Interaction between religion and politics: Religion & Communalism

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Prof. (Dr.) Tanuja Singh
Ex. Head, Dept. of Pol. Sc.
A.N. College, Patna, PPU

INTRODUCTION
India is a multi-religious country. There are eight major religious communities.
(1) The Hindus (82.64%)
(2) The Muslim (15.35%)
(3) The Christians (2.43%)
(4) The Sikhs (2%)
(5) The Buddhists (0.71%)
(6) The Jain (0.48%)
(7) The Parsis (0.3%)
(8) The Jews (0.1%)

All these religions have played a very dynamic role in the evolution of human civilization and culture. Realizing the nature of Indian society i.e. multi-religious, the founding fathers of our constitution enshrined secularism as one of the basic features of our constitution. The religious interests of all religious communities in our country are fully protected and safeguarded. Secularism is the most powerful instrument for building a modern secular polity. But still communal tension and communal politics become a part of Indian politics.

During the last 20 or 25 years (particularly after 1990) the problem of regionalism in India is escalating day by day. Almost all states have regional parties. Many of them are in government. No national party is in a position to form a government at the centre on its own. They are dependent upon regional parties for critical support. The regional sentiments are on the rise everywhere in India. This chapter attempts to explain the concept of regionalism, consider its historical roots, current situation and the way out or the solution to the problem as discussed by veteran politicians and thinkers.

INTERACTION BETWEEN RELIGION AND POLITICS
Interaction between religion and politics leading to politicization of religion and communalization of politics.
A. Religion has very powerful emotional appeal which is
manipulated by the communal elite for realization of certain objectives. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians in India form distinct homogeneous and cohesive communicates.

B. Each community has its own distinct history. The followers of a religion have not only common religious beliefs, but also common social, economic, political, cultural interests.

C. Religious communities are the basic unit of organized political activity. The real followers of a religion belong to and support the political party of their own community.

D. Religious distinction is the most fundamental feature and overrides distinction made on the basis of nationality, language. The religious identity is the supreme and all other identities are subordinate to religious identity.

E The interest of different religious groups is divergent and antagonistic.

F From historical events we have seen, religion worked as a major divisive force. The partition of the country was made on the basis of the religion and homeland for the Indian Muslims in the form of Pakistan. The Hindu-Muslim communalism is a legacy of the British rule in our country, which continues to serve as a divisive force in the nation building activities and also in the workings of the Indian political order.

COMMUNALISM
Interaction between religion and politics leading to politicization of religion and communalization of politics. Indian communalism takes two distinct political forms

1 communal politics
2 Communal tension.

Communal politics:
A It means active use of religion in political life and in political process. Communal politics is carried out by communal political parties or organization which represents communal ideological battles.

B. It is a long term continuous phenomenon. The actors in the communal politics are drawn from the landed gentry, middle class bourgeoisie and bureaucratic elements

C. Communal politics and communal tension as supplementary to one another - Communal riots can occur from communal politics. Communal politicians do instigate acts of communal violence.

D Active involvement of masses - The success of communal politics requires involvement of the masses. The communal parties in our country, such as the Muslim league, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtirya Sevak Sangh have become mass oriented
in their activities. These communal tensions are for attainment of certain political objectives.

E Communal politics is opposed to secular and national politics.

**Communal Tension:**
It means a violent expression of religious sentiments, hurt on such petty issues as music before mosque. Therefore communal tension is always subject to outbursts of emotional excitement and generally involves urban lower class of people. Communal politics precedes communal tension. Many times outbursts of communal tension, is preceded by communal politics, arousal of communal passions through vicious propaganda, inflammatory accusations and wild rumours. Communal tension is not longer lasting. It disappears as soon as normalcy is restored. However, every instance of a communal riot is followed by a trail of inter – communal discord, and systematically exploited, Later by the riot – lovers.

**Factor promoting Communalism:**
Communalism in India is not only a religious conflict but also socio-economic and socio-political phenomenon. The socio – economic and political issues, when projected in religious idioms, acquire emotional appeal to the masses. The causes of communalism are both ideological as well as local issue oriented.

Main causes of communalism are as follows:

1) **The British policy of divide and rule:**
It is a historical fact that seeds of communalism were sown, nurtured and promoted in India by the British policy of divide and rule.

2) **Religion:**
It is not the root cause but a powerful instrument in the hands of vested interests .There is a difference between religious violence and communal violence. The religious violence occurs owing to sectarian doctrinaire differences; whereas communal violence occurs owing to conflict over controlling political power and resources which takes place between the elite of different communities

3) **Underdeveloped economy:**
The underdeveloped economy leads to the uneven development of both communities. Owing to the uneven development, inter communal cohesive class structure does not develop. The upper classes of the less developed community feel a strong sense of rivalry vis-a-vis their counterpart in the other community. To win the support of the masses of one’s community, the grievances are formulated in terms of community. This can be done by adding a few religion – cultural demands and by mythologizing the community’s past. Thus mythologizing one’s community’s past serves as a very powerful instrument for mobilizing the masses for realizing class aspirations. In a backward and heterogeneous society like India, class solidarity, cutting across communal lines, is very
difficult to evolve. The exploiting class cleverly manipulates mythologized version and proletariat as well as petty bourgeoisie classes easily fall prey to such manipulation.

