

Communalism

[UPSC Notes]

What is Communalism?

Communalism is an inevitable truth in a society as vast and diverse as India. In the broadest of terms, communalism can be defined as a sense of attachment toward one's community or beliefs. Communalism is problematic because this attachment isn't healthy. As an ideology, it is used to unify a community by eradicating all differences/distinctions. This is important because it creates an 'us vs.

Communalism helps promote orthodox beliefs and principles along with intolerance and disrespect towards other groups. It divides society into fragments. While a positive side to communalism could be the strong sense of communalism, it does more harm than good. It propagates separate identity guises the interests of a few.

Types of Communalism

Communalism is an ideology and can be differentiated into three broader categories that are as follows;

- **Political Communalism:** In politics, leaders may implicitly promote the idea of division. Political ideologies and lines are what divide people in political communalism.
- **Economic Communalism:** When the economic interests of people belonging to different groups are pitted against each other, this furthers divisional cracks in society.
- **Social Communalism:** Societal beliefs create rivalries among individuals belonging to certain communities. This is called social communalism.

Dimensions of Communalism

T.K. Ooman is an Indian sociologist who has theorized six dimensions of communalism. These have been listed below;

- **Assimilationist:** This is the dimension where a small group(s) assimilates into a wider or bigger group.
- **Retreatist:** When a community entirely abstains from participating in Politics, it is called retreatist in nature.
- **Welfarist:** When there is a conscious effort and work toward the betterment of the community, it is called welfarist in nature,
- **Retaliatory:** When rivalry among two or more communities, and they actively work to hurt each other, it is called retaliatory in nature.
- **Secessionist:** When a community demands political identity through the creation of secession by the state, it is called secessionist in nature.
- **Separatist:** When there is a demand for a different and separate identity from a larger group, it is called separatist in nature.

Communalism In India

Communalism in India has had a bad and bloody history. This finds its roots within the diversity in the religious and cultural spheres of India. The country has always been a melting pot of traditions, with people coming from different ethnicities, cultures and beliefs. Plus, multiple dynasties have ruled over the population, each with its own set of ideologies and political and religious propaganda that divided the people on the grounds of their differences and perpetuated communal hatred.

Ancient India

Ancient India saw peaceful co-existence as multiple religions found their home here.

- Buddha, perhaps, was the first prophet to have given the ideology of secularism.
- His follower, Ashoka, adopted a policy of peaceful co-existence and, later, a no-war policy to stop communal tensions.
- Ashoka's Dhamma was a set of edicts that functioned on all religions' unified principles. Some basic edicts of Ashoka's Dhamma are:
 - Respect for elders and love for children
 - Ahimsa (non-violence)
 - A karmic reward for good deeds
 - Respect for all religions

Medieval India

Medieval India saw a shift in this pattern of peace and harmony with the arrival of Mughal invasions. Till now, religion had acquired an important status in the hearts of the people, but there was no idea of communal politics yet.

- Mahmud Ghazni and Mohammad Ghori led several plundering sprees that left the destruction of temples of different faiths.
- People often equate the rise of communalism to the rise of Islamic rule in India. That, however, is untrue. There was a differentiation between the religions, but hatred was still not there.
- One of the most common instances of this was the levying of the Jizya by the Muslim rulers on their Hindu subjects in exchange for protection. Qutb-ud-din Aibak was the first to bring jizya to India for the first time.
- Akbar abolished Jizya in the 16th century. Akbar was known for his secularism. He founded a secular religious program of Din-I-Ilahi, which literally translates to Oneness of God. It propounded a message of secularism.
- It would be inaccurate to say that the Mughal arrival disrupted communal harmony as rulers like Akbar and Sher Shah Suri followed a strict policy of religious tolerance and respected the sanctity of other religions, cultures and traditions.
- The secular reign and legacy of Akbar were abruptly stopped by Aurangzeb, who re-introduced the Jizya tax in the 17th century.

Modern India

The truest form of communalism took its shape under British rule, where the British colonial rule planted its seeds to severely impact the society from within by the creation of such divides to puncture the Indian social strata.

