League passed a resolution calling for the formation of a separate State of Pakistan for the first time. Therefore, the idea of Pakistan spread rapidly in the country. However, it is a generally held view that the Jinnah’s ‘two-nation theory’ first floated in March 1940 generated intense animosity during that time and thereafter.

In 1942, ‘Quit India Movement’ was launched. This movement once again threatened Hindu-Muslim unity. Jinnah warned that if the British came to terms directly with Congress Party, it would lead to direct consequences.

During 1942-46, very few riots occurred because this period was a period of economic boom for the middle class in India. The expectancy of

\(^{20}\text{Ibid.}\)
partition and frustrated feelings were responsible for the large number of communal violence in the year 1946. Serious communal disturbances were recorded from Allahabad, Patna, Bhagalpur, Kolkata, Mumbai, Noakhali and Dhaka (now in Bangladesh).

The Kolkata killings of August 1946 was an immediate consequence of Jinnah’s call for ‘direct action’ for the achievement of Pakistan. The call for ‘direct action’ followed the breakdown of negotiations among the three principal parties over the Cabinet Mission Plan. The Kolkata violence was mimicked in many other places in Northern and Western India thereafter. The Kolkata Government requested from the British bureaucracy to quell the riots, but failed miserably. In Kolkata, according to official reports 5,000 people were killed and almost the same number of people were injured.

According to Williams, “the religious differences (between Hindus and Muslims) were neither necessary nor sufficient cause for the mass violence that accompanied the appearance of India and Pakistan as new nations.” This is echoed in the Report of Srikrishna Commission (1998). Analysing the causes the Commission said, “Hindus and Muslims were united during the freedom struggle but towards end.” Jinnah’s ‘two-nation theory’ led to the vivisection of the country and heightened the Hindu-Muslim communal hatred.

The British created antagonism between the Hindus and Muslims as an excuse for not doing anything. At the same time, they blessed the Muslim League, by ignoring other Muslim groups and thereby confronted Mahatma Gandhi with the issue of Pakistan. Thus, there seemed to be no alternative except division of the country.

---

22 Ibid. See also The Deccan Herald, August 8, 1998.
Lord Mountbatten and all others (except Mahatma Gandhi) felt that partition was the only way to save the country. The British rulers also proceeded to transfer of power in August 1947. The division of India and provinces created a storm that added gunpowder to fire.

The encouragement given by the British in 1858 to the ‘Babri Masjid-Ramjanmbhoomi’ dispute and the failure to stop the rioting in Kanpur in 1931 revealed the British efforts to aggravate Hindu-Muslim contradictions as a part of their ‘divide and rule’ policy. Their refusal to help the elected Government in Kolkata riots in 1946 revealed that power was slipping out of their hands.

The communal violence that first started occurring in Noakhali just after the independence continued in Kanpur, Aligarh, Moradabad, Meerut, Hyderabad, Bihar Sharif, Bhagalpur, Jamshedpur and finally the peak in Gujarat where Muslims were butchered en masse. About these riots, at least 36 inquiry commissions have been set up but so far, there is no result coming up.

It would also be wrong to blame all Muslims for the partition of the country. Indian Muslims were divided on the issue. The Muslim Ulema too opposed it and declared their support for composite nationalism of the Congress and also justified it on religious grounds.

Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madni, a prominent theologian and rector of the Darul Ulum, Deoband, a premier Islamic seminary in India, was in forefront of the opponents of the ‘two-nation theory’ and he refuted it in his book Muttahida Qawmiyat aur Islam (i.e. Composite Nationalism and Islam). He also appealed to the Muslims not to be mislead by Jinnah and his ‘two-nation theory’.\(^2\) This was clear proof of the fact that a section of Muslims strongly opposed creation of Pakistan.

