

Communalism its Growth in India.

Dr. S. Ameer Pasha.
Assistant Professor.
Department of Political science.
Government First Grade College Devanahalli.562110
Bangalore Rural, Karnataka. India.

Abstract :

The rise and growth of trend of communalism can be traced back to pre-independent India attributed to British policy of divide and rule. The imperial leaders used this weapon to raise one community against the other on the basis of Hindu and Muslim religious identity to stay in power. The British rulers always siding the Muslims and opposing the Hindus created a discord between them. This policy ultimately led to the partition of India. The Muslim league under the leadership of Mohd. Ali Jinnah demanded creation of a new nation on the basis of religion; the dream was realized in the year 1947. India had been divided into two, India and Pakistan.

As regards the origin of the problem of communalism evolved in three stages namely;

- 1) Formation stage
- 2) Institutionalization stage
- 3) Explosion stage

Since independence the problem of communalism has been the main source of conflict between Hindus and Muslims. The elections held in India have been using communalism as a source of gaining political power. Hence everywhere in India the communal politics is characterized by fundamentalism which has its variants like Hindu Muslim, Christian and Sikh fundamentalism. Fundamentalism in ordinary sense is strict adherence to the particular religious dogma and opposing social changes.

Most of the political parties in India have indulged in spreading communalism. The problem of communalism has multiplied in the recent years. India has the spirit of democracy along with secular outlook enshrined in the Indian constitution. But in practice

the situation is different most of the political parties have been responsible for spreading communal riots by threatening the very secular fabric of India.

The evil designs of political parties continuously manifested in the major controversies with regards to the communal issues such as Ram Janma Bhoomy-Babri Masjid, Uniform civil code, Controversy of Cow slaughter, and ethnic problems involved the religious sentiments of two major communities (Hindus & Muslims) in India. The adverse effects of communalism at the cost of national unity are due to the perverted role of religion which culminated in the fanaticism and fundamentalism, etc. Since communalism has been closely linked with India's socio political development it has been causing the social exploitation, economic disparities, persisted political outlook etc. Thus communalism has been responsible for these adverse effects in India.

The cause and consequences of the communalism are dealt in detail.

Topic- Communalism its Growth in India.

Communalism is the menace not only for the target communities but also for those in whose name communal politics is played. It is a potential threat to the sovereignty, democracy, integrity, and in short the very existence of India. It is common tendency to identify communalism with pre-independence era especially with the communal forces led by Jinnah. But there is need to unravel the ugly face of communalism in India after Independence.

The most derogatory abuse in the Indian political vocabulary is to dub somebody "communal". Though 'communal' is not only a political term, it is a social phenomenon too. "Communal consciousness," scholars argue, "is built in very early stages of life". The literal meaning of the word 'communalism' is 'altruistic passion attached to one's commune'. Here the ideology seems to be quite innocuous but, more often than not, the word is referred to in its negative connotation. This implies the tendency of socio-religious groups to attempt to maximize its economic, social and political strength at the cost of other groups. In this sense it can be defined as "the political functioning of individuals or groups for the selfish interests

of particular religious groups or sects, by hook or crook.” Thus, it is an epithet implying anti-social greed and reactionary outlook.

Communalism is a modern day phenomenon – a sectarian, restrictive, and negative response to the process of modern nation building. As Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru wrote, “One must never forget that communalism is a later day phenomenon which has grown up before our eyes.” Hence, communalism is one of the major though despondent developments during the national movement of independence.

Communalism is a perception of other religions and communities as inimical entities arranged with an unfriendly, antagonistic, and belligerent equation to one another. The most glaring manifestation of this is communal violence or riots. It has developed in certain areas and sections of society due to their failure to develop the new national consciousness. It is amongst one of the major developments during the national movement, which ultimately led to the partition of India.

Bipan Chandra has classified communalism on the bases of intensity of rancour towards other communities in his *Communalism – a primer*, which is as follows. A belief that people who follow the same religion have common secular interest i.e. common political, economic, social and cultural interest.

In a multi-religious society like India the secular interests such as social, cultural, economic and political of one religion are dissimilar with the followers of other religions, and communalism raises its head when the interest of different religions are seen as mutually incompatible, hostile and antagonistic.

