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COMMUNALISM IN INDIA : ISSUES AND OUTLOOK

Communalism in India, manifested in perennial conflicts between the Hindus and Muslims is one of the major issues in Indian politics. The two communities are poles apart in their religious thoughts, beliefs and practices which lay behind their historically troubled coexistence. The relations between the Hindus and Muslims have not only been one of religious antagonism, but also influenced to a great extent the course of Indian political history. Religious beliefs and emotions have been used widely in the political process of the subcontinent. Mutual threat perceptions and grievances of the two communities have been aggravated by a host of socio-economic and political factors and issues. Thus, despite being an officially 'secular state', India has gone through one of the worst experiences of communal violences.

The religion of Islam entered India, the citadel of Hinduism, through a series of conquests which ultimately resulted in the establishment of Muslim rule in the sub-continent leaving behind a deep and indelible imprint on its soil. Ever since the advent of Islam in the Indian polity, the interaction between the two religious groups had largely been a conflicting one. As a result, the followers of these two faiths, instead of being conciliatory and accommodative towards each other, politicized their religions, and doctrinally, socially, economically and politically remained

antagonistic to each other. This phenomenon of antagonism and constant rivalry between the Hindus and Muslims, in no time, gave birth to a perverse ideology of communalism - a phenomenon whose spill-over effects are still being felt in many spheres of Indian national life today. It is relevant to mention here that among the major religious communities coexisting in India for centuries, the Hindus and Muslims are the principal ones - the former forming 82.7%, while the latter forming 11.8% of the total present Indian population.

Communalism which was bred in the sub-continent a few hundred years back has not died as yet. Today, communalism arising out of a division in the social structure of India on the basis of Hindu-Muslim rivalry, and the concurrent exploitation of this schism by different vested hands is, perhaps, the most disastrous factor of national dissension and destabilization. The regular frequency and intensity of communal violence seems to have become a part and parcel of Indian social life, undermining and disrupting the process of nation building.

This paper purports to study the case of Hindu - Muslim rivalry as a manifestation of communalism in India. Do the differences in religio-philosophical concepts between the two communities limit the scope for accommodation and adjustment for the respective adherents? How does the politicization of religion lead to fanaticism which takes violent and militant shape? What are the impact of all these on the two communities and the society as a whole? Is there a solution to the problem in a pluralistic society and composite culture? These are among the issues to be taken up in the paper.

Theological and Social Outlook

Hindusim and Islam sharply contradict each other in theological and social outlook. Infact, the inner contradiction within these two belief systems centres around the way in which the creator is represented,

"Hinduism, as a faith, is vague, amorphous, many-sided, all things to all men. It is hardly possible to define it, or indeed to say definitely whether it is religion or not, in the usual sense of the word. In its present form and even in the past, it embraces many beliefs and practices, from the highest to the lowest, often opposed to or contradicting each other"¹. Even to consider Hinduism as an exclusive Vedic Dharma or Sanatana Dharma (classical religion) would be, rather, a fallacy, since Buddhism and Jainism are among the ancient religions of India inducting Vedic philosophies and moral teachings into their respective fold. It seems that Hinduism, probably lacks any concrete definition.

"Hinduism or the Sanatana Dharma (Eternal Duty) is less a monolithic creed than a conglomeration of loosely related but inter-woven cults and traditions. It has no unifying creed or priesthood, no founder, no ecclesiastical organization and no concept of heresy. Relatively tolerant, it encompasses differing theologies and spans the religious spectrum from monism to polytheism and from atheism to animism. It also accommodates a large body of superstitions, folk beliefs and occult practices and ceremonies that are sometimes lumped together as village or popular Hinduism to distinguish them from orthodox Brahminism. Thus, it is difficult to define Hinduism, and the term Hindu itself is a geographic rather than religious designation"². The Hindu concept of the creator is that God is a kind of all pervading cosmic spirit, to whose manifestations there would be no limit. As a result, a Hindu worships God in any form he chooses, in animals, ancestors, sages, spirits, natural forces, divine incarnations, snakes, phalluses, water, fire, plants and stars.³ Idolatry is the Hinduism's

1. J. Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, New Delhi : J. Nehru Memorial Fund, 1986, p. 75
2. George Thomas Kurian, *Encyclopaedia of the Third World*, Vol. II, London : Manshell Publishing Ltd., 1982, p. 781.
3. Cited in D. H. Butani, *The Future of Pakistan*, New Delhi : Promilla and Co. Publishers, 1984, p. 122.

natural form of expression, and a Hindu is known to worship the God selected from a pantheon of three to three and a half million divinities.

