

Review Article

Communal Violence: A Black spot on the face of democratic country

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Abstract

Communal riots have become a distinct feature of communalism in India. The reason for such a clash could be superficial and trivial, though underlying them are deeper considerations of political representation, control of and access to resources and power. Local economic rivalries, political games, and international tensions brought a new awareness of difficulties and discriminations.

Keywords: Communal riots, Social causes , Political Causes, Religious Causes

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Introduction

whenever conflicting groups from two different religions called as communal riot. Communal riots have become a distinct feature of communalism in India.¹ There have been many incidents of riots recorded during the course of British period and after independent India². The main responsible factors for the communal violence may be discussed under the following factors:

(1). Socio-Political factors (2). Economic Factors (3) Religious factors and (4). Trivial factors

1. Socio-Political Factors

Often socio-political issues also engineered communal violence. In most cases the communal violence is politically motivated. There is a growing tendency to maximize political gains by adopting short cuts in terms of usage of ancient identities, money and muscle power, communal slogans, doctrinaire issue, etc. The major cause of communal conflict before partition was the struggle between the Hindu and the Muslim elite for political power as well as control of economic resources at the national level.³

In communal violence several causes and multiplicity of factors are involved which contribute to the generation and aggravation of communal riots. In communal violence there are micro as well as macro factors involved. The micro factors may be non-ideological and of local nature. The macro factors are often of ideological in nature and have nation-wide sweep. Both are integrally connected with the process of socio-economic development in the country.

The history of Hindu-Muslim antagonism is the result of 'divide and rule' policy adopted by the British rulers, which left a wide impact on Hindu-Muslim relations. After the revolt of 1857, the British rulers started to divide different communities on communal lines,

particularly Hindus and Muslims in India. The Indian ruling class continued the 'divide and rule' policy of the British rulers in the post-partition period in relation to the masses of the two communities to keep them divided and always fighting. The Indian ruling class continued the 'divide and rule' policy of the British rulers in the post-partition period in relation to the masses of the two communities to keep them divided and always fighting.⁴

The local Gorakshini Sabhas began springing up in many parts of Northern India from the late 1880s, and became more militant and brought acute social tension. On the other hand, Muslim revivalist trends were simultaneously insisting on the necessity of the 'Bakharid' (i.e. the festival of sacrifice) sacrifices. Thus, the ground was prepared for communal violence in 1893.

The division of Bengal in 1905, based on religion was the unique example of fomenting communalism by the British policy of 'divide and rule'. Communal perception was again perpetrated through the political instrument of *separate electorates*, wherein religious minorities were given separate seats in the legislative bodies according to their proportion of population in the provinces. This widened the prevailing communal antagonism in the country.

Partition of the country also created a great deal of bitterness and communalized political processes in post-Independent India. Before partition, all were Indians, but after partition Muslims became a minority in India while Hindus and Sikhs became minority in Pakistan. Allegations of persecution of minorities in both the countries had been made from time to time. The seeds of distrust and disharmony have gradually taken shape of big trees and communal termite is slowly eating into the age-old roots of our peace.⁵

Communal riots are not caused spontaneously and also that they are rarely caused by religious animosity. They arise due to conflicting political interests, which are often linked to economic interests. During the time of partition, it was the clash of political interests of the elite of two different communities which resulted in communal riots.⁶

In 1967, the attempt to make 'Urdu', the second official language in Bihar, was the cause behind communal violence in Ranchi. The 1980s decade witnessed the highest degree of communalization of politics. In 1994, the introduction of a short 'Urdu News Bulletin' from the Bangalore Doordarshan (DD) had sparked off communal violence in Bangalore.

Due to the political issues communal riots occurred in many cities of India. In the late 80s, communal riots that broke out in Meerut (1987) and the Bhagalpur (1989) were directly the result of 'Ayodhya dispute', the dispute was essentially political in nature.

Weak law and order is one of the causes of communal violence. After partition, the most of communal violence took place because of the weak law and order. There was failure of the police and administrative officers in gauging the intensity of the communal situation in advance. The partisan role of state machinery particularly police goes in sustenance of communal violence and reactive motivation by the group feeling. The partisan attitude of police allows petty clashes to turn into a major communal violence.⁷

The Moradabad riots (1982) and the *Maliana* and *Hashimpura* episode in Meerut (1987) are the glaring examples of one-sided action of the Uttar Pradesh (UP)-Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC). Looting and arson in this context was considered legitimate and necessary and was therefore ignored. The other examples of PAC being responsible for communal violence are noticed. V.N. Rai, an ex-police officer of UP held the police partisan as the cause of communal violence. [8] The partisan role of the police in Mumbai riots (1992-93), Gujarat killings and in Orissa riots (2008) has been equally shameful. The partisan role of the police in Mumbai riots is well documented in a compilation from the *Times of India*.