Bipan Chandra also regards above-mentioned three classifications as three stages in the development of communalism during the glorious national struggle for independence. He opines, “Communal ideology starts when persons or groups believe that people of the same religion have same socio-economic interest. The second stage is reached when a person or a group believes and practices communal politics. Though at this stage of communalism one holds a view that different religion-based communities have their own special interests, these interests can be reconciled and accommodated. The third stage is reached when the religious differences are converted into secular differences and are seen as incompatible with each other. At this notorious stage, there is always a tendency to use

violence of language, deed, behaviour and enmity against the “opponents”. Movements of linguism, casteism, regionalism and separatism most often accompany this stage. Needless to add at this stage the idea of a separate nation or “two nations theory” was put forward and pursued in India in 1940s.

RISE OF COMMUNALISM IN INDIA

The British who came to India knew too well the weaknesses of India’s political fabric – internal disunity caused by narrow jealousies, dissensions, greed and communal loyalties that had plagued India at every stage of its history. It is not even wrong to state that the same tendencies and influences had paved the way for the British rule India. The British were consummate in using their policy of *divise et impera* (divide and rule) to use natives against natives.

As the author of *The History and Culture of Indian People* points out that the reaction of the British conquest on the mindset of Muslims and Hindus was bound to be different. The Hindus welcomed the British rule in India and regarded it as a benign act of providence, which brought them deliverance from the tyranny of Muslim rule. On the other hand, the hostility of Muslims towards the English was unbounded. They regarded them as their bitterest foes, since they had seized their political authority.

Rafiq Zakaria refers only to this phenomenon when he states in his *Rise of Muslims in Indian politics*: “They (Muslims) detested the ‘cross’ because it has replaced the ‘crescent’.” With the onset of colonisation in India the British started adopting a continuous policy of suppression towards Muslims. With the new policy of land settlement, the Muslim nobility and official class came to a position of social degradation. The British policy aimed at destroying indigenous industries and handicraft had a crushing effect on the millions of Muslim weavers and other artisans.

Nehru expressed his anguish over this development in his *Discovery of India*: “Where they to go? Their old profession was ruined; the way to a new one was totally barred. They could die of course.... They did actually die in tens of millions.” The social degradation and poverty especially of the Muslim community as against to the gradual but

persistent rise of Hindu nobility, officials, moneylenders, etc. certainly was not a positive development for the future politics in India.

Zia-ul-hasan Faruqi here argues that “the complex socio-economic ground where the seeds of Communalism were sprinkled and watered by the religious and cultural bickering to develop into thorny bush which subsequently inflicted bleeding wounds on the unity of India and finally divided it into two parts.”

The British also contaminated education with communal ideas. They invented history to divide Hindus and Muslims. Faruqi comments, “... scores of empire scholars... went on to produce a synthetic Hindu versus Muslim history of India and their lies became history. The goal of this history was to legitimise the British policy of divide and rule” Such biased feeling and attitude of the government resulted in the growth of communalism. Here it will be feasible to quote A.R. Desai, “a modern educated middle class and a bourgeoisie sprang on a substantial scale from the Muslim community rather later from within the Hindu community. By the time they realised this lag, Hindus had already firmly established in government services and key positions in trade, industry and finance. Thus they needed the support of the mass of their community in their struggle for jobs against rival Hindus.” R.P. Dutt epitomises the whole idea briefly as “behind the communal antagonism lies the social and economic questions. This is obvious in the case of middle class communalists competing for positions and jobs.” Hence, besides being a modern phenomenon it is also referred to as Middle Class phenomenon.

In the later stages of colonialism, the destruction of Muslims was so complete and their plight perpetuated enough that they no longer remained any threat to the British. So the Englishmen now tried to play the game other way round. The theory was same, only ‘pawns’ had exchanged their positions. Now the sympathetic books like William Hunter’s Indian mussalman: are they bound to revolt against the queen? Were written in this period. With rise and strengthening of nationalism this feeling of “allegiance” to Muslims became more and more prominent.

