

Rise and growth of communalism



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India has always been a hub of cultural and religious diversities and its orientation goes back in the historical times. India has a number of religions and they co-exist side by side peacefully. This diversity includes a large number of Hindu populations and a minority of Muslims. Despite this factor there had never been much of a problem between the two religions. So what led to the disputes between these two diverse religions?

There is a belief that people following same religion have common thinking and cultural, social, economical and political interests. The communalist emphasizes that Hindus and Muslims cannot have common secular interests, instead their interests are bound to be opposed to each other. Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Christian communalisms have similar ideologies.

The rise and growth of communalism

Communalism emerged as a consequence of the emergence of modern politics. As Jawaharlal Nehru said ‘ One must not forget that communalism is a latter-day phenomenon which has grown up before our eyes’, which means that this ideology came into being in the recent-past and it was a result of the conditions which have in other societies produced similar ideologies and phenomenon. The consciousness of communalism in India arose under the impact of colonialism and the need to fight against the system, which was not accepted by the citizens of India during the colonial rule. The new ways of common interests started building up amongst the people because of the growing political, economic and social amalgamation of the regions, the developing opposition between colonialism and the citizens of India and the common desire to make India into a nation. This also followed from the birth

of the new politics during the late 19th century. It was based on the increasing number of politicization and mobilization of the Indians.

The transformation in the ideologies was a gradual and difficult process. The process included the spread of modern ideas of cultural and linguistic development, nationalism and the need to raise voice against discrimination on the basis of region, race, religion, caste, color, etc. In the process of spreading and accepting these ideas and identities, gave a way to some other new ideas and identities. The religiousness consciousness was transformed into communal consciousness in some parts and sections of the country. This transformation took place as there were some factors that favored its growth in that situation and served these sections of the society. The ideology of communalism grew across the country during in the 20th century as it had political and socio-economic roots. The resulting economic downfall and the impact on the Indians produced conditions which were favorable to division and opposition within the society. Some of the problems like unemployment, especially for the educated middle and lower-middle classes who could not fall back on their land and the absence of development of health, education, etc., led to socio-economic deterioration. This situation gave birth to some of the popular movements including nationalist movement, which enabled to look for long term solutions to the problems of the people by fighting against colonialism. The lower-middle and middle classes were the ones who were part of the military nationalist movement and left wing parties. But because of intense competition after the economic downfall among the individuals for jobs, the middle class individuals used other group identities such as religion, caste, region, etc. for

getting a larger share of economic opportunities. Communalism benefitted these individuals in the short run but at the same time gave birth to communal politics. People started using this technique of communalism to achieve their individualistic goals. However, it played short-term and partial role in the social existence of the middle classes.

Communalism often misinterpreted social tension and class conflict between the exploiters to different religions as communal conflict. Most often, the exploiting sections were the upper class Hindus and the exploited were Muslims or lower class Hindus. The Muslim communalists used to grumble that the Hindus are exploiting Muslims or the Hindu Communalists used to complain about the Muslims destroying their property. The struggle between landlords and tenants in various parts of the country also portrayed the struggle between Muslims and Hindus. The landlord-moneylender coercion, attack by rural poor on rural urban and many such cases were represented as oppressions by Muslims on Hindus or by Hindus on Muslims. One aspect of the growth of communalism in Punjab was the attempt by the higher level Muslim landlords to protect their economic and social position by using the way of communalism as revenge against the act performed by the Hindu moneylenders and traders against the Muslim tenants to protect their threatened class interests. Communalism also enabled the colonial rulers and the upper classes to unite with the lower classes and to utilize the politics of the later to serve their own needs.

The Divide and Rule policy under the rule of British bore special responsibility for the growth of communalism in modern India. But it is true that the reason for this success was the internal political and social

conditions. They used communalism to counter and weaken the growing national movement. It was being portrayed as a problem of the defense of minorities by the British. The disunity between Hindus and Muslims and the need to protect the minorities and the suppression by the majority was a form of justification for protection of the British rule.

An attempt was made to put caste against caste, region against region, leftist against rightist and even one class against the other. But the most successful was the communal division which survived till the end. The colonial authorities did whatever they could do by staking everything on it to make Indians fight against each other. Communalism was not developed to such an extent that it could divide the country into two, but the powerful support of the colonial rule increased the chances of division of the country. It was communalism that helped the British in influencing the workers, the middle and lower middle classes and the peasants which gradually included all the sections of the society.

The peasants during the 19th century lacked the understanding of the colonial system and the social movements itself and also lacked the possession of new ideologies that we as a nation can have a concept of an alternative and self-governing society. The concept that would unite the people in a common struggle and develop political movements that would last for a long term.

