



## CHANGING TRENDS OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNALISM IN INDIA

**Ashish Anshu, Ph. D.**

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Government Degree College Ganai Gangoli,  
Pithoragarh, 262532, Email id: [bhu.ashish@gmail.com](mailto:bhu.ashish@gmail.com)

### Abstract

*In this research paper it has been tried to understand the changing trends of religious communalism in India. After Independence and especially after the 1990's liberalization, information revolution and expansion of houses have been created a new edge for religious communalism in India. And this is the reason even before this the idea of secularism was never so sharp attacked by religious fundamentalist group.*



*Scholarly Research Journal's is licensed Based on a work at [www.srjis.com](http://www.srjis.com)*

### Introduction

There is historical as well as historiographical perplexity between nation and community which underlies the evolution of modern nation state, at the same time it failed to make elaborate statement on the nuances on communalism. Bipin Chandra, in his book "Communalism in India" defines communalism as the belief that because a group of people follow a particular religion, they have, as a result, common, social, political and economic interests. Communalism can be seen as a self-positing and self-fulfilling prophecy, which established the truth of its categories by a protracted onslaught on democratic values and institutions, and measured its success in a creeping accretion of state power, and hegemony over the ethical fabric of society.

### The relationship between Communalism and Community

The relationship between Communalism and community are closely associated and at the same time it has also a complex relation. The core idea of community is idea of 'We Feeling'. And if we meticulously examine the idea of communalism it also shares the idea of, we feeling in the form of common values and heritage at some /great extent. About this complex relation John writes Communalism as consciously shared religious heritage which becomes the dominant form of identity for a given segment of society. Due to this shared religious heritage it is easy to mobilize or polarize people on communal ground. The sense of we feelings separates one group from another group and creates a sense of self and alienation in them.

## **The historical background of Communalism in India**

The essence of communal ideology is historical memory, manifested in myths, symbols and atavistic emotion. The function of communalism is mass mobilization for the authoritarian reconstruction of the state in crisis. This state is a precipitate of a medieval and a colonial past, but is also the organizer of capital accumulation in the context of a world economy. As ideology, communalism achieves the fusion of archaic and modern elements (mythologized memory and Rousseau's notions of popular sovereignty). The state, too, expresses the fusion of the age-old specialization of power with the modern despotism of capital. A state driven by crises of legitimacy can quite easily and naturally turn to communal institutions and movements to secure an authoritarian popular base. When communalism achieves state-power, the distinction between community and nation seems to vanish, and the task of critical comprehension becomes even more difficult.

Communalism in India has been deep rooted in Colonial past. It was British government who used it as a tool of divide and rule. They provided all the breeding ground to divide Indians on communal line. Especially after the mutiny of 1857 where Hindus and Muslims fought together against British rule.

### **Changing trends**

Communalism is deep rooted in power structure. The discourse of power structure could be seen in power relations who have this privilege power to enjoy and manifest it into their hegemony. This power relations provide some specific community sense of togetherness and a disposition to dominant others. Britishers was first to use communalism as a tool to provide stability to their rule and make sure their power structure as unchallenged so that their hegemony could be continued. Even after independence communalism is being used as strategic weapon in power structure and electoral politics. Political interests are taken care by instilling fear, fright and hatred in one community towards the other community, therefore they are able to continue their hegemony in power structure. And as a result, the dominance of the dominant community continued over the other community.

Communalism was, (and still is), a process, taking different forms in different geographical, cultural and chronological spaces; and, at all times, a political-cum-linguistic project, an endeavor. Strident calls for Hindu unity, Muslim unity or Panthic (Sikh) unity would scarcely have been necessary if the people known by such names had shown a spontaneous proclivity to be united along communal lines. Historians argue that religious

communalism in India has historical – social trajectory and see it as colonial legacy which reflects in contemporary Indian society.

Asghar Ali Engineer (1992) in his study found that after independence in cities like Aligarh, Jamshedpur, Bhiwandi, Godhra, Varanasi, a new Muslim class was emerged which had its own socio-cultural values and ethos. They found new paths of prosperity by their hard work. Now they were keen interested to convert this prosperity into political power too. They were now able to influence Muslim community because of their prosperity that was working for them as a new identity. Political ambitions of this new Muslim class started to challenge traditional Muslim leadership and tried to make their own way and space in politics. This challenged was opposed by traditional Muslim power lords and tried to make them cornered. But this political rivalry set a deep seed of communalism in India.

If one takes a look at the accounts of communal riots during the last two decades, several distinctive features come out clearly. As far as political economy of religious communalism in India is concerned, there are some stark changes started to take place in last two decades. For one' thing, communal riots have become fairly pro-longed affairs recently. Earlier they tended to be short-lived affairs, lasting a day or at best a few days. Once the tensions subsided, calm was restored and life returned to normal. One of the things that are shown by recent reports is that communal riots now-a-days last longer. Even after calm returns, tensions continue. This is confirmed by the events in Aligarh, Moradabad, Jamshedpur and Ahmedabad which have all seen repeated recurrence of communal violence in recent years. Second, communal riots over the last two decades have become considerably more gory affairs than used to be the case earlier and witness greater loss of life and property. Partly this is a function of the easy availability of a more advanced arsenal to the public. Earlier, whenever communal riots took place, the weapons usually used tended to be either sticks or knives. Now-a-days sophisticated guns and bombs tend to be used more frequently, resulting in greater loss of life and property. Thirdly, there is some evidence to suggest that communal riots these days are much more planned affairs than used to be the case earlier. Earlier communal riots were usually confined to the streets and the loss to pro-property resulting from a riot was largely accidental. It seems from the few accounts available that the targets of communal riots these days are specific properties and places and their destruction is ensured through the use of adequate arsenal. Fourthly the ecology of communal riots during the last two decades has undergone a change. Earlier and particularly before independence,