4) Social structure:
The RSS, the SIMI and the Jamat-i-Islami have following among the urban petty bourgeoisie classes. Their religious sentiments are successfully exploited for secular ends by the communal elites. Another important characteristics of petty bourgeois class is its tendency to submit to the authority and the communal elites have taken advantage to develop authoritarian structures. The RSS and the Jamat lay emphasis on submission to the authority rather than free thinking and democratic functioning. This also amounts to blind submission to the authority of god or holy scriptures and thereby perpetuating utter conservatism in the society.

5) Socio Economic changes:
In a traditional society socioeconomic changes bring about deep sense of insecurity among those strata of society which are adversely affected by it. The proletariat and the pretty bourgeoisie classes are usually the worst affected by such situation. They provide fertile ground for the communal movements. This reality baffles those who take mechanical view of socio-economic development because they feel that such a development should lead to greater rationality in society. On the contrary, sense of insecurity generated by socio-economic changes increases appeal of religion by providing solace and reducing psychological tension. The rise of religious fundamentalism must be seen in this perspective. The fundamentalist movements reflect the rising ambitions of petty bourgeoisie classes. They have clearly defined political goals. The VHP published several pamphlets in various languages and painted wall slogans in most of the towns and cities to promote, militant nationalism. Equally virulent communalism of Muslim brand was witnessed on the issues of maintenance to divorced Muslim women and thereby raising the issue of inviolability of sacred ‘Shariyat Civil code of Muslims.

6) Regional organizations:
Yet another related factor is the militant assertion of regional and communal identity in the form of regional political parties and organizations. Assertion of communal or regional identity is a direct result of conflict over the share in the limited economic resources. The aspirations are rising faster and economic development is extremely sluggish. As a consequence, conflict is bound to result among different sections of society. The rising aspirations are expressed by these sections of society through the medium of either regional or religio-cultural identity.

7) Attitude of Political Parties:
The political parties have encouraged communalism in order to broaden their mass base. They encouraged religious communalism with some political motives.

8) Political rivalry:
Reprehensive democracy and periodical elections have intensified political rivalry between the elites of the two communities. They try to mobilize the voters by appealing to their respective communal identity. The Mandir- Mazar controversy is a symbolic expression of the political aspiration of two communities.

9) Economic factors:
The conflicting economic interests of the traders belonging to two communities are also instrumental in communal tension.

10) Anti – social elements:
Underworld gangs play a prominent role in communal riots. The political parties need money as well as muscle power of the underworld to win elections. They, in turn, provide immunity to criminals against any action. During the last decade, the powerful elements of the underworld have started taking active part in politics. The criminalization of politics and politicization of crime, with money and muscle power of the underworld, contribute to communal riots.

Effects of communalism:
Communalism is anti – national and anti – human. Today communalism in its varied forms has become extremely dangerous in our country. It has disrupted the pattern of co – existence in our multi – religious and multi – lingual fraternity. It is an insult to India’s nationalist identity, destructive of our democratic political stability and a tragic set back to our evolving secular culture. Communalism whether Hindu, Muslim or Sikh has played the most disastrous role by weakening our political stability, development, national security, pride and patriotism of the people.

Measures to combat (eradicate) communalism:
1. A massive re – awakening of citizens in all walks of life:
There is a dire need for re- awakening of citizens on national unity and integrity, secularism.

2. De – recognition of Communal Political parties:
It is essential to de – recognize the political parties that encourage and promote communalism in any form by their declared policies, programmes and practices.

3. Punishment:
Those who are found guilty of neglecting their duty in controlling communal violence or encouraging communalism should be punished.
4. **A committed secular and national Orientation to community Centers, work places and educational Institutions:**
A committed secular and national orientation to our textbooks, reading materials should be supported by active work in community centers, work places, temples, and educational institutions for emphasizing the values on national fraternity, of India’s composite culture and of humanist principles.

5. **Avoidance of coverage of communal news and views:**
Mass media like television, radio and the press should avoid coverage of news and views which are to promote communal hatred.

6. **Secularism in India:**
Secularism is one of the basic feature of our constitution. It is one of the most powerful instrument for building a modern secular polity in our multi – religious country.

**The essence of secularism:**
It includes the following fundamental ideas:
1. Religious freedom to all persons of all communities
2. Equal respect for all religions
3. No state religion
4. No special privileges to any religion
5. Separation of state from religious Dogma and superstition.

True secularism can be achieved in our country only by adopting and practicing the following basic secular principles in our polity –

1. All religious beliefs, practices should be recognized as purely personal aspects of life. The state must not interfere in them.

2. Politics must be divorced from all religious dominated individuals, groups and parties.

3. There must be common civil laws.

4. The attitude of scientific temper and spirit of enquiry be recognized as the basic principle of secular polity.

5. Equality of status and opportunity for all Indian state and government functions in accordance with the provisions of the Indian constitution:-

1. Indian state is secular. It is mentioned in the preamble of the constitution i.e. The Nature of the Indian State is secular.
2 There is no provision in the constitution of India which declares any particular religion as the ‘state religion’. Many other constitutions based on Theocracy like Pakistan have done it.
3 The constitution of India guarantees to all persons in our country:

1. The right to freedom of religion (Art 25).
2. The right to manage religious affairs (Art 26)
3. The right to freedom as to payment of taxes for protection of any particular religion (Art 27)
4. The right to freedom of worship Art 215.
5. Right to protection of interests of minorities. (Art 29).
6. The right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their own (Art 30) Thus India is a secular state.

Conclusion:
Communalism and religious fundamentalism weaken the democratic and secular polity of our country.