

Essay on Communalism A Threat to India's Unity

"All kinds of communalism are dangerous. Just before 1947, the main damage to national unity was inflicted by the Muslim Communalism which led to the partition of India. After 1947 it is Hindu Communalism that poses a great threat to India's democracy and its unity."

—A Thinker.

India is a secular State. Secular means non-religious, but in the context of Indian polity, it means the co-existence of all religions without any kind of discrimination. Though our constitution safeguards for the minorities, the actual implementation of the provisions is a complex one. Indian people are generally known for their non-violence, tolerance, brotherhood characters, that is why several religions have flourished in Indian society. After the traumatic partition and bloodshed, the partition has given the political parties, several inflammable issues for exploiting communal passions for their political gains. Not only the politicians but also the religious heads of minorities and the majority community instead of trying to mitigate the communal frenzy flared it up with their speeches and actions. The destruction of Babri Masjid and burning alive the Hindu Kar Sewaks in Godhra (Gujrat) and the incidences of violence in Gujrat after the Godhra massacre have torn the Secular Fabric of Indian Democracy to uncountable pieces. One incidence after another creates more hatred, more incidences, more communalism in the country.

During the struggle for independence, several reformers and freedom fighters were committed to the task of modernizing the religious

practices in India but what is seen nowadays? Communal violence has become the order of the day. The socio-economic backwardness, illiteracy, poverty of the vast population of our country, both Hindus and Muslims, have always remained a fertile ground for fanaticism, and communal hatred. The hard-liners or extremists on both sides, never try to educate the common people, about the demerits of their communal feelings, so that they may continue to exploit them for their vested interests. Such attitude on the part of religious leaders contributed to a great extent to the growth and development of communalism in Indian society which surely will sometimes work as a nuclear warhead and destroy the whole country.

In India, throughout the past century, communal forces have tried to capture the political center stage. By various means, they have sought to disrupt the unity and integrity of the country, tried to gnaw at the very secular foundations of Indian culture and history. But every time they have failed. Yet, the consequences of such thought have often been traumatic. One has to but mention the holocaust of 1947, the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, the demolition of the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya, and the riots accompanying it, etc. to get a feel of the trauma. The Muslim fundamentalists have made it an issue of their identity and existence. The Hindu fundamentalists are also not behind inciting the gullible masses, to rise against the Muslims, by making them believe that Hindus in Hindustan are being treated as second-class citizens.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Sangh Parivar, which is an umbrella sheltering and nurturing organizations like Bhartiya Janata Party(BJP), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the Bajrang Dal, the Shiv Sena, and others of their ilk, is such a conglomerate. The backbone of the now-infamous "Saffron Brigade" i.e. the organizations following a militant Hindu Fundamentalist agenda and fascist principles, is the RSS. In fact, the "family" came into being because

the RSS was rejected by people after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi and thus chose to remain in the background.

The basic fabric of Indian society and polity, which is heterogeneous, composite, and democratic, came under attack by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its various supporters in different guises. The most important of these is BJP. The politicians or religious leaders of BJP, VHP, RSS, and Bajrang Dal might have some good reasons for reviving the past glories of Hinduism, but the cruel fact is that their efforts for such revival are creating communal tensions among Muslims. After independence –all the political parties–have exploited religion and caste sentiments in furthering their political goals.

Over the past years, the Muslim community in India has been demonized in both subtle and overt ways. Hindu right is obsessed with sexuality and power, which manifested themselves in most gruesome form during the riots via both the systematic attacks on Muslim women and the widespread and false stories circulating that Hindu women were being abducted and raped by Muslim men. The second key obsession is with “nation”. It is telling that immediately after the burning of the Sabarmati, Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani said that the event was Pakistani-inspiration, in the absence of any evidence. Although some claimed that this was to divert blame away from the local Muslim community, the record of the Sangh Parivar, and Advani in particular, shows that the fundamental motivations are quite the opposite–to put the nationality of Indian Muslims under question.