In sharp contradistinction to the polytheistic nature of Hinduism, Islamic creed is monotheistic. "There is no God but God and Muhammad (SM) is the Prophet of God", is the whole-hearted confirmation and unshakable conviction in Islamic doctrine. Islam emphasizes the unity and greatness of God, and the absolute authority of the Holy Quran, the final revelation. Thus, according to the simplest definition a Muslim is one who submits to the will of God and believes in His Book, the Quran, and in his Messenger Muhammad (SM). Being puritanical in nature, Islam disclaims idolatry, and all the excesses of life. "The chief strength of Islam lies behind its uncompromising monotheism, simple and enthusiastic faith in the supreme rule of a transcendent being, and establishment of brotherhood. Thus, its adherents enjoy a consciousness of contentment and resignation unknown among the followers of most creeds".⁴

The sharply contrasting philosophy revealing the polytheistic and monotheistic nature of the two religions, act as a barrier towards a closer understanding and appreciation of each other's perspectives and problems. As a result, there had always been misapprehension about each other,

Each religion, besides being a body of some metaphysical assumptions, has its own social aspect. This social aspect of religion may turn its adherents into strong solidarity group. The attitude of these groups may be termed as "communalism when their members place their loyalty to the community above the loyalty to the politic-legal nation to which they belong or else,

4. Phillip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, Sixth Edn., London : Macmillan and Co, Ltd., 1956, p. 129.

when they develop active hostility towards other communities living within the same body-politic".⁵

Among the most visible social differences, first comes the Islamic concept of brotherhood or egalitarianism, which struck at the very core of a rigid caste system established by the Hindu doctrine⁶. In this sense, Hinduism is a socially closed system. Being stratified into the lower segment of the society, the unprivileged Hindus were psychologically attracted by the Islamic brotherhood, and later on a significant number of them became converts. This conversion was possible due to the permissive proselytization inherent in Islam, to which Hinduism is deadly opposed. "Hindu society being a stratified system of social groups sanctified by the doctrine of *Karma*, proselytization struck at the very core of Hindu doctrine and presented the greatest threat to Hinduism since the virtual suppression of Buddhism"⁷. As will be noted later, this social aspect of Islam is still a matter of grave concern to the Hindu majority, who view such conversion as a drainage of Hinduism from India.

It is, therefore, apparent that such diverse theological and social outlooks of communities would influence their daily living profoundly. Thus, in language, in food, in dress, in spirit and modes of thought, these communities stand on different footings.

5. Quoted in Moin Shakir, *Islam in Indian Politics*, New Delhi : Ajanta Publications, 1983, p. 29.

6. The caste system in Hinduism divides society into four stratified groups. The four groups are the *Brahmins* (priestly class), the *Kshatriyas* (warrior class), the *Vaishyas* (trading class), and the *Sudras* (artisan class). Outside of the caste system are the so-called untouchables (renamed Harijan or children of God by M. Gandhi, and officially known as scheduled caste). They are untouchables and unseeable. Their very sight is pollution. George Thomas Kurian, *Encyclopaedia of the Third World*, *op. cit.* p. 782

7. M. R. A. Baig, *The Muslim Dilemma in India*, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1974, p 34

The long chequered history of the subcontinent may fail to bring any testimony to a fruitful interaction and assimilation between the Hindus and Muslims—a fact that is to be reckoned with an understanding of a diverse society in which they are living. Other religions like Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism have evolved different patterns which somehow reflect a synthesis between their traditional beliefs and Hindu practices. Moreover, excepting Zoroastrianism, the other religions were all inspired by Indian thought and aspiration. But Islam was an alien religion in a predominantly Hindu land, and its uncompromising monotheism and social system did not permit it to go beyond its orbit, and make a compromise with the parent religion of India. Doctrinally closed Islam and socially closed Hinduism, thus turned each society into an inclusive-exclusive complex - inclusive within each society and exclusive to the other society. Socially and economically, they remained apart too.⁸

Evolution of the Problem—a Historical Perspective

Religion and politics do not remain in separate compartments as they are aligned to each other. "A religious community is also a political community based on specific norms and values, structured around relations of domination and subordination within the community and in relation to other communities".⁹ The cleavage between the Hindus and Muslims arising out of a difference in religious and social outlook was further sharpened due to what is called politicization of religion.

