

The Politics of Communalism

POINTS TO DEVELOP 1. Conflict inherent to a society in transition like that of India.

The pre-independence communal situation led to the framers of India's Constitution establishing a secular state and accommodation of cultural diversity.

Communalism, however, could not be removed and it now operated at various levels- individual, local, institutional and national political levels.

political parties have encouraged communalism to establish support bases.

Socio- religious organizations have institutionalized communalism.

Efforts are made to communalize education.

When a cultural identity takes a political form, differences between communities get hardened. Lopsided norms of integration lead to political tension and finally even to demands of cultural self- determination.

Secularisation of politics has become necessary. It can only be achieved through encouraging participatory democracy.

Social harmony must be promoted at the societal level rather than through state intervention.

India is a nation in the making with a society in transition which has various strands of social groups either in conflict, or in temporary alliance with each other. The conflict has sometimes been summarized as ' Bharat' versus 'India', where 'Bharat' represents the vast disadvantaged sections left behind bearing the brunt of social exploitation, and 'India' symbolizes the people who are on the path of progress, having access to resources, information technology and are a part of the global villages.

The bitter lesson of partition and the staging implications of the two – nation theory enunciated by Jinnah had led to the conclusion that the survival of India as a nation state depended on the adherence to a set of political values having a universal rather than a partisan appeal. The idea of separating religion altogether from public life. However, was considered too utopian a solution. Since religion is an inalienable part of public life, the more viable solution was the separation of the state from all faiths and providing freedom for the profession of diverse forms of religious worship. This alternative was adopted by the framers of the Constitution and they stipulated that the attitude of the state towards religion

should be one of neutrality and equal treatment should be given to all faiths. The fundamental rights forbid any kind of discrimination on the basis of religion.

Thus, national unity was sought to be maintained through the constitutional way which provides for federal structures to harmonise Centre- state relations. Political unity was envisaged even while providing space for regional parties to balance loyalty to region and religion and loyalty to the nation. Social unity was to be fostered by accommodating cultural diversity.

Notwithstanding all this, communalism has been reinforced in many ways. Communalism operates at different levels- ranging from influencing individual relations and interests to determining local, institutional and national political to causing communal riots. In other words, it could range from being a state of consciousness of an ideology or competition for scarce resources to being an instrument of power. The selective appropriation of the cultural past, for instance symbols form a particular era; is a communal attempt to carve out nationalism form particularises.

Since independence, most political parties have carefully carved out for themselves combinations of support bases in which the units of mobilization remain principally caste, religion and linguistic groups. In the last two decades. We have witnessed the rise of militant fundamentalist organizations, and not all of them have sprung as a consequence of Hindu orthodoxy. The reasons for the growth of these organizations can be traced back to the days.

In the process, prejudices become pronounced and boundaries for interactions are redrawn. While, on the one hand commonalities between different communities are ignored, on the other, internal socio-cultural differentiations within a particular group are underplayed by religious leaders to carve out a unified monolithic religious identity. Towards such an end, symbols are evolved and history is reinterpreted. Thus, norms of integration, if lopsided, result in political tension and insecurity which lead demands for cultural self-determination and complicate the already existing problems in a heterogeneous state like India.

The demolition of the disputed Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992 has taken the issue of secularism out of the realm of the state and intelligentsia, into the civic forum. Now the issues are; what constitutes secularism and what is the difference between religiosity and fundamentalism.

In a country where several religious groups co-exist, secularisation of politics can take place by sustaining sus. Participation of people on a large

scale provides legitimacy to governmental authority and helps in subordination of primordial loyalties of civil authority.

There is a need to promote social harmony between various communities. But this should be managed by multicultural, multi- religious committees at the societal level rather than by the state structures such as the National Integration Council. Education, apart from being value- based, should be made relevant to the present context and contain elements of secularisation and scientific and rational thinking.