The politicization of the **Mandir-Masjid issue** and the subsequent demolition of the Mosque gave the BJP the opportunity to consolidate its vote bank. In the recent years the South Indian states, particularly Kerala and Tamilnadu, have also witnessed communal violence and are slowly growing into communally sensitive areas.

Communal violence has entered a new phase with the Christians and members of other minority religions being made the victims of planned attacks. There are many other factors also which contribute to the building up of communal tension. The increased prosperity of a group challenges the traditional political leadership of the town. This political rivalry leads to communally dangerous situations. Political rivalries assume dangerous extent in areas marked by a high level of political instability and social violence. Politicians have no interest in bridging the

gap between communities, but have, in fact, a positive stake in ensuring that it remains as wide as possible. They succeed in misguiding their ignorant co-religionists in the wrong direction and towards the wrong goals, which are against the interests of the people themselves. Hindus and Muslims cannot be treated as entirely homogenous communities. There are besides religious conflicts, conflicts of interests too. On occasion, these interests sharpen religious conflict.⁹

Communal conflict/communal of interest does not seem to originate in the ignorance of 'true religion' but in the struggle for autonomy on the part of one or more groups and there is an inescapable conflict between their drive for autonomy and the cohesion of the state in a multi-religious society. Politicization of religion, conditions of extreme scarcity and a particularly divisive style of politics aggravate the problem, which appears to be basic to heterogeneous societies.

False and exaggerated rumours pave an easy way to communal violence. Rumours are circulated rapidly and their distortions grow with each repetition. It should be the imperative duty of the district administration to counter rumours floated around by unscrupulous persons. In almost all riots the role of rumours in rousing communal zeal is quite famous. Rumour plays a mischievous role in fanning the flames in a surcharged atmosphere. It is always a key in the hands of communal elements to engineer communal violence. The most effective to incite the mass is the rumour of the women or girl of one community being molested, raped or kidnapped by the members of another community; or the killing of a prohibited animals by a Muslim; etc. In 1961, rumours played a vital role in Jabalpur riots. The communal violence was provoked by rumours about a Hindu girl being assaulted by two Muslims. The main cause of Nellie, Assam riot (1983) was rumour that the Bengali Muslim had cut off the breasts of Hindu women and displayed them in the Hindu areas to show their power. In Bhagalpur riots (1989) too, the role of rumours was significant. During Gujarat killings (2002), the Gujarati press became the agent provocateur. *Sandesh* published false reports, rumours and biased reports, which aggravated the flames of communal violence.

In December 1990, during the second phase of *karseva* in Ayodhya, violence broke out in many cities of India.¹⁰ This false story has spread like wildfire across Gujarat and was compounded by extreme sexual violence and bestiality against Muslim women. Godhra was indeed the first major communal riot that got such a wide media coverage particularly from the satellite channels. Therefore the media now needs to be more responsible, considering the influence that it can have over the masses. It is time that the media stopped any kind of biased reporting as it can further encourage the communal elements to instigate the masses. Political parties have always had a hand in instigating and exploiting communal violence so as to meet their electoral interests.

During communal violence, there is no free exchange of views and opinions between the two communities and both the communities perceive as inimical. Such absence of inter-group communication is favorable for communal violence. During communal violence, both communities paste and distribute posters and pamphlets thereby increasing communal tensions and continuation of communal violence. Such communication preaches communal hatred and prejudice to incite communal violence. Isolated individual instances of injustices and loss, rightly or wrongly are published and communicated in the newspapers and consequently communal groups get support for continuing communal violence, as one community perceives that the other community committed violent acts against it.¹¹

Communal violence takes place, as members of one community perceive the threat, harassment, fear and danger from the members of the other community. The response to the threat is either fight or departure. The latter generates fear and terror and the former cause's hatred and anger phobia. There is a lack of inter-personal trust and mutual understanding resulting in subsequent fear and worry among the communities. During communal violence, neighbors and acquaintances become enemies to one another. Though they are staying nearby, some persons from the same locality participate in communal violence. Thus, the people known to each other over a period become assailants. During communal violence, there is lack of rapport between the people and police. People do not report many communal incidents to police, as they are afraid of personal assaults by the criminals in the absence of adequate protection by police. An individual personal attack is sometimes misconstrued as an attack against the entire community. As a result, people become scared and frustrated and thereby more violence takes place.

2. Economic Factors

Economic competition often leads to social tensions that can easily turn into communal violence. An important cause of communalism and communal violence springing from it has been unbalanced and exploitative economic relations in Indian society. In 1929, Mumbai riots were explained at the time as the outcome of an economic conflict between Hindu strikers and Muslim strike breakers, mixed in with Hindu antipathy towards Muslim moneylenders in the city. Several accounts of the partition riots in Punjab have also focused on the role of land shortages and conflicts between indebted Muslim farmers and mainly Hindu money lenders in the country side and between Muslim and Hindu business interests in the cities.¹²

After independence, however, as riots have become much more urban in nature, most economic explanations of riots have focused on either: (i) economic competition due to Muslim craftsmen moving up in the economic division of labour and beginning to compete with Hindu merchants; or (ii) riots stocked by urban land mafias in an attempt to displace one community from increasingly valuable

urban real estate. Due to the economic factors communal violence occurred in the industrial belt of country. Communal Violence have mostly occurred in urban towns which are either industrial belts or trading centers with the economy largely based on a particular occupation. Most of urban towns places had a considerable percentage of Muslim population whose political or economic interests clashed with those of the Hindus. Riots in this phase might have occurred in the villages or rural areas like the Bihar Sharif riots, but they have often remained unreported. Various case studies disclose that in period before Ayodhya issue violence took place in cities where Muslim artisans and weavers took over the trading of their products from Hindus. The intense economic competition led to conflicts and riots. The Gopal Singh Committee in its Report (1983) also testifies to the economic factors, local rivalry, acquiring control over and sharing of the gains of economic ventures.¹³

It is asserted that most of the employers, industrialists, etc., are Hindus, whereas most of the workers and artisans are Muslims. The economic factors played a significant role at those industrial places where Hindus and Muslims both were engaged in the same industry. The problem becomes complex, where Muslims occur to be wage-earning artisans. The riots in Moradabad, Khurja, Aligarh, Bhagalpur, Ahmedabad, Baroda and Surat were specially targeted because in these towns Muslim craftsmen, artisans, foundry owners and weavers reap the reward of favorable economic climate and trading relations with oil rich Gulf countries.¹⁴

Often, communal forces exploit the economic backwardness of their community to mobilize it against other community. The economic crisis in our society leads not only to communal violence but also to atrocities over women, Scheduled Castes (SC) and members of weaker sections of society. The present inflation and worrying economic condition is also responsible for communal violence. Business rivalries are also regarded as the cause behind the communal disturbances. The society is so interdependent in its business activities that it is difficult to visualize a situation where give and take among various sections is non-existent. Hindu and Muslim entrepreneurs and artisans cannot flourish without each other's assistance. Any bitterness in their relationship would affect the whole industry adversely. The comparative economic prosperity among the Muslims leads to greater political aspirations among them. This results in a communally dangerous situation. During the last few decades, a perceptible qualitative difference is being felt in many towns. Communal forces have identified certain contradictions in their relationships to create situations in which further communal clashes are encouraged. The contribution of land mafias in communal violence is visible in Ahmadabad and Mumbai. In Hyderabad riots (1990-91), it was found that the role of land mafias in collaboration with their political mentors was derisive in engineering and sustaining these riots for long periods.¹⁵

The riot of Bhiwandi (1970) is the clear example of business rivalries among traders resulting in planned and organized attacks on the looms working for rival traders. The economic targeting of Muslims in the Gujarat riots (2002) is unprecedented. Muslim businesses have been systematically destroyed. The Tribunal recorded extensive evidence of the divesting loss of property of the Muslim community in the state. Due to business rivalry, the anti-social elements are encouraged to attack the opposite business establishments. The theories of class conflict, viz., class stratification coinciding with religious cleavages or the dominant property group trying to raise bogie of majority communalism in order to mute or deflect the rising demands of the minority. In India, communal identity and division has always pervaded Indian society but communalism is one of the by-products of Colonial underdevelopment of the Indian economy. The rise of modern politics and social classes occurred in the same period and the crises of Colonial economy began to be largely felt. Colonial economy, underdevelopment and economic stagnation produced conditions conducive to the growth of internal divisions and antagonism within society. The internal divisions promoted communal violence and social tension at the mass level. Some scholars argue that all classes in the society behave differently according to their economic needs, which when triggered off by a religious issue, lead to communal violence. They attribute class struggle as the root cause behind several communal disturbances, not religion. Some scholars believe that after partition of the country, Indian Muslim developed the psychology of being the deprived group. Thus, an incident, which may be trivial in nature, leads to a chain reaction ending in violence.¹⁶

3. Religious Causes

Religion is an important factor responsible for the origin or growth of communal violence. However, religion acts more as an agent determining the attitude of its followers than the motivation or mainspring of communal violence. Religion has become a cat's paw in the hands of unscrupulous elements. Religious conflicts are the expressions of beliefs on the ground of superiority. The man is influenced by instinctive impulse and remains on the brute plane and due to ignorance, fear and fancy; deceit becomes dominant with cruelty, jealousy and violence.

The new found faith in religion by the communities has, however, given rise to several problems. Every religion teaches its followers that its understanding and interpretation of God, Prophet, etc., is the best and the ultimate. The tremendous faith in one's religious beliefs and a feeling that nonbelievers in these are misguided people who derive to be told regarding the correct path, lead to conflicts, which may be termed as religious conflicts. Normally, the destruction of places of worship of other community and forced or voluntary conversions were supposed to be part of religious duty. However,

religious/communal groups in free India continue to exploit the situation; the tug of war between them has intensified the communal divide; their leaders thrive on spreading hatred. One believes in extermination of the other group the other in retaliation. The communal violence is thus organized by vested powerful semi and quasi-politically affiliated groups. It is, therefore, necessary that such organizations should not be allowed to ransack the lives and properties of innocent people. Though religious festivals and processions are generally the starting points of communal riots, still sufficient security is not provided during these times. There is also not much response against incidents of communal violence from the civil society.

The manipulation of religious processions by political leaders is an old phenomenon. Processions became significant vehicles of violence, when local power politics was at stake. Communalists use religiosity for boundary definitions in political and other spheres. Their emphasis remains on religious festivals, processions, etc. They try to promote solidarity by exaggerating incidents when such processions have been infringed upon. Recently, due to religious celebrations and processions communal disturbances have been reported.

Thus, religious processions become an irritant for causing communal violence. Further, other religious processions, on occasions of both Hindu and Muslim festivals are primary factors responsible for communal violence. Very often, provocation due to hurting of religious sentiments resulted in the communal violence.

In December 1986, communal riots broke out in Bangalore and Mysore, because of defamatory article against last Prophet of Islam. The Moradabad riot (1980) was due to the intrusion of a pig into the Idgah during 'Eid' prayer. Both politicians and priests of their religion succeed in stoking the flames of communal hatred, bias and prejudice and in triggering communal clashes whenever convenient to them. Due to frustration and stress, people become more religious and as a result, communal bodies are flourishing all over the country taking advantage of liberal democracy and freedom of association. The activities of religious groups, by spending on religious and semi-religious activities have been held responsible for communal violence. The real cause of conflict between two communities in Moradabad riots (1980) was economic competition and the increased degree of spending on religious and semi-religious activities. Thus, such activities could easily cause a greater degree of hostility among the other communities and succeeded in creating an atmosphere for communal violence. Sharp reactions are also seen where any place of worship erected or established by one community in an area where the other community exceeds in numbers.

The Muslim fundamentalists often brand the Indian State as 'Hindu'; Hindu fundamentalists accept this and start prescribing a code of conduct for all 'Muslims', and they charge 'Muslim' with being

strongly organized and blind supporters of their own co-religionists. Muslims accept this allegation and claim that if they do not defend their religion the 'Hindus' will stamp out Islam. Thus, Hindu fundamentalists view minorities as enemies of the nation and communal violence as deliberate acts intended to humiliate and injure the Hindus. While Muslim fundamentalists view communal violence as well organized and pre-planned, and designed to terrorize the Muslims—to depress them, to drive them out of their own areas and to reduce them into second-class citizens.

Fundamentalists in either community use their influence in creating certain biases. They have taken all possible opportunities to incite the minds of the people and at times even resorted to the use of foul language. However, it cannot be ignored that Hindus and Muslims have deep-rooted prejudices against each other, which are taken advantage of by the fundamentalists. For instance, by mobilizing the masses on communally sensitive issues, the communalists succeeded in inflaming the already existing prejudices.

The fundamentalists exploit the discrepancy between the self-perception of one religious group and perception of it by the antagonistic communal group to spread fear, suspicions, mistrust and insecurity among their co-religionists. Thus, fundamentalists of one group, instead of maculating the communalism of another group, feed and fatten it through violence or communal propaganda. Religious fanaticism among the people also has its source in the constant preaching and actions of communal organizations. Since they are interested in sharpening the differences between religious groups, it is in their interest to make their followers hard-boiled, unreasonable and passionate followers of manipulated form of the religion concerned, a form which is, in fact, farthest from the actual tenets of the faith.

That is why it is a common feature, observed in every religious/communal group, to unite whenever the 'religion in danger' slogan is raised. Politicians and priests mobilize people around this slogan, and they preserve in keeping the slogan alive all the time. This fostering of fanaticism is of course, facilitated by the ignorance and the lack of awareness amongst the people. That is why vested interests have a stake in keeping ignorant as many people as possible and as long as possible.

Proselytisation (Conversion) is a source of communal conflict and communal violence. The conversion issue intensified communal discord in the country and resulted in communal violence in many parts of the country. Frequent conversions caused a great resentment among people. During the continuous phases of communal violence in Bengal from 1905 to 1947, conversion was one of the main causes of communal violence. The communal violence in Ahmadabad, Pune and Sholapur in 1982 had been the direct result of the Meenakshipuram conversions. The recent communal violence against the Christian

community in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh (MP) and Uttarakhand and particularly in Orissa in 2008 was due to the conversion of Adhivasis and Gorkhas to the Christianity.¹⁷

4.Trivial Causes

Some of the trivial causes responsible for communal violence and disturbance are disputes such as over places of worship, clashing of times of prayers of different communities, disturbances in religious processions/functions, objection to playing of music, singing and dancing in front of mosque and other religious places, obstructions placed during religious processions, desecration or destruction of places of worship, reaction for religious conversions and vulgar display of religious fervors on the localities especially at the places inhabited by the members of the other community etc.

Other causes responsible for communal violence are dispute between property owners and tenants, distribution of objectionable pamphlets, due to the migrated Muslims and refugees, emotion and insecurity, laying the foundation for new statues, mischievous media reporting, objectionable speeches, pelting stones to disturb the religious processions, petty quarrels between members of different communities, personal quarrels, provocative and abusive slogans against the other community, publishing of provocative articles and objectionable writings, use of loudspeakers at religious places and other similar practices, no regulation on religious processions, existence of different disputes, lack of responsive and responsible behaviour by local administration and lack of coordination between the various administrative units on the spot, reaction and repercussion of riots of other places, i.e., Delhi riots of 1987 as a fall out of Meerut riots of 1987, road accident, traffic accidents, showing signs or symbols of insulting, sudden quarrel, taking out processions through unconventional and non-permitted routes

Some of the trivial causes responsible for communal violence and disturbance are festivals such as demarcating new places for Tazias, changing the root of processions, intolerance during fairs and festivals, performing Qurbani (i.e. sacrifice) in a public or open place, sacrificing of cow on 'Bakharid' (i.e. the festival of sacrifice), Cow slaughter, beef consumption, presence of objectionable animals at the time of prayers, , throwing of liquor and flesh of objectionable animals at religious places, throwing of colours, gulal, etc, on person who resent it and throwing of colours, gulal, etc, on mosque or other religious places.

Sexual offences such as marriage, harassment at workplace, eve-teasing and sexual relations between members of the opposite groups and cases of elopement etc. are some of the trivial causes responsible for communal violence.

.Conclusion

The problem of communal violence encompasses religious, political, socio-economic, cultural, historical and intellectual spheres in different ratios and extent with reference to different states and regions. After

partition of the country, communal violence is organized, planned and executed by the stakes for deriving selfish gains. In most cases, it is politically motivated and the role of rumours in rousing communal passions is quite famous. The communal atmosphere provides a ready-tilled soil for communal minded people to sow seeds of communal hatred and nurture them until the bitter harvest of communal violence is reaped. Efforts were made by the government to "appease" both Hindus and Muslims, which brought about disaster. Politicians have no interest in bridging the gap between communities, but have, in fact, a positive stake in ensuring that it remains as wide as possible. They succeed in misguiding their ignorant co-religionists in the wrong direction and towards the wrong goals, which are against the interests of the people themselves. The next decade would be one of blood and tears.. Communal violence are really unwelcome problem for any civilized and harmonious society.

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