Communalism or any other manifestation of social conflict is not a sudden or inevitable outcome of various conflicting forces acting on the society. Infact, such forces interact with each other in a long historical process, and ultimately help the conflict to take its own course. In the same manner, politicization

8. *Ibid.*, p. 27

9. Neeta Chandhoke, "Situation in India: Misunderstanding of Religion" *World Focus*, June 1987, p. 10

of religion as one of such conflicting forces helped the Hindu Muslim rivalry to grow in intensity in a long evolutionary process.

The traces of Hindu-Muslim rivalry can be dated back to the time the Muslim rule was established in the subcontinent. India was invaded by the Muslim conquerors in three phases. The fact that Muslims came to the subcontinent essentially as invaders left indelible hatred and mistrust in the Hindu dominated India. The earliest two phases of invasion in India from the Arab and the Ghazni under Muhammad-Bin-Qasim and Sultan Mahmud respectively, could not consolidate the Muslim rule in India. Qasim's fall was as meteoric as his rise, and Sultan Mahmud was a "raider - in - chief" who came, burnt, killed, plundered, captured and went.¹⁰ The third phase of Muslim conquest beginning during the last quarter of the 12th century led to the establishment of a series of dynastic rules and sultanates in India. Unlike the first and second invasions the conquests of the third invasion proved permanent, and led to the establishment of Muslim rule in India. Excepting a handful of astute rulers, the most outstanding of which is Mughal Emperor Akbar, the Muslim rulers were mostly communal, and pursued a discriminatory policy against the conquered masses. Society was divided into two communities - the Muslims and the Hindus. The former consisted of the kings, the members of the Royal family, the nobility and a new privileged class, whereas the latter mostly with the loss of political power had become almost degenerate. In most of the instances, the religious freedom of the Hindus was curtailed and they were not exempted from slavery, tribute and Jaziya (tax).

While most of the Muslim rulers ignored the majority Hindu factor in their national policy calculation, Akbar's realistic approach to politics by winning the hearts of the Hindus - a product of his time - laid the foundation of secularism in Indian

10. Quoted in Mohar Ali, *A Brief Survey of Muslim Rule in India*, Fourth Edn., Dhaka : 1969, Mullick Brothers, p. 13.

politics. It seems if India could produce a few more 'Akbars', the secular approach to politics based on tolerance and accommodation would probably have its root more deeply implanted in the soil of India.

The communal nature of the Muslim rule in India was an incubation period of a Hindu-Muslim conflict, soon to take a more ominous posture through the vicissitudes of time and history. It seems, even today, the Hindus can hardly forget the past deeds of the Muslim rulers recorded in their minds as one of 'oppression and suppression'. A view commonly shared by all Hindus is that the Muslims are responsible for causing menace to their Hindu-Vedic civilization, thereby bringing misfortune to this sacred land of 'Lord Rama'.¹¹

With the end of Muslim rule in India, the country went through another phase of invasion by the British colonialists. The displacement of Muslim power by the British was a stumbling blow to established wealth and prosperity, power and prestige of the Muslims. The Muslims deeply resenting the rule of non-Muslim power kept themselves away from any cooperation with the new masters, and therefore, withdrew into mental and physical mahallas. On the other hand, for the Hindus the British was little more than a change of non-Hindu masters. They had no inhibitions in collaborating with the new rulers. The British taking advantage of a schism between these two communities, expediently exploited their religious sentiments to achieve their political goal of exploitation in a colony. It seems that their traditional policy of divide and rule kept their Hindu and Muslim subjects far apart from each other, adding fuel to the fire of the existing communal feeling between these rival groups. There was no scope for a meaningful interaction between the two communities as they moved in two parallel directions.

11. *Rama* is the incarnation of *Vishnu*, one of the three Gods as embodied in the Hindu concept of Trinity (Trimurti). The famous Indian epic, the *Ramayana* is based on his legendary heroism.

