

Communal Violence

► 7.1 Secularism—Indian Context

India is a multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural pluralist society. Unity in such diversity is the uniqueness of the Indian society. The Indian Constitution is a precious document of lasting value that preserves the composite culture and promotes the essence of Indian polity. The Constitution through its Preamble, Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles has created a secular state based on the principle of equality and non-discrimination. The Supreme Court has included 'secularism' in its doctrine of Basic Structure which cannot be amended even by Parliament.

The Indian model of secularism means equal treatment and equal respect for all religions by the State to endorse communal harmony and religious tolerance. It is basically derived from the doctrines of '*Sarva Dharm Sambhav*' and '*Sarva Dharm Sadbhav*'. Unlike the western model of secularism which envisions complete separation of religion and state, the Indian model is based on non-discrimination and equal participation by the State in all religions.

► 7.2 Historical Background

The seeds of the present communal violence were sown in the aftermath of the freedom struggle and Partition. The partition of Bengal on communal lines by Lord Curzon in 1905 can be considered as an attempt by the British to communalise Indian society and the political structure. The formation

of Muslim League in 1906, and the introduction of separate electorates on communal lines in 1909 through the Morley-Minto reforms and the creation of Hindu Mahasabha in 1915 is believed to be the beginning of modern day communalism in India. The two-nation theory adopted by the Muslim League led to the division of this country into two separate sovereign nations. Partition resulted in displacement of nearly 14 million people with estimated loss of life of 2-3 million people. The violent nature of the partition created an atmosphere of mutual hostility and suspicion between Hindus and Muslims.

After partition, India has seen recurrent communal riots in different parts of the country. A rise in fundamentalist feelings occurred due to the Shah Bano case in 1986 and Ayodhya events of 1990s. On one hand, there was a growing feeling of fear among Muslims. On the other hand, Hindus opposed the so called pseudo-secularists and appeasement policies of successive governments. After 1992, post Ayodhya riots spread almost all over the country. Mumbai even witnessed bomb blasts. Again the Godhra and post Godhra riots of 2002 further disturbed communal harmony in the country. In 2013, communal clashes in Muzaffarnagar and adjoining districts of western Uttar Pradesh have further vitiated the atmosphere. The Ministry of Home Affairs' data on communal violence nationwide reveals that there has been a decline in communal incidents from 2008 till 2011 but a sharp increase was recorded in 2012 and 2013. The year 2013 saw more deaths due to communal riots than the entire three-year period of 2010-2012. Uttar Pradesh accounted for 35 percent of the communal incidents across the country in 2013.

Recent years have seen a growth of both Muslim and Hindu chauvinistic organizations. Though Indian Muslims have, by and large, resisted continuous efforts at radicalization, but due to political and criminal exploitation of communal sentiments, fringe elements within the Muslim community remain vulnerable to mobilization, recruitment and radicalization by hostile anti-India forces that have always been looking to wage a proxy sub-conventional war against India.

➤ **7.3 Factors Responsible for Communal Riots**

The following factors are responsible for communal riots.

1. **Historical factors:** The history of Partition and the two-nation theory have generated a deep sense of communalism and lack of mutual trust among both the communities. It discouraged a harmonious association and peaceful co-existence.
2. **Political factors:** Divide and rule policy practised by the British and the subsequent vote-bank politics followed by Indian political parties after Independence have added to the divide between the communities. Lack of liberal, progressive and modern attitude in both communities has also weakened the cause of communal harmony.

3. **Educational factors:** There is lack of modern education among a large section of Indian society. A majority of Indians failed to adopt a scientific and technological approach, hence are reluctant to adopt liberal, progressive values.
4. **Socio-economic factors:** Due to their educational backwardness, the Muslims have not been represented sufficiently in public services, industry and trade, etc. Their economic status is very low. This causes the feeling of relative deprivation and such feelings contain the seeds of communalism.
5. **Psychological factors:** Psychological factors play an important role in the development of communalism. Both communities have perceived grudges against each other. There is a sort of fear psychosis amongst Muslims. These lead to communal ill-feelings.
6. **Identity crisis or identity factors:** There is a feeling that Muslims are reluctant to join the national mainstream. Most of them do not enthusiastically participate in secular nationalistic politics and insist on maintaining their separate identity.
7. **Cultural factors:** Orthodox members of both communities feel that they have a distinct entity with their own cultural pattern, personal laws and thought processes. There are strong elements of conservatism and fundamentalism among both the communities.
8. **The ISI factor:** It is widely believed that the ISI is directly encouraging and promoting communalism by instigating hard core fundamentalist elements of Indian Muslim community. It is also believed that vulnerable youth are trained by ISI to destabilize India's internal security by spreading communal venom.
9. **Influence of international Pan-Islamic Jehadi movements:** Pan-Islamic movements have also been mobilizing anti-India Jehadi sentiments in the context of the Kashmir issue and the Gujarat riots.
10. **Demographic factors:** Demographic changes in Assam, West Bengal and the Kashmir Valley create opportunities for manipulation of communal sentiments for short-term political objectives.
11. **Social media factors:** Negative impact of social media in spreading rumours, disinformation, hate-campaign and fanning violence.
12. **Organized criminal involvement:** Underworld criminals like Dawood Ibrahim, Chhota Shakeel, etc. are believed to have a key role in acting as agents of vested interest in instigating communal riots. There is also lack of political and social consciousness towards building a harmonious, coexistent society. We also need to build a nationalistic consciousness where the nation is above everything else.
13. **Lack of strong action:** Lack of strong and decisive action by police and allegations of biased or delayed action by them are also a cause. Real perpetrators are rarely punished and there is lack of fear of law that could prevent them from instigating communal riots.

► 7.3.1 Immediate Flash Points for Riots

There are many causes why communal riots flare up:

1. *Gender offences:* Offences like eve teasing, molestation, rape, elopement with girls/boys of other community. Hindu organizations attribute such elopement and marriages as part of a conspiracy, namely 'love jihad'.
2. *Land disputes:* Disputes over ownership of land belonging to graveyards, construction on new place of worship, unauthorized construction, claims and counter claims over old constructions at places of worship as well as demolition.
3. *Religious festivities:* During celebration of Holi, Eid, Moharram, etc. many local disputes arise between the two communities which have a potential to flare up.

► 7.4 The Way Forward

The following measures need to be implemented to curb the menace of communal violence:

1. **Taking pride in our heritage:** The feelings of nationalism should be inculcated in the minds of people by reminding them about the glorious moments of freedom struggle wherein Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were united in the fight against the British to safeguard the interests of the country.
2. **Impartial administration and police:** Most riots persist for longer periods because people feel that the administration/police is not impartial. Changing this perception is most crucial for stopping riots. Perceived political interference in administration during communal violence must be eliminated. The directives of police reforms given by the Hon. Supreme Court should be adopted by state Governments in letter and spirit. A fixed tenure of District Magistrate/Deputy Commissioner and Superintendent of Police, SHO and Field officers will make a big difference.
3. **Policy of zero-tolerance towards violence:** Government policy and practices should be firm and strict in this regard. It should not be affected by vote-bank politics. Police must take immediate, strong and effective action against those who indulge in violence irrespective of their community. There is an urgent need of not just an effective civil administration but also a speedy judiciary. Strict bail provisions must be made in cases of communal violence on the lines of the NDPS Act.
4. **Peace committees:** Peace committees should be mandatory in every area. It should include secular and visionary people from all communities. People with high social standing like doctors, philanthropists and social workers must be engaged with such peace committees. Meetings of peace committee should be organized regularly. The district administration should engage actively with such committees to promote communal harmony.

5. **Win people's hearts through media and civil society:** The faith of common people in the local police should be restored with the help of civil society, NGOs and media. Community policing and beat-constable system is also helpful in gathering intelligence and grass-roots information.
6. **Sensitise police towards feelings of minorities:** The minority community at large views the police as communal and biased against them. Police must be sensitised to feelings of minorities and build trust.
7. **Holistic development of minority communities:** There should be a sincere effort to ensure that employment and skill development opportunities are available in the economic, educational and social spheres for the minority communities. Efforts should be made for bringing them in the mainstream of Indian society.
8. **Impart liberal values:** Government should impart liberal values in our society through our education system. Soft skill development training should be provide to police and administration personnel.
9. **Strong legal action:** The police should take adequate steps to identify in advance potential trouble makers and make timely use of preventive sections of law. Those inciting communal feelings must be punished. Provocative speeches by religious leaders in public and media must be dealt with strictly and strong legal action should be taken against them.
10. **Positive utilization of social media and mass media for awareness:** The misuse of social media and mass media should be prevented. Efforts should be made through mass media for changing the attitude of people towards other communities. People must be made aware of the evils of communalism. Government should sponsor movies promoting communal harmony and secularism.
11. **Proper checks and balances on social media:** Rumours/hate propaganda can be prevented through control of bulk SMSes in times of communal tension.
12. **Need to evolve early warning signals to prevent communal flare ups.**
13. **Ban on contesting elections:** People charge sheeted in cases of communal violence should be banned from contesting elections.
14. **Special fast track courts to deal with communal riot cases and bail norms must be strict.**
15. **Manpower shortage issue in police:** The number of policemen per one lakh people in India is only 130. The minimum United Nations norm is 220. This gap should be filled.
16. **A fair representation of marginalized section of society in police and other security forces.**
17. **Capacity building of police and implementation of police reforms.**
18. **Identification of miscreants and action against provocateurs.**
19. **Videography of riots and strict legal action against rioters.**
20. **Creation of sources in communally sensitive areas.**
21. **Preventing community based ghettos in urban areas.**
22. **Formulating counter-radicalization and de-radicalization policies.**

PROBABLE QUESTIONS BASED ON THIS CHAPTER

1. What are the fundamental reasons for the rise of communal feelings in a society? Explain this with suitable examples in the context of India.
2. Is communalism the biggest threat to the country's unity? Explain with relevant examples.
3. What measures would you suggest for curbing communal violence and establishing a progressive, liberal and peaceful society in India?