\(^2\) Supra note 1 at 37.
To understand the extent to which the British were convinced that their departure would bring to India its worst disaster, it would be interesting to read the speech of the then British Prime Minister (PM), Winston Churchill, in the Parliament on December 12, 1946 that referred to the ugly riots of Bihar in 1946. He described the events as:24

➢ Only the first few drops of before the thunderstorm breaks…a foretaste of what may well come in future.

The British PM Winston Churchill forgot to mention in his speech that British imperialism had contributed largely to the stormy future that he was predicting for India.

It is useful recalling the observations of M.S. Golwalkar in his 1947 book (first published in 1937) *We or Our Nation-Hood Defined*. He said:25

➢ Non-Hindu People in Hindustan must adopt the Hindu culture and language and must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea, but glorification of the Hindu race and culture…they must cease to be foreigners, or may stay in the country wholly subordinate to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen’s rights.

Peter Heehs pointed out that the problem of communalism grew along the growth of independence movement and held to be responsible for partition of the country. Communal violence, thus reached to its catastrophic climax at the time of partition of the country.26 The assassination of Gandhi in 1948 brought about a change in the attitude of the people on the communal question. The RSS was banned and the Hindu communal elements were greatly weakened.

24 *Supra* note 4 at 44.


26 *Supra* note 21 at 121
C. Bayly maintains that the communal perceptions were well developed in the 18th and early 19th century. He maintains that although the two communities were not undifferentiated blocks they did have outbreak of violence on local level due to political, economic and cultural factors.\textsuperscript{27}

To sum up, during Muslim rule people saw a balance of relationship and socio-economic exchange between the Hindus and Muslims. Later, the Muslim urge of religious and political domination was fully exploited by the British and communal tension reached its height in their regime.

It is important to note that the British policy was not to create differences that already existed between the two communities but to prevent the development of common consciousness by a policy of separate and special treatment.

Therefore, it is clear that with the active help of the British Government, the communal organizations were able to convince their co-religionists that their problems were because of the other religionists and the solution to these non-religious issues were available in religion. This was the basic cause of widespread communal violence between the two communities.

It is a widely accepted fact that communalism and communal violence became a major problem during the last part of the 19th century. It grew along with the growth of the independence movement and reached a catastrophic climax at the time of partition of the country.

\section*{2.4 Post-Independence Period}

The havoc of communal riots caused at the time of the partition, led to unprecedented loss of human life and property. The independence of the country was born in the wake of terrible communal holocaust. It is estimated

\textsuperscript{27} Id. at 124.
that about 1,80,000 people were killed in the partition violence. Around six million Muslims and four and half million Hindus and Sikhs became refugees. The country witnessed the violence and massacres in both sides in 1947. The partition of the country triggered off a wave of violence—loot, arson, rape and massacre—unprecedented in the history of the world. Thus, freedom brought a great calamity for both Hindus and Muslims in India.

It was believed that partition of the country had solved the problem of communal violence. However, partition further aggravated the problem of communalism and communal violence rather solving it. This was perhaps due to the one community’s heightened distrust towards other and vice-versa.

Indian Muslims faced problems of security and identity from the day one after India became Independent. The innocent Muslim masses in India continued to pay heavy price for creation of Pakistan. It created hatred in the minds of upper caste Hindus towards Muslims.

Once, Dr. Rajendra Prasad suggested that Mahatma Gandhiji’s attempts to establish Hindu-Muslim unity ended with the establishment of Pakistan on the one side and his supreme sacrifice on the other.\textsuperscript{28} In 1940, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had predicted that:\textsuperscript{29}

\begin{itemize}
\item The only way to make Hindustan homogeneous is to arrange for exchange of population. Until that is done, it must be admitted that even with creation of Pakistan the problem of majority versus minority will remain in Hindustan as before and will continue to produce disharmony in the body politic of Hindustan.
\end{itemize}

The debates of the Constituent Assembly of India on Minority Rights revealed that even after the partition of the country mostly Muslim members of

\textsuperscript{28} Shrivastava, \textit{supra} note 5 at 95; see also Mahatma Gandhi, \textit{The Way to Communal Harmony} xii (Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1963).
\textsuperscript{29} Shrivastava, \textit{ibid}; see also B.R. Ambedkar, \textit{Thoughts on Pakistan} 104 (Thacker and Company Ltd., Mumbai, 1941).
the Assembly were of the opinion that there should be provision of *separate electorates* for Muslims. Thus, even after the partition, the menace of communalism was very well present.