Taking advantage of the western education and all the available training programmes the Hindus began to exhibit an intellectual awakening. Imbued with the ideals of western democracy, culture and liberty, the new intelligentsia of India sought for a revivalism on a Hindu line of culture and tradition. Different reformist movements such as the *Brahma Samaj*, *Arya Samaj*, and *Hindu Mahasabha* identified Hinduism with Indian nationalism, and sought the exit of the British dominance.¹² The Indian National Congress mirrored at the time the viewpoints of the Indian intelligentsia. After its inception in 1885, it was composed of moderates and liberals who advocated a progressive pattern of administration based on British lines and a policy of so-called secularism.

How far was the Congress really secular? Infact its secularism has been a subject of controversy. It might appear that it was in a sense devoid of secularism. Its leaders like Pandit Mahan Malaviya, Bal Gangadhar, Tilak, Lala Lajpat and others like Gandhi tried to induct Hindu religious ideas into the national movement.¹³ The connection of Congress with the Hindu Mahasabha causing misapprehension in the Muslim mind about its secularism should not probably go unnoticed. The Hindu Mahasabha and its leader Savarkar had no patience with Gandhi's non-violence mood. They were militant in nature. Savarkar's glorification of Vedic Hinduism and overt anti-Muslim feeling led him to believe in a 'Two Nation Theory' well before Jinnah. He said "India could not be regarded as a unitarian or homogeneous nation, but on the contrary there are two nations in the main, the Hindus and the Muslims."¹⁴ The Congress support for anti-cow slaughter movement (which caused sporadic riots in

12. Ajit Singh Sarhadi, *India's Security in Resurgent Asia*, New Delhi : Heritage Publishers, 1979, p. 77.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

14. Sankar Ghose, *Modern Indian Political Thought*, New Delhi : Allied Publishers Private Ltd., 1979, p. 253.

many parts of India) made a dent in the suspicion of Muslim mind. The Muslims considered the displacement of Urdu in the U.P. by Hindi to be an outcome of Hindu provocation influencing the British mind.

Any historical phenomenon is to be understood in terms of an interplay of various factors taking place at the particular period of time. The feeling of communalism in the minds of the new Indian national bourgeoisie was thus essentially an outcome of certain prevailing factors. Firstly, it had emerged within the highly restrictive structure of the dependent colonial system. Secondly, as the new leadership had not originated in the context of an economic and cultural conflict with feudalism, it therefore, failed to transcend the religious elements in its culture to achieve a secular political language. Thirdly, the glorification of Hinduism was also a product of time. The vedic culture and civilization after having passed through a successive period of shocking experiences under alien rule was still under the sway of a non-Hindu power, and thus the concomitant Hindu feeling was that Hinduism was on the verge of disappearance from the land in which it was born.

It would be interesting to observe how the Muslims reacted to such activities of the Hindu nationalists. Lagging behind the advancement made by the enlightened Hindus in political, social and economic fields, the distressed Muslims now sought to pull their community from the morass of ignorance and enlighten them with the ideals of democracy, religious liberalism and western modernization. In this respect, much of the credit goes to Sir syed Ahmed, the pioneer of Muslim renaissance in India. His political ideas and thoughts profoundly influenced the nascent Muslim bourgeoisie who began to feel a sense of insecurity about the intentions of the Congress. It was, probably a mistake of the Congress not to have taken into account the seriousness of the difference between the Hindus and the Muslims. As a result, with

the intensity of the nationalist movement under the aegis of the Congress, the doubts and misgivings between the Hindus and Muslims were also accentuated. The political imperatives operating on the British colonial period were aimed at intensifying communal conflict as a device to weaken the nationalist movement, and took the best advantage of the asymmetrical political goals of the Hindus and Muslims. It is in this political milieu that we see the emergence of the Muslim League (1906) as a separate political party of the Muslims.

It seems that formation of the Muslim League pushed the Congress even further towards a Hindu Communalist direction. Thus, nationalism that grew in India was out of a communal breeding, and ultimately it polarized the political society into two distinct hostile blocs—the Hindu nationalists speaking of Indian nationalism under veiled communalism, whereas the Muslim exhibited open communalism by speaking for the Muslims only. The politics of the Congress and Muslim League were vividly marked by communal ideas and thoughts, and the consciousness of the two groups was on parallel lines ultimately leading to the unbridgeable schism in the two.¹⁵ Despite a stiff resistance put forward by the Congress leaders, the Two Nation Theory propounded by the Muslim League to protect the political, social and religious rights of the Muslim Community, was successful in maneuvering the British diplomatically to divide the sