

Chapter 2

Communalism: Challenge to the Truth of Indian Diversity

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ABSTRACT

Indian diversity is a result of generations of co-mingling and the delicate social fabric faces challenge of the ever-growing threat of communalism. To understand the challenge of communalism it is imperative for us to define and recognise its manifestations. This chapter will focus on defining communalism, its changing form from pre to post independence, how the contemporary political scenario has promoted communal passions of the masses, that is often manifested in the communal violence, how it has made history central to their communal programme; and finally the repercussions of the communal hate mongering on the Indian social fabric. It is through communal interpretation of history and its propagation through all possible means that pits one community against the other. This chapter will counter the communal interpretation of history and will focus on the need for the promotion of counter narrative.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0582-2.ch002

INTRODUCTION

Communalism for generations is regarded as a threat to the delicate social fabric of India. The delicate social fabric implies the diversity aspiring for common economic, political, social and security interests. Communalism in India, which has evolved over a century, has become strong threat to the people's aspirations for their well being. There have been attempts by scholars (of different persuasions) to articulate the challenges posed by communalism. These scholars have examined the phenomenon in order to contest it and articulate popular desires. To understand the challenge of communalism it is imperative for us to define and recognise its manifestations. This chapter will focus on defining communalism, its changing form from pre to post independent and analyse the medieval Indian history often used as a scapegoat to communalise history. The political scene has witnessed a promotion of communal passions of the masses for electoral and non electoral process politics that endangers the political culture and the Indian social fabric.

The issue of analysing communalism lies only in an empiricist and ahistorical approach (Singh, 1990). This fails to provide a comprehensive view of communalism with all its interconnections. The evolving social crisis during the colonial and independent period brings out the dangers of communal politics in their historical and political context and role of political class therein. Communalism can be seen as "perversion of religion from a moral order to temporal arrangement of contemporary convenience, from a faith into a constituency, from a strategy of living into tactics of politics, from an end into a means." (Khan, 1987, pp. 12-13) Just as, at a general level, W.C. Smith (1979), has defined it as, 'communalism as ideology has focussed on opposition of religious groups on issues of organising social, political and economic life causing antagonism among religious groups.' (p.187) However, what is important is the fact that religion by itself does not promote communalism until it is mobilised by the political class for electoral purposes.

Communalism has mostly expressed itself in various forms and manifestations in both pre and post-independence phase. When not so violent, communalism manifests itself as discrimination against a religious group in matters of education, employment, promotion, placement, language, culture, way of life and livelihood. In its violent forms of mayhem, pitched battles, entry into each other's houses to kill, burn, loot, plunder amounts to at times and places genocide. Violence is cultural, social political religious and linked to structural causes. It is not linked to culture human nature, way of life or propensity of a community to commit aggression. It is neither natural, cultural, or culture. It is situational. Situations are a combination of over determination of anxiety driven pogrom. Any pogroms of rioting, ethnic cleansing or nuclear threats are anti human, apart from an attack on identity.

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