The Muslim leaders regained the faith that even after partition; the British Communal Award (1932) privileges should be retained in some form by maintaining the minority status. Therefore, theme of ‘consolidated vote power’ attained a wide support even among the Muslim elite, which was somewhat contrary to their earlier stand.³⁰

The majority of communal disturbances prior to the independence were attributed to the ‘divide and rule’ policy of the British rulers. The British did try to divide Indians in order to consolidate their rule. Today, many other aspects have come on the scene, over and above the British policy of ‘divide and rule’.

The continuance of communal violence even after the departure of the British rule reflects the character of most of the non-left political parties who may never fail to engineer a communal riot if it politically suits them. The last 65 years have seen pre-planned and organized attempts by communal forces to disturb pleasant relations between the two communities in various places.

The period between 1947 and 1950 witnessed eruption of communal violence on an unprecedented scale. This was direct result of partition and displacement of population on large-scale. There was relatively communal peace during the 1950s as the entire focus during this period was on *linguistic* re-organization of states. During this decade, only *linguistic* violence occurred in the country after constituting the *linguistic* states.

Post-Independence communal violence can be divided into two parts, i.e., violence until the end of 70s and violence thereafter. From 1947 to the end

---
³⁰ Shrivastava, *ibid*; see also Imam Zafar (ed.), *Muslims in India* 173 (Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1975).
of 1970, communal violence had the usual pattern and the immediate causes were more or less the same. After 1980, the pattern changed as the foreign involvement found place in Hindu-Muslim conflict in India.

Hinduism again became a source of inspiration for political reorganization with the support of those masses, which had suffered most during partition. For political gains, the Muslim votes provided an opportunity to extremist Hindus for fomenting discord among a section of population. This situation increased communal violence after partition.

The first major communal riot after partition exploded in Jabalpur in 1961 followed by disturbances in Western UP. In Jabalpur, nearly 1,000 people were killed. The Jabalpur riots shook Indian Muslims’ confidence in Congress as well as in secularism. The riot was so serious that Jawaharlal Nehru formed the National Integration Council (NIC) after Jabalpur riots and Chinese invasion of 1962, to promote emotional integration in the country.

After Jabalpur riots, a chain of communal riots broke out in Ranchi, Jamshedpur, Aligarh, Rourkela, etc. According to S.K. Ghosh, who was then Additional Inspector General of Police (AIG) in Orissa, two thousand people, mostly Muslims were killed in Rourkela alone in riots, which lasted for about 15 days.31 These riots continued up to 1965 when Indo-Pak war broke out.

In 1967, the next wave of communal disturbances occurred at Ranchi-Hatia, Solapur, Ahmednagar, Malegaon, Jaunpur, Suchetpur and Sursand. Just before 1970s, some major riots took place in Western India due to changes in Indian politics. The Gujarat witnessed major communal riots in 1969 where Morarji Desai’s faction (who was opposed to Mrs. Gandhi) was in power.

In Maharashtra, Bhiwandi-Jalgaon witnessed eruption of communal violence in 1970 in which 400 persons died. One famous political party in Maharashtra mainly instigated the violence. There were 500 cases of communal riots all over the country between 1969 and 1970.

The period from 1971 to 1977 was comparatively peaceful. Indira Gandhi declared the emergency in 1975 due to J.P. Narayan’s movement. During emergency, all the leaders were arrested. There was no one to incite communal passions and therefore there was hardly any major riot. In 1977, only one case of communal violence was reported from UP.

‘Between’ 1978 to 1980, the communal problem surfaced once again and major riots broke out in Jamshedpur, Aligarh, Varanasi and Moradabad. The Muslims were once again at the receiving end. The Moradabad riots (1980) took more than 1,000 lives. The Moradabad riot was the result of business rivalry between Punjabi businesspersons and Muslim traders.

After 1980, the communal problem took a turn for the worse; credit goes to Indira Gandhi’s policies. For her own political survival, she started encouraging Hindu revivalism. After 1980, the communal situation spread very fast in some parts of South, particularly in the State of Tamil Nadu. Since then communal disturbances have been reported almost every year.

From 1980 onwards, maximum major communal riots occurred in Bihar, UP, Madhya Pradesh (MP), Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh (AP), Tamil Nadu, Assam and Gujarat. In these riots, several hundred Muslims were killed and their properties worth crores of rupees destroyed. The riots were either due to political controversy or due to economic competition.

Town after towns experienced communal disturbances. From sporadic localizes and controllable riots an era of bloodier and widespread riots had
ushered. Communal violence at Aligarh, Kanpur, Meerut, Moradabad, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Baroda, Surat, Bhagalpur and Ranchi were of the above nature.\textsuperscript{32}

The Hindu-Sikh riots of Delhi in 1984, was an example of high handedness misguidance of the majority community in the country of Gandhi and Lord Buddha, where the slogan so far has been *ahinsa parmo dharam* (i.e. Non-Violence is supreme religion). The meanings of the words are same even now but the time has changed and so have our attitude towards our own people.

The brutal killing of more than 3,000 innocent and helpless Sikhs cannot be condoned by any act, great or small, much less the resignation by a minister or an Member of Parliament. The families of the victims still feel strongly about the ghastly murders and unspeakable bestialities they had witnessed continuously for four days. The Meerut riots (1987) and Bhagalpur riots (1989) sent shock waves throughout India making Muslims feel terribly insecure.

The decade of 80s saw the most aggressive form of communalism and communal violence after the partition. During this decade, most of the riots were the result of either the ‘Shah Bano’ controversy, or the ‘Mandir-Masjid’ dispute. In the electoral battle of 1989 (for ninth Lok Sabha Elections), communalism has crossed all limits. The Bhagalpur riots (1989) were the most horrible and took more than 1,000 lives, besides causing huge loss of property.

In 1990, a fresh wave of communal violence started in different parts of India after the *kar sewa* began on October 30, 1990. The first major riot took place in Bijnor in UP, which took more than 200 lives. In other places, communal riots occurred in Lucknow, Bundelkhand region in adjoining MP, Delhi, Patna, Hyderabad and Ranga Reddy district in AP.

\textsuperscript{32} Supra nota 21 at 119; see also Mushirul Hasan, *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India’s Muslim Since Independence* 258 (Hurst and Company, London, 1997).
During the second phase of kar sewa in Ayodhya on December 7, 1990, communal violence broke out in Agra, Aligarh and Kanpur. In Aligarh, on December 7, Gomti Express was stopped by a Hindu mob near Aligarh railway station, Muslims pulled out and several of them killed. The death toll, according to the reliable sources, crossed fifty. Near Sasni Gate chowki, ten members of a family were burnt alive.\(^{33}\)

The tenth Lok Sabha elections in May 1991 were fought mainly on the issue of the ‘Babri Masjid-Ramjanmbhoomi’. The ‘Rath Yatra’, culminated in the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992. The communal strife boils up every time during election. Hyderabad\(^{34}\) and Coimbatore\(^{35}\) are the examples in 1998.

The seismic shock emitted from epicenter in Ayodhya caused wave after waves of communal violence throughout the country: first at the time of opening of the locks of Babri Masjid in 1986; second the ‘Rath Yatra’ by L.K. Advani in 1990; last shilanyas for Ramjanmbhoomi temple and after demolition of Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992. Two hundred people mostly Muslims were killed in 60 riots in UP between 1986 and June 1997.\(^{36}\)

The ‘Rath Yatra’ alone took a toll of 1,000 persons (90 percent Muslims) in 21 towns all along the route in seven. The kar sewa and shilanyas resulted in rioting in the whole of the country under the shadow of communal fire. Countrywide communal carnage took the life of 2,000 people and left 13,000 injured. Property running into crores was damaged and destroyed.\(^{37}\)


\(^{34}\) “Hyderabad Violence Toll Reaches Eight, Curfew Extended”, *The Times of India*, June 8, 1998.


\(^{36}\) *Supra* nota 21 at 119-20.

\(^{37}\) *Id*. at 120.
Chapter 2

The Mumbai riots (1992-93) were probably the worst, unmatched, and unparalleled in the savagery and colossal loss.\textsuperscript{38} The Srikrishna Commission Report (1998) mentions death of 900 persons and 2,036 injured during December 92 and January 93 riots of Mumbai.\textsuperscript{39}

In 1997, two new cities—Coimbatore and Tamil Nadu (TN), turned violent and joined a place in the list of riot prone cities of India. In 1998, anti-Christian violence began. Throughout 1999, continuous attacks on Christians were reported and their prayer halls were destroyed in Dangs and other parts of Gujarat. After Gujarat, a number of incidents took place in UP, MP, Bihar, Maharashtra and Orissa.

In 2002, Gujarat killings had shaken the country very badly, resulted in the death of hundreds of innocent people, and brought shame to our country in the whole world. The police openly sided with rioters and marauders. An estimated 2,50,000 individuals were displaced as a direct result of Gujarat violence.\textsuperscript{40}

Genocide of this kind was not seen since the partition of the country. Thousands of people were butchered in Gujarat. Never such communal violence took place with so much active collaboration of the state. There never was so much hate campaign against minorities in India as in Gujarat. Communal carnage in Gujarat was a ‘conspiracy’ hatched between the state and the then centre, said former President K. Narayanan. He then further said:\textsuperscript{41}

- I asked the army to be deployed to suppress the violence…The army was sent but there was no shooting against those who

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid; see also Jim Masselos, “The Bombay Riots of January 1993: The Politics of Urban Conflagration”, 17 South Asia (Special Issue) 80 (1994).

\textsuperscript{39} Supra nota 21 at 120. Also available at: www.onlineasia.com.news.htm


\textsuperscript{41} Quamar Ashraf, “Vajpayee’s Role in Gujarat”, 14(321) Nation and the World 50 (March 16, 2005).
engineered violence. He then added, if the army was given power to suppress the violence, the tragedy in Gujarat could have been avoided but the State Government did not do it. The centre also did the same. It was a conspiracy between State and the Central Government.

Amnesty International (AI) strongly believes that justice continues to elude many of those who were victims of the violence in Gujarat in 2002. The complete failure of the Government of Gujarat, itself accused of direct complicity in the violence, left over 2,000 people dead and 2,500 injured. A number of Independent Citizens’ Reports have established that the Gujarat carnage was planned over a considerable period with tacit support of the State Government.42

According to the Fact-Finding Report of the British team by Peter Holland, the death toll was around 2,000 in Gujarat violence and the number of homeless Muslims was about one lakh. As reported, hundreds of Muslim men, women and children regardless of their age were brutally killed, young women gang raped and houses, shops and factories were ruthlessly burnt to ashes.43

In 2005, according to the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), communal incident was reported from Mau town in UP on October 14, 2005, involving confrontation over the holding of a procession and the use of loudspeaker by Hindus during Bharat Milap programmes which claimed 10 lives. During January-December 2005, the country witnessed 779 communal incidents in which 124 persons were killed and 2,066 injured.44

In December 2007, violence broke out against Christians in Kandhmal district. Several churches were burnt and according to official account 4

43 Asrar Ahmad, “Humanism of Cruel Masters”, 11(254) Nation and the World 28 (June 1, 2002).
44 M.Y. Siddiqui, “Combating Communalism”, 14(349) Nation and the World 18 (June 1, 2006).
persons killed but unofficially, 12 persons were killed. Orissa has been the
centre of anti-Christian violence. It was in this state that an Australian priest
working among the lepers Graham Stains was burnt alive along with his two
had a hand in this ghastly incident.\textsuperscript{45}

During 2003 to 2007, several incidents of communal violence were
reported from Gujarat, Bihar, Maharashtra, MP, UP, AP, TN, Karnataka,
Orissa, Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, Rajasthan, Goa and Kerala. Except for
Mau riots (UP) in October 2005, all other riots were minor and result of small
incidents here and there.

All the riots from 2003 to 2007 could be controlled easily as there was
no political purpose behind these disturbances. Such violence is also result of
constant hate propaganda by communal forces. In no other country, such petty
causes will result in communal violence.

The year 2008 witnessed major communal violence against Christians
for the first time after independence. However, they have been under attack for
several years but 2008 saw major communal violence against Christian
minority in Kandhmal district of Orissa. In Kandhmal district of Orissa and
some adjoining districts more than 40 Christians were killed, a nun mass raped,
women burnt beyond recognition, more than 400 houses burnt and looted and
35,000 fled from their villages to relief camps.\textsuperscript{46} Orissa is another Gujarat in
both brutalities and terrorization of minorities.

The year 2009 also did not witness major riots. However, communal
violence erupts on smaller scale in different places of India. This year

\textsuperscript{45} A.A. Engineer, \textit{Communal Challenge and Secular Response} 50 (Shipra Publications, Delhi, 2003).

\textsuperscript{46} A.A. Engineer, “How Secular is India Today?”, 15(407) \textit{Nation and the World} 21 (November 16, 2008).
communal disturbances took place in Nanded, Azamgarh, Lucknow, Bareilly, Varanasi, Thane, South Karnataka, Pusad, Anand, Kokrajahr (Assam), Mysore, Shahpur area of Ahmedabad, Kohlapur, Jaisalmer, Shravasti and Bhilwada.

During 2009, 23 lives were lost and 73 people injured. According to the MHA data between 2001 and 2009, 6,541 communal clashes occurred and 2,234 persons were killed. Though the number of communal clashes may be correct officially, the number of casualties is never reported accurately in official records for various reasons.\(^{47}\)

No year has been riot-free in India. In 2010, communal riots reported from Evatmahal, Mangalore, Shimoga, Bareilly, Hyderabad, Agra, Dhule, Amalner, Jodhpur, Ahmedabad, Rawer, Malegaon, Sarada, Ratlam, Deganga, and Malerkotla and finally District Jhalawad in Rajasthan came under spell of communal violence.\(^{48}\)

Riot-free India remains a far away dream. Like every year this year too, i.e., 2011, several communal riots took place in different places of India. This year communal riots reported from Umarkhedi, Baroda, Sewri, Aurangabad, Meerut, Agra, Moradabad, Jabalpur, Bahraich, Titwala, Newasa, Ujjain, Aduni Tehsil, Nandurbar and Rudrapur. The biggest riot of 2011 took place in Gopalgarh, Bharatpur on September 14 in which 11 persons were killed and nine of them by one-sided police firing inside mosque.\(^{49}\)

It would be seen that almost all riots takes place on extremely petty issues. Eruption of communal violence on petty issues is possible only because due to constant communal propaganda, strong prejudices prevail and there is total lack of confidence between two communities. It shows that if police is

\(^{47}\) Available at: www.twocircles.net  
\(^{48}\) Ibid.  
\(^{49}\) Ibid.
impartial it can control violence effectively. In addition, poverty and unemployment makes it possible for large crowds to gather and take part in rioting. It is so humorous that even 65 years after independence and our secular Constitution, communal violence breaks out on small and very trivial matters.

The scale of communal violence has increased over the years. The states that were once free of it have now been affected. Now communal violence has spread to non-traditional conflict States like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, AP, Karnataka, Orissa, and Uttrakhand. Rajasthan, Karnataka, MP, and Tamil Nadu joined the list of communally sensitive states. Not only UP and Bihar, but also Gujarat and Maharashtra are greatly affected by communal violence.

Communal violence erupts more often in medium-sized-towns than in large urban towns. Religious orthodoxy generates more often and more quickly a communal atmosphere in medium and small-sized towns. Medium sized towns like Aligarh, Agra, Meerut, Moradabad, Varanasi, Jamshedpur, Bhiwandi, Malegaon, Godhra, Udaipur, etc., have been communally very sensitive. Riots that are more communal occur in districts, which have a Muslim population varying between 15 percent and 59.3 percent. In the past, communal violence was largely an urban phenomenon.

Now alarming trend is that the virus has spread to the rural areas also. The rural areas were caught in the communal violence after the Ayodhya incident. There are 30 districts in the country identified as being prone to communal violence in rural areas. Almost all social groups seem to participate in one way or another in these communal conflicts.

In recent years, the emergence of revivalist forces, foreign inflow of money, changing political equations and increasing communal emphasis have

---

50 Supra note 9 at 171.
more than worsened the situation. It is with the event of Colonialism on one hand, and later parliamentary democracy that led to politicization of religion and religious communities.

The use of communal ideology and religion in election process has been an unfortunate aspect of Indian democracy. Some people have suggested that only a vibrant civil society can check communal violence but when the civil society itself is so highly communalized how it can check communal violence.

The partition of the country created a great deal of bitterness and communalized political processes in post-Independent India. Indian Muslims, even after 65 years of independence, face a host of problems. They are economically quite backward and illiterate than others in the country. Earlier Gopal Singh Commission Report in early 1980s and now Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee Report (2006) have amply borne out this.

The frequent destruction of life and property on communal ground raises the question why after decades of commitment to secular ideology India has come under the grips of communalization of politics and communal strife. There arises an obvious need of the in depth study on the subject to safeguard our constitutional values.

### 2.5 Concluding Remarks

After analyzing the different periods, we find that the answer to the Hindu-Muslim unity lay in the ruler, not in the religion. Wars were fought between rulers regardless of religion. The clash was of interests, not of religions. The fight was for power, assets, territory or because of political grievances, not for religion.

The British rulers created communal consciousness among the Indian people. It slowly seeped through our civil society. Thus, the society we have
inherited from the Colonial past was a communalized society and no conscious effort was made in post-Independent India to get rid of this communal legacy. Communal forces aggressively exploit religion for political ends and use communal sentiments in spreading communal violence for their social, political and electoral base. Thus, communal violence in post-Independent India is planned, skilful, organized and deftly executed.

Communalism and communal violence is the result of widespread communal propaganda, and law taking no serious notice against this communal propaganda. Communal violence must be curbed before it forces secular citizens to think communally and join forces with the communalists. The injection of hatred in tender minds through widespread historical and media distortions is dangerous. Ignorance is a fertile ground for the growth of communalism. The media should exercise their freedom within the ambit of Indian ethos and values.

To override communalism and communal violence, honest political determination is required. To put an end to communalism and communal violence, it is necessary that people of India embody such values as tolerance and mutual respect.

The communal violence would be lessened if it is made clear to all that the government is both strong and impartial and determined to put down at any cost communal violence or any talk of communal violence. The government should give confidence to the people and put fear in the hearts and minds of the potential perpetrators and organizers of communal violence. Thus, the problem of communal violence calls for serious attention.