COMMUNALISM

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Communalism has become one of the biggest menaces of modern India. Problem that arises between the socio-religious relations of the people who belong to various minority communities on the one hand and the majority community on the other, can be referred to as "communalism" or "communal problem." Communalism and communal riots normally arise when religious matters are politicalised. Communalism is often understood as an ideology which states that the society is divided into religious communities whose interest differ and are, at times, even oppose to each other. It is kind of antagonism which is found between religious.

Definitions of Communalism

Bipan Chandra

According to Bipan Chandra, communalism is "the belief that because a group of people following a particular religion, they have common social, political and economic interests". He further adds that religious distinction is the fundamental distinction that overrides all other distinctions.

In Indian context, he cites that Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs have dissimilar social, economic, cultural and political interests as they are different religious entities. Hence, if one communal group seeks to better its social, political and economic

interests then it will be a loss for the other groups. According to him, the Indian people can act socially and cannot act in any other manner except as members of such homogeneous communities whose interests and outlook remains the same.

Bipan Chandra has outlined three elements of communalism:

- Communalism is strong among those people who have common secular interests.

- Secular interests of different religions are divergent from that of the others.

- Interests of different communities are different and hostile to others.

Harbans Mukhia

According to historian Harbans Mukhia, "communalism is the phenomenon of religious differences between groups, often leading to tension and even rioting between them." He elaborates that people of different religious communities becomes hostile when they have to live together and share common economic, political and other scarce resources.

D.E. Smith

Communalism as the function of religious communities in a way, generally considered detrimental to the interests of other groups or of the nation as a whole.

T.K. Oomen:

T.K. Oomen, a famous sociologist, has suggested that there are six dimension of communalism. These are:

Assimilationist (or) Communist Communalism

Under this type of communalism, small religious groups are assimilated into big religions group. For instance, scheduled tribes, Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists are Hindus and they should be covered by Hindu Marriage Act, 1955. In addition, all of them should be covered with the same personal law. Hence, a Sikh,

Buddhist, Jain does not identify himself/ herself too much different from a Hindu and Hindu religious beliefs and sentiments.

Welfarist Communalism

In this type of communalism, emphasis is placed on the welfare for the particular community. Providing education, scholarship, financial assistance in higher studies, matrimonial assistance, skill development, residential accommodation are examples of the services provided under this type of communalism. These welfarist organizations are involved in different kind of charitable and other social upliftment activities related to their particular community alone.

Retreatist Communalism

In this type of communalism, small religious community keeps itself aloof from politically related activities. They keep themselves away from politics, for example, people belonging to Bahai religious community keep themselves away from any political activity.

Retaliatory Communalism

In this type of communalism, people belonging to one religious community attempts to harm, hurt and injure the members of other religious communities. In India, this type of communalism can be witnessed where the 'fight between different groups either religious or caste is omnipresent. A very good example of this case is the Godhra Riots and its aftermath

Separatist Communalism

In this type of communalism, one religious community decides to maintain its cultural specificity and demands a separate territorial state within the country, for example, the demand for Gorkhaland by Gorkhas, Bodoland by Bodos, Vidharbha in Maharashtra, separatist tendencies in Mizoram.

Secessionist Communalism

In this type of communalism, a religious community demands for a separate political identity and insists to have a separate state. For example, the demand for Khalistan, the demand for an independent Kashmir by militant groups in Kashmir falls under this category. A very recent example is the demand for 'Nagalim' from the erstwhile parts of Nagaland and Myanmar.

Of all the above types of communalism, the last three categories create problems by perpetuating communal riots, terrorism and insurgency

Main Characteristics of Communalism

The main characteristics of communalism are as follows:

The following can be stated as the main features of communalism:

- It is an ideological concept,
- Based on orthodox principles,
- Based on intolerance,
- Propagation of intense dislike towards other religions,
- Considering owns own religion to be superior,
- Working towards the elimination of other religions and their values,
- Making use of extremist tactics including use of violence against people belonging to other religions and faith,
- Believes that followers of same religion have common political, economic and social interests, which are different from beliefs of other communities.

- Believes that followers of other religions to be completely incompatible, antagonist and hostile.