Government policies now changed 360 degrees the first manifestation of which was the partition of Bengal. The partition was used as a major device by Curzon to drive a wedge between the Hindus and the Muslims. In the name of Islam and its ascendancy, he

inflamed the sentiments of Muslims, who were originally against any kind of division. Curzon promised them that “partition would invest Mohammedans of eastern Bengal with a unity which they had not enjoyed since the days of Muslim kings.” To keep Muslims from the *swadeshi* and *boycott* movements, propaganda was unleashed that these campaigns will only benefit industrialists who were prominently Hindus. After having kindled the flames of Communalism, partition was annulled. This gave a rude shock to Muslims, they felt once again betrayed. They believed that the Hindus have forced the government to abolish partition. This led the Muslims to think that without organisation, the sufferings and sacrifices nothing could be achieved from the government.

Lord Minto became viceroy in 1905; he was confronted with a very tense situation in the country. In order to enfeeble the growing popularity of Indian National Congress he revived the attempt at the establishment of the council of the princes and enthusiastically pushed through his plans. The viceroy even corresponded with the princes on the subject with a view to obtaining a “mutual co-operation against a common danger”. The response of the princess to the viceroy’s communication was encouraging and they even recommended certain specific measures, which the government should take to combat the “common danger” of the Indian National Congress.

The most heinous step in this regard was a deputation, consisting of 35 prominent Muslims drawn from different provinces led by Aga Khan, met the Viceroy on October 1, 1906, and presented to him two important demands on behalf of the Muslim community. The first was that the position accorded to the Muslim community in any kind of representation should commensurate with their numerical strength and with their political importance and consistent with “the positions they acquired in India a little more than a hundred years ago”. The second was that they should be given the right of sending their own representative by themselves through separate electorate comprising of the Muslims alone, beginning from the local bodies and going up to the imperial legislative council, including Indian universities. Deputation also asked for greater representation of the Muslims in the services of the government, and protection of their interests if an Indian was to be appointed a member of the governor general’s executive council.

The viceroy sympathised with the claims of the Muslim community and said, “You justly claimed that your position should be estimated not only on numerical strength, but in respect of the political importance of your community and the services it has rendered to the empire.”

With the introduction of communal representation – the cleavage between the two communities widened and there existed constant tensions between the Hindus and the Muslims. The separatist Muslim leaders expressed the necessity of independent organisation and action. They wished to secure independent political recognition from the British government as “a nation within a nation”. To meet the long felt need of a Muslim political organisation composed of the top stratum of the Muslim community and its professional classes, an all India Muslim League was founded in 1906 soon after the Muslim deputation led by Aga Khan met Lord Minto. Nawab Saleemullah Khan of Dacca in this regard took the initiative but the organisation was soon taken over by the Aligarh-based Muslim elite group. Here again the British responsibility of the encouragement of communal separatism cannot be ruled out. Syed Ahmed’s political heir Mohsin-ul-mulk informed principal Archbold on August 4, 1906 that a more active political policy was necessary to counter the Congress influence amongst the Muslims. There is ample evidence that through principal Archbold, Mohsin-ul-mulk and other Muslim leaders kept in close touch with Minto’s private secretary Dunlop Smith as well as with officials like the Lucknow commissioner Hartcourt Butler.

The formation of Muslim League was a great landmark in the history of Indian politics, for it was under the aegis of this body that large number of Muslims mostly nawabs, landlords and title holders kept communalism alive and prevented the bulk of the Muslims from falling in line with the national forces in the country. The League realised the hopes of the British by consistently fighting the growth of nationalism and thereby providing a convenient argument to British government for denying independence to India. M. N. Das in his *India under Morley and Minto* asserts, “Minto’s policy saw its culmination when the Muslim league fought for the recognition as the sole representative body of the Indian Musalmans and finally it was to split India into two parts.”

Though “Communalisms” always exist in pairs, the dominant and ocular Communalism in the pre-independence era was “Muslim” Communalism.

In the first half of the 19th century, there were only few notable Muslim organisations but later a change in Muslim attitude became quite discernible. Nawab Abdul Lateef founded the *Mohammedan Literary and Scientific Society of Calcutta* in 1863 for imparting the English education and European customs to Muslims. In 1878, Syed Ameer Ali and Syed Ameer Hussain established the *National Mohammedan Association* to promote the well-being of the Muslims by all legitimate means available. However, Syed Ahmed Khan was the most towering of them all who started as innocuous religious reformer but according to many ended as a die-hard communalist. He was anti-Congress, which demanded representative government because his attitude was that democracy being the rule of majority means Hindu rule in India. It is maintained though not very accurately; by many exponents, that Aligarh movement was the beginning of the communal ideology. It no doubt brought about the political and social regeneration of the Muslims but at the same time widened the cleavage between the Hindus and Muslims and created a permanent distinct Muslim unit in the Indian politics.