On 26th March 1902, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, in one of his speeches included the condition of the country, the condition of finances of the country and the poverty of the people. He came to a conclusion that the condition of the

people is deteriorating gradually and it's the worse in the economic history of the world. He set to analyze the budget in detail and showed how the land and other taxes had been going up even in cases of drought and famine. He asked for reduction of these taxes so that the middle and the lower middle classes would not be harassed. He was victorious as his proposal was accepted by the British government.

Bharat Singh's, one of the revolutionaries, approach towards politics was very secular and he understood the conditions of the people more clearly and the danger that communalism posed to the nation and the national movement. He and his companions were against and openly opposed the suggestion that youth belonging to religious-communal organizations should be appointed as a member of the Sabha. He wrote that a new group of youth was coming forward who did not recognize any differences based on religion and saw a person as a human being and then as an Indian, instead of discriminating on the basis of religion. He admired Lala Lajpat Rai as a leader but he didn't stand by him during the last years of his life as Lajpat Rai switched to communal politics. He saw the importance of making the people free from all the mental burden of religion. A large number of revolutionaries started criticizing the colonial ideologies and some turned to Marxism, some had the idea of a socialist revolution and the other's joined the Revolutionary Socialist Party, the Communist Party, the Gandhian wing of the Congress and the other Left parties.

In the years following the Non-cooperation Movement, 1922, the conviction of nationalism was still alive in the hearts of the Gandhian followers, who

kept the Government on its toes by not following the colonial policies and protested and fought for their rights.

The colonial operations by the British colonialists in India led to growth of the communal organizations and movements. These organizations focus on promoting the interests of that particular community. Some of these organizations were Hindu Mahasabha, All India Muslim League, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, etc.

Indian National Congress (INC) was found in the 1885 in order to narrow the Hindu-Muslim divide and all sorts of discrimination between Indians on the basis of religion.

But Sir Sayed and many such Muslim leaders portrayed the Congress as a representative body of Hindus, so they tried to hinder the unity between Hindus and Muslims. Poor participation of Muslims in the INC proves it. The majority of number of seats was being dominated by Hindus. At the same time Hindus were against the Congress as the religious and communal leaders thought that this movement was supportive of the Western cultural assault.

All India Muslim League was a movement that started by the Muslim leaders on 30th December 1906 as a proposal for a political association for the Muslims in India. The motive behind this proposal was to counter Congress influences, to protect Muslim interests and to support the British administration. The 1st meeting of this proposed entity took place in Karachi on the 20th December, 1907. It gave the Muslim leaders a platform on local, national and international levels.

Khilafat Movement (1919-24), was an Islamic movement in India during the colonial rule. It was an effort by the Indian Muslim community to unite together against the Turkish Empire ruled by the Khalifa, whom the Muslims considered as the caretaker of Islam. The leaders involved the Khilafat movement fully supported the non-violent methods of Gandhi facilitating the establishment of Muslims and Hindus against colonialism. This effort formed a major threat to the British rule. This movement did not last long and resulted in violent incidents and the final outcome was deaths of many Indian and British people.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, one of the members of the Gandhi's congress party, made speeches on pressurizing Hindus and Muslims to live together, but later in 1935 when he returned to India he came up with a mission to save Indian Muslims from Hindu domination. He built up a moribund Muslim League which he later disclosed that this union was only for the Muslims.

Hindu Mahasabha was a Hindu nationalist organization which was found in 1915 to oppose the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League. This movement started at a small scale as a conference in Allahabad by the leading Hindus. Many socio-political problems led to emergence of Hindu Mahasabha as a communal organization. A certain section of Hindus decided to organize the Hindus with the motive of self-defense. Madan Mohan Malaviya enlightened his fellow Hindus that Muslims and Christians had been carrying on activities since a long time resulting in non-participation of Hindus.

Conclusion

There have been many such conflicts between Hindus and Muslims in India since the beginning of the colonial rule which may be in the form of violence or non-violence. Before the colonial rule, both the religious groups: Hindus and Muslims were able to live together peacefully. There were communal movements and conflicts in the country which were based on religious communities and strong feelings of nationalism in India during the late 19th century. Some Muslim leaders desired to call for a communal Muslim society. This belief led to initiation of a separate community for Muslims. It became very difficult for them to follow the colonial policies, culture and power. They started refusing to learn English and to associate with the British. They found that Hindus were at better positions with the British in government than they were and they started believing that they favored Hindus. On the other hand, Hindus protested against the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League as they believed that the other religious communities were getting the opportunity to participate in political events but they were neglected. The British took advantage of the disputes and misunderstandings between these two religious groups by strategizing one against the other and by favoring the seemingly more peaceful Hindus and Sikhs over the Muslims and enforcing their belief systems upon each religion. Jinnah took an astonishing decision by demanding a separate nation for Muslims in the sub-continent. Later, in the year 1947 he was rewarded with a new country, Pakistan because of the growing communal tensions.