- Believes that specific interests of a particular community can be promoted by only maintaining a separate identity so that their interests are served better.

- Tends to believe that communal interests are superior to the national interests.

- Treats citizens of a nation not as citizens but as members of particular religious community.

- In its extreme form, it demands separate nation for a particular community. It resorts to violence, fraud, and even gets assistance from foreign powers to achieve their political goals.

- It leads to abuse of power.

- It is used by the elites as a tool for exploiting the communal identities of the poorer sections of people belonging to their own religion.

- It is engineered by opportunistic political and economic interest of groups within political parties.

> Communalism, in a broad sense means a strong attachment to one's own community. In popular discourse in India, it is understood as unhealthy attachment to one's own religion.
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> - It's an ideology that, in order to unify the community, suppresses distinctions within the community and emphasizes the essential unity of the community against other communities.
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> - In this way it **promotes belief in orthodox tenets and principles, intolerance and hatred** of other religions and thus, divides the society.

- **Positive aspect** of communalism stands for the **affinity of an individual towards his own community** involving efforts for the **social and economic upliftment** of his community.

- However, in **negative connotation**, it is an ideology which emphasises the **separate identity of a religious group** in relation to other groups with a tendency to promote its own interests at the expense of the others.

Communalism in India

- Communalism as a **political philosophy** has its roots in the religious and cultural diversity of India.

- It has been used as a political propaganda tool to create divide, differences and tensions between the communities on the basis of religious and ethnic identity leading to communal hatred and violence.

- In ancient Indian society, people of different faith coexisted peacefully.

- **Buddha** was perhaps the first Indian prophet who gave the concept of secularism.

- Meanwhile, Kings like **Ashoka** followed a policy of peace and religious tolerance.

- While, religion was an important part of people's lives but there was no communal ideology or communal politics.

- Rulers like **Akbar and Sher Shah Suri** followed the religious policy of toleration towards different cultures and tradition practiced across country.

- As a modern phenomenon it has arose as a result of British colonial impact and the response of Indian social strata.

Reasons behind Communalism

The major factors that contributed towards the emergence and growth of communalism in modern India involves:

- British Imperialism and their **Policy of "Divide and Rule"**.
- Disappointment and disaffection among young and aspiring middle class youth, caused by stagnant agriculture, absence of modern industrial development and inadequate employment opportunities, which is being exploited by political opportunists.
- Hindu and Muslim revivalist movements
- A communal and distorted view of Indian history, taught in school and colleges played a major role in rise and growth of communal feelings among the masses.
- Separatism and isolation among Muslims.
- Rise of communal and fundamentalist parties.

Major Incidents of Communal Violence in India

- Communal violence is a phenomenon where people belonging to two different religious communities mobilise and attacks each other with feelings of hatred and enmity.
- The partition of India witnessed mass bloodshed and violence that continued up to 1949.
- No major communal disturbances took place until 1961 when the Jabalpur riots shook the country due to economic competition between a Hindu and a Muslim bidi manufacturer than any electoral competition.
- In 1960s – A series of riots broke out particularly in the eastern part of India - Rourkela, Jamshedpur and Ranchi - in 1964, 1965 and 1967, in places where Hindu refugees from the then East Pakistan were being settled.

- In September, 1969, riots in Ahmedabad shook the conscience of the nation. The apparent cause was the Jan Sangh passing a resolution on Indianisation of Muslims to show its intense opposition to Indira Gandhi's leftward thrust.

- In April, 1974, violence occurred in the chawl or tenement, in the Worli neighborhood of Mumbai after the police attempted to disperse a rally of the Dalit Panthers that had turned violent, angered by clashes with the Shiv Sena.

- In February, 1983, the violence took place in Nellie as fallout of the decision to hold the controversial state elections in 1983 in the midst of the Assam Agitation, after Indira Gandhi's decision to give 4 million immigrants from Bangladesh the right to vote. It has been described as one of the worst pogroms since World War II.

- In October, 1984, the anti-Sikh riots broke out after the assassination of Indira Gandhi, where more than 4000 Sikhs were killed in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and other parts of India.

- Meanwhile, the Bombay-Bhiwandi riots were instigated by the Shiv Sena when it jumped on the Hindutva bandwagon to revive the political fortunes of the Shiv Sena which had lost its appeal.

Factors Responsible for Communal Violence

Communalization of Politics:
Electoral politics in India has become more expensive and competitive. Different political parties are not hesitating to use any means, fair or foul, for electoral victory. They even create communal tensions and try to take political advantage

out of it. Concessions are granted to various minority groups for appeasing them.

Each and every party is playing communal card and if situation so demands, is not hesitating to join hands with the communal parties for coming to power. Communalization of politics as a process is supporting the growth of communalism in India.

Psychological Causes:
- Hatred, disgust, deceptive and misleading dogmas give rise to communal tensions. Stereotyped beliefs of both the communities towards one another tend to prevail since long. The Hindus construe the Muslims as fanatics and staunch fundamentalist. What is more important in this regard is that the Hindus believe that the Muslims are unpatriotic and owe their allegiance to the Islamic countries. The lack of inter-personal trust and mutual understanding between two communities often result in perception of threat, harassment, fear and danger in one community against the members of the other community , which in turn leads to fight, hatred and anger phobia.

Economic Causes – Uneven development, class divisions, poverty and unemployment aggravates insecurity in the common men which make them vulnerable to political manipulation.

- **History of Communal Riots** – Probability of recurrence of communal riots in a town where communal riots have already taken place once or twice is stronger than in a town when such riots have never occurred.

- **Isolation and Economic Backwardness of Muslim Community** – The failure to adopt the scientific and technological education and thus, insufficient representation

in the public service, industry and trade etc has led to the feeling of relative deprivation among Muslims.

- The resurgence of Hindu-Muslim economic competition, especially among the lower and middle class strata has fuelled the communal ideology.

- **Role of Media** – It is often accused of sensationalism and disseminates rumours as "news" which sometimes resulted into further tension and riots between two rival religious groups.

- **Social media** has also emerged as a powerful medium to spread messages relating to communal tension or riot in any part of the country.

Measures to Deal with Communalism

- There is need to reform in present criminal justice system, speedy trials and adequate compensation to the victims, may act as deterrent.

- Increase in representation of minority community and weaker sections in all wings of law-enforcement, training of forces in human rights, especially in the use of firearms in accordance with UN code of conduct.

- Codified guidelines for the administration, specialised training for the police force to handle communal riots and setting up special investigating and prosecuting agencies can help in damping major communal disgruntlement.

- Emphasis on value-oriented education with focus on the values of peace, non-violence, compassion, secularism and humanism as well as developing scientific temper (enshrined as a fundamental duty) and rationalism as core values in children both in schools and colleges/universities, can prove vital in preventing communal feelings.

- Government can adopt models followed by countries like Malaysia that has developed early-warning indicators to prevent racial clashes.
  The Malaysian Ethnic Relations Monitoring System (known by its acronym Mesra) that makes use of a quality of life index (included criteria such as housing, health, income and education) and a perception index to gauge people's needs and feelings about race relations in their area.

- Also the Hong Kong model of combating communalism by setting up a "Race Relation Unit" to promote racial harmony and facilitate integration of ethnic minorities, can be emulated by India.

- RRU has established a hotline for complaints and inquiries on racial discrimination. Meanwhile, to create awareness about communal harmony, RRU talks to schools on culture of ethnic minorities and concept of racial discrimination.

- Government can encourage and support civil society and NGOs to run projects that help create communal awareness, build stronger community relation and cultivating values of communal harmony in next generation.

- There is a need for minority welfare schemes to be launched and implemented efficiently by administration to address the challenges and various forms of discrimination faced by them in jobs, housing and daily life.

- A pro-active approach by National Foundation for Communal Harmony (NFCH), the body responsible for promoting communal harmony is needed.

- NFCH provides assistance for the physical and psychological rehabilitation of the child victims of communal, caste, ethnic or terrorist violence, besides

promoting communal harmony, fraternity and national integration.

- A legislation is required to curb the communal violence. Communal Violence (Prevention, Control and Rehabilitation of Victims) Bill, 2005 must be enacted soon.