Creating strong associations between the notion of “Muslims” and the notion of “foreigner” is a part of the Sangh Parivar project of the construction of India as a Hindu State. During the riots, it is common for mobs to chant the verse “there seemed only two living places for Muslims–Pakistan or the cemetery (Kabrastan)”

Traditionally secular forces in India have attempted to undermine these notions by stressing the “Indianness” and “loyalty” of Indian Muslims, with the role of so many in the freedom struggle, etc.

In the aftermath of Gujarat, what was seen by many as a cynical attempt to divert attention away from the carnage, the Indian government engineered a confrontation with Pakistan which brought the region to the edge of nuclear war. On 14th May 2002 an army barracks at Kaluchak near Jammu was stormed by militants and both soldiers and their families were killed. Although there have been such regular attacks before—indeed ones which have taken a greater toll—this time India immediately geared up for war with Pakistan. It is very uncertain what degree of control Pakistan commands over militants infiltrated into India, but with the country still reeling from the violence in Gujrat it was clearly a convenient time to divert everyone’s attention towards the permanent enemy.

All groups, whether Hindu or Muslim, which encourage narrow communal identities are adding to the problem. The reality is that real people’s identities are fluid and complex, whereas the project of ethnic nationalism requires the construction of narrow identities, and then the use of those identities to mobilize people. In this way, the apparently innocent encouragement of religious identity can be part of a process that culminates in violence.

Riots are rarely spontaneous events. Probably the most incorrect caricature of the recent violence is of spontaneous tit for tat violence. To highlight the organized nature of violence is not to brush away the difficult questions of where exactly mass violence and mass sexual violence comes from and how these are connected with authoritarianism and sexual repression.

The religious right in India exploits to a great extent its multiple

faces, from the more respectable to the more extreme. The key point to recognize is that the differences between the organizations are tactical rather than ideological.

There are no golden pasts. History, especially the pre-British history of India, has become a battle-ground with Hindu Nationalists reminding us of an apparently beautiful pre-Islamic era, and secularists attempting to counter this with examples of peace, progress, and cohesion achieved during the time of Mughal rule. The reality is that such simplifications of history are always dangerous. All empires, pre-Islamic, and post-Islamic have been born through brutal conquest and expansion and have seen great social injustices. Many have also had their times of relative peace and stability, and social progress. Today it is probably more useful to question the overall way that history is caricatured, rather than getting bogged down retailed debate.

The enmity between India and Pakistan is crucially linked to the ability of the Sangh Parivar in India to orchestrate violence against Muslims. Fear of the enemy without and the enemy with feed off each other. The perceived threat of "terrorism", the associated climate of fear, and the need for "strong leaders" which breeds are preconditions for getting the complicity of significant sections of the population in a genocidal project. Thus the anti-communal be linked to a peace movement. Undermining the construction of India as a Hindu state, undermining the construction of Pakistan as a Muslim state, and undermining the cross-border tensions because of Terrorism are all linked ingredients in preventing a slide towards fascism and war.

In a country like India, with so much plurality and diversity, talking of Hindu state, or Hindustan for Hindus, shall be a dangerous sign, totally against the well-established, secular fabric of the

Indian Constitution. The unsecular forces organizations must keep in mind that communalizing India will bring horror in the country and the people will eat others and time is near that we will be again under foreign rule. Unless an all-out attempt is made to contain the communal forces, the very unity of India is in danger. A total ban on all types of communal organizations must be put forth. A social and cultural movement should be launched to awaken the people about the reality of communal violence and its effects on them and the country as a whole. The process has to start from the top. All political parties and religious organizations must stop delivering inflammatory speeches and inciting the general masses in the name of religion. A wrong action on the part of a community cannot be equalized by another wrong action by another community.

For the survival of the country, secularism has to survive for the survival of secularism, religious friendship, togetherness, and tolerance are a must. Communalism can only destroy the unity and integrity of the nation, it can't help in creating friendship, fraternity, or togetherness.