Movements of religious revivalism also accentuated communal politics. It is said that the *Wahabi* movement left behind a trail of communal consciousness in Muslims. An aggressive form of Hindu revivalism emerged, particularly under the Arya Samaj movement whose *sangathan* and *shuddhi* further sharpened communal disharmony between Hindus and Muslims. Tilak, Pal, and Ghosh brothers spearheaded the national movement during the close of the 19th century, drawing inspirations from the Indian past. They cited episodes from the history of the Hindu India, and tried to infuse the national pride and self-respect of the masses by utilising Hindu gods and legends. In a multi-religious society, Hindu nationalism was bound to weaken its secular character. Nationalism thus expressed in religious terms and clothed under mystical forms, had no appeal for the politically conscious Muslim middle class. It rather alarmed them.

A magnanimous contribution in the evolution of naked communalism was by Hindi-Urdu controversy. It originally started at Benaras in 1867, when Hindus organised a movement to replace Urdu by Hindi and the Persian script by the Devnagari script. Immediately after the anti-Urdu campaign, Syed Ahmed Khan told his superior officer Mr. Shakespeare that he was convinced after the anti-Urdu agitation of the pro-Hindi Hindus that

there was no hope of any kind of joint action by Hindus and Muslims. Muslims, he said, had to organise themselves on their own to safeguard their heritage. Apparently, the adoption of the Devnagari character and the Hindi language had greatly injured educated Muslims in both official and private life. The attitude of leaders like Lajpat Rai who opposed the use of Urdu and expressed his conviction that the political solidarity of the Hindu demanded the development of Hindi into the national language of India, aggravated further the situation. The aggressively communal stand of many newspapers fomented the already strained feelings between the two communities. Muslims registered violent protests. They could have somehow swallowed the abolition of Urdu in Bihar, but the abolition of it in the united provinces – the very home of Urdu – was too severe a blow.

Conclusion:-

These are some of the factors, which contributed to the growth of communalism in India. The hostility of Muslims was concretely and shrewdly directed against the Hindus as they thought (wrongly) the government is with them. The Hindus on their part nourished a grievance that the government had abdicated in favour of the Muslims in not firmly implementing its own decisions. All this foreboded a deep rift, which sought to cleave society and culture into two irreconcilable groups.

Historically arguing, Bipan Chandra says, “Basic change from liberal communalism occurred during 1937-38 when both the Hindu and Muslim communalism, in the form of the Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS started becoming fascist and irrational in their ideologies and politics.” Through communal riots, ‘parting of ways’ on Nehru report and Jinnah’s 14 points, two nations theory, and several other developments (rather negative) – this fascist communalism resulted eventually in the splitting up of India. Did the threat of communalism die out with the creation of Pakistan? If one says yes, he is living in the Shangri-la of fools.

Referencess:-

1. Asghar Ali Engineer, secular known on fire, Ajanta Publication, New Delhi, 1991
2. Asghar Ali Engineer, Communalism and communal violence in India, Ajanta Publications, Delhi 1989.
3. Arun Shoury, Indian controversies Essay on Religion in Politics. A.S.A Publications, A-31 west, New Delhi 1993.
4. Atrid Husain, The Destiny of Indian Muslims, Asia Publishing House, New Delhi.1995.
5. Amalendu De, Religious Fundamentalise and Secularism in India Suryasena Prakashana, West Bengal, India 1996.
6. Anitudan Kasyap, communalism and Constitution, Lancers Book, New Delhi 1988.
7. Anand Shankar Panday, Ayodhya an answer to Terrorism and fundamentalism, Pancha Rathna on Nehru, New Delhi. 1972
8. Anirudan Kashyap, Communalism and Constitution, Luncurs Books, Delhi. 1988.
9. Bads – Ud – Din Tyaloji, The Self in Secularism, Orient Longman Limited, New Delhi. 1971.
10. Bhatnagar S.K. History of the M.A.O. College, Aligarh, Bombay, Asia Publishing House Delhi. 1969.
11. Bipin Chandra, Communalism in Modern India, Delhi 1984.