*Copyright © 2020, Scholarly Research Journal for Humanity Science & English Language*

communal riots tended to occur more often than not in small townships. This is no longer true today. Communal violence and tensions have during the last two decades become concentrated into what would generally be regarded as developing commercial and industrial centers. Even if they are not commercially or industrially developed, they at least have a tremendous potential for expansion of business and commerce.

Apart from above notion one of the reasons that has most influenced the character of communalism in recent years is undoubtedly social media. In the age of social media, it is now easier to play the game of communalism and make rift among people for vested interest. If we study riots in the last ten years social media has played an important role in the communal riots. Particularly in the context of Delhi riots (2020), social media served as fuel in the fire. The uncontrollable nature of social media has made it easy to spread false communal rumours and hate speeches. WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter etc. as social media has full of misleading, illusory, hateful and prejudiced texts, photos, videos, meme, gif towards the specific community. Misleading information available on this platform is providing intellectual legitimacy to communal haters. A large section of people considers this information as an ultimate truth without verifying the facts either receiving information or facts are true or false. The social media platform is being used most widely by communal forces to expand their agenda and reach out with like minded and potential people who could be fit to set their agenda on this platform and in public life. Because at this platform there is free flow of information. Neelanjan Sircar in his article at The Print (4 March 2020) highlighted the role of social media during communal violence. He titled his article ‘Not all communal riots are local social media is now making them national’. In his explanation he found that “social media has reduced the social distance between local communal conflict and national communal polarisation. Today a local communal conflict can be made a national issue in seconds, and a larger communal narrative can quickly be constructed from a patchwork of local incidents”.

Along with Social Media the mainstream media is also making way for communal haters. This is quite well-known fact that a larger section of mainstream media is inclined towards the majority. They all set agenda in favour of majority to exercise their communal idea. Electronic or Print or Digital media which has significant impact to make a notion, they are largely expressed their prejudiced religious ideology in their programme and writing, they are working as a catalyst to fuel the riots. There is complex relationship between religion,

*Copyright © 2020, Scholarly Research Journal for Humanity Science & English Language*

politics and media in India. If we look after 2020 Delhi riots it has exposed the weakness and one-sided inclination of Indian media. In recent year the integrity of media at high stake it seems to serve the idea of communal politics for their interest and putting society at risk.

If we attempt to see some other aspects which directly or indirectly affected the cultural politics of communalism in Modern India, the relationship between religion and politics emerges as a major aspect to ponder upon. The use of religion as an instrument for political mass mobilization seems another recent trend which has affected the socio-cultural fabric of Indian society.

The process of religious communalism involves competitive de-secularization (a competitive striving to extend the reach and power of religions), which—along with non-religious factors—helps to harden the divisions between different religious communities and increase tensions between them. Here greater importance is granted to religious forces, religious identity, religious competition, religious ideologies and to religious imbrications in popular, folk and elite cultures.

The advent of neo liberal economic forces affected popular perception of Indian society and changed several aspects of Indian society, at the same time growing religious and cultural intolerance among different sections of Indian society engendered from popular cultures which severely attempt to discard mutual co-existence of different socio-political and religious opinions could be seen as another recent trend in growing religious communalism in Indian society.

### **Conclusion**

So, it can be said that, the recent trends of religious communalism are not merely confined to religion, but it is also influenced from political economy of society as well as has great capacity to influence politics and economy of Indian society.

### **References:**

- Ahmed Hilal (6 May 2018), "Communalism in India is Now Several Shades Darker than What it Was in the 1970s", *www.theprint.in*
- Chandra Bipin (1984), "Communalism in Modern India", New Delhi: Vikas Publication
- Das Veena (1990), "Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia", New Delhi: Oxford University Press
- Engineer A A (1992), "Communal Riots in Post-Independence in India", Hyderabad: Sangam Books
- Krishna G (19 January 1985), "Communal Violence in India" *Economic and Political Weekly*.
- Pandey Gyanendra (2006), "The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India", New Delhi: Oxford India

*Pannikar K N (1991), "Communalism in India: History Politics and Culture", New Delhi: Manohar Publication*

*Rai Alok (2000), "Hindu Nationalism", Hyderabad: Orient Longman*

*Sahay A K, Bagaitkar A (13 March 2020), "What Role Did the Media Play During the Delhi Riots" www.thewire.in*

*Sircar Neelanjan (4 March 2020), "Not All Communal Riots are Local Social Media is Now Making Them National", www.theprint.in*

*Van der veer Peter (1994), "Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India", Barkley: University of California Press.*

*Varshney A (2002), "Ethnic Violence and Civic Life", New Haven: Yale University Press*