- The British rule came with a theory of 'Divide and Rule' to conquer the Indian population. The British believed that infighting would be an inevitable way to cripple the independence struggle in a country as diverse as India.
- The Bengal Partition of 1905 is one example of the British's efforts to add communal shades to the Hindu-Muslim equation. Announced by Lord Curzon, this reorganised the state of Bengal based on its population, with Hindus acquiring the west and Muslims acquiring the east. This partition was undone six years later. However, the seeds of communal differences had started to take shape.
- The separate electorate and the Communal Award were two other moves by the British to increase communal tensions.
- A separate electorate was provided to people from minorities which enabled them to hold separate elections for representatives from their community. It was instated in the Indian Councils Act of 1909 and was given to Muslims.
- The communal Award furthered the scope of separate electorates. Created by the British prime minister Ramsay MacDonald in 1932, it was also called the MacDonald Award. It extended the option of having separate electorates to depressed Classes and other minorities, like Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians and Europeans, through the Government of India Act 1919.

Causes of Communalism in India

A few factors can be traced back to the point of growth and emergence of communalism in India. They are discussed below;

- The Arrival of the British marked the true arrival of communal identity and politics in India. Their policy of 'Divide and Rule' was infamously created to cause rifts among the diverse population of India.
- Several factors like inadequate development of employment, absence of industrialism, and stagnancy in agriculture, among other reasons, were causing dissatisfaction and unhappiness among the youth of the growing strata of the middle-class population. Political leaders exploited this dissatisfaction and unhappiness for their own gains.
- There were revivalist movements that Hindus and Muslims ran.
- History and how its learned plays a huge role in the participation of future generations. History taught with a communal lens is distorted in its vision and creates and propagates communal tension among the masses.
- The Muslim community fell into a pattern of isolation and separation to protect their religious identity.
- The rise of fundamentalist and communal parties also contributes to developing communalism in India.

Major Incidents of Communal Violence

Sadly, a long and tragic history of communalism has been marked with blood in India. These have been listed below;

- **India and Pakistan Partition:** Perhaps, the biggest tragedy and loss of human life in the modern history of India is the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, which continued up to 1949.
- **Jabalpur Riots:** 1961 saw the Jabalpur riots that took place because of the economic competition caused between Muslim and Hindu bidi manufacturers. With the Jabalpur riots setting things into motion, the 1960s saw a lot of bloodshed on communal grounds. The riots of 1964 in Rourkela, Jamshedpur in 1965 and Ranchi in 1967 happened in the area of Hindu refugees from East Pakistan (Bangladesh now).
- **Ahemdabad Riots:** September riots of 1969 in Ahemdabad caused a major rift. The cause is said to be traced back to the Jan Sangh party, which passed a resolution to oppose the leftward thrust by Indira Gandhi. The resolution aimed at the 'Indianisation' of Muslims.
- **Worli Clashes:** The dispersal of the Dalit Panthers by the Police in the tenement settlement in the Worli area of the state of Mumbai turned violent in April 1974 owing to the angry clashes of a political party called Shiv Sena.
- **Assam Agitation:** Indira Gandhi's decision to give the population of Bangladeshi immigrants (nearly 4 million) was met with agitation in the form of the Assam Agitation. An incident of violence took place in Nellie that followed the fallout of the 1983 state elections. The loss that occurred in its wake made it one of the worst pogroms since the occurrence of Worl War II.
- **Anti-Sikh Riots:** The Anti-Sikh riots of 1984 that broke out after Indira Gandhi's assassination. This saw th massacre of nearly 4000 Sikhs in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, and others.
- **Bombay-Bhiwandi Riots:** The Hindutva bandwagon was boarded by the leaders of Shiv Sena, who instigated violence in the form of the 'Bombay-Bhiwandi' riots.
- **Babri Masjid Controversy:** The controversy of Shah Bano in 1985 and the Babri Masjid-Ram Mandir controversy have since redirected much of the political discourse towards a communal discourse. They have since become important tools for the propagation and propaganda for communal tensions, especially in the Eighties.
- **Kashmiri Pandit Exodus:** Nearly 1,00,000 Kashmiri Pandits were driven out of their homes in the Kashmir valley in the year of 1992 following a threat of insurgency.
- **Babri Masjid Demolition:** December 1992 saw the communal apex being explored with the demolition of the Babri masjid by several right-wing parties. This was followed by terrible riots in the cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Surat, Kanpur, etc.
- **Gujarat Riots:** 2002 Gujarat riots started with the burning of a train in Godhra.
- **Vadodara Riots:** May 2006 saw riots breaking out in the state of Vadodara due to the state Municipality's order to remove the dargah of Sufi saint Syed Chishti Rashiduddin.
- **Assam Riots of 2012:** The Year 2012 saw Assam under the terror of violence. The rift was between the indigenous Bodo-speaking community and the Muslims of Assam. The tensions flared when the Bodo-speaking community accused the Muslim community of having increased because of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants.
- **Muzaffarnagar Riots:** The Muzaffarnagar district of Uttar Pradesh saw the worst incidents of violence in the year 2013. It is said to be one of the worst occurrences of Hindi-Muslim violence in the current times.
- **Mob Lynchings:** Recent times have seen tremendously bloody growth in the occurrences of mob lynchings which have killed nearly 90 people since 2015.

Factors affecting Communalism

There are several factors that have affected the stimulated growth of communalism in India, such as;

- **Divisive Politics:** Communalism has thrived in India simply because of the exploitation of the masses at the hands of the powerful, which continues to further their cultural differences as villains for their own material gains.
- **Economic Reasons:** There exists a wide disparity between the development of different communities that has given rise to generational poverty and unemployment that deepens the aggravation caused by dissatisfaction and unhappiness among such masses. This leaves them very prone to being pawns of political manipulation and propaganda.
- **Communal Riots and their bloody History:** Riots leave behind a deep-rooted prejudice and a lot of communal hatred in their wake. Hence, the places that have prior been the points of occurrence for such incidents of communal tensions are likely to go through these things again because there is a lot of disaffection among the masses.
- **Appeasement Politics:** The politics of India has been a silent yet obvious culprit in the communal history of the country. Selfish interests furthered by political consideration have always given rise to such communal flames.
- **Economic Retardation and Isolation of the Muslims:** The inability to adopt technological and modern education has caused insufficient representation of the Muslim community in places of power in the Muslim community. This has led the majority into a state of relative depression.
- **Failure of Administration:** A weak institution of law and order that fails to protect its population against such threats leads to the disintegration of faith in the institution and the masses taking matters into their 'own hands'.
- **Psychological Factors:** Over the years, such occurrences have created and fostered a sense of mutual understanding that lacks faith and interpersonal trust among the clashing communities. This leads to the formation of stereotypes, prejudices and misconceptions about communities that can further propagate instances of threat, mistrust, and harassment that will create fear and a sense of danger among a specific community towards a specific community.
- **Media's Role:** The model of sensationalism that the Media follows is not lost on us. The dissemination so rumours as 'breaking news' has caused a lot of damage to the already faltering institution of secularism in India.
- **Social media:** A medium widely used by the masses has become one of the worst and most powerful mediums to perpetuate communal tension by sensationalizing small issues and rumors.

How to Keep Communalism in Check?

Recent times have been a witness to the increase in communal tensions. Especially with the onset of sensationalism over media channels and social media, the need for reform becomes glaringly evident.

- There needs to be an increase in the representation of the minorities and weaker sects of the community within all branches of administration.
- Reform in the present criminal justice system is ardently required that guarantee speedier trials and compensation to the victims.
- Guidelines for administration are to be codified. There needs to be sensitization among the forces about handling communal riots and stopping them from worsening.
- Value-oriented education should be taught to promote the feelings of brotherhood, peace, non-violence, humanism, and secularism, along with developing a scientific

temperament that takes people away from falling prey to misinformation and propaganda.

- Countries like Malaysia have developed models that serve as early-warning indicators to prevent such communal violence. The Malaysian Ethnic Relations Monitoring System (or MESRA) uses a systematic quality of life index and perception index to accurately determine the needs and feelings of people about racial differences in their area.
- NGOs and civil societies that run support projects to create communal harmony and awareness should be encouraged.
- Updation in the minority welfare schemes is desperately needed to address the challenges and shortcomings of the current administrative patterns in providing for the minorities.
- The National Foundation for Communal Harmony must take a proactive approach to promote communal peace.
- The communal violence that we continue to witness needs more active legislation to curb it. The Communal Violence (Prevention, Control, and Rehabilitation of Victims) Bill, 2005, must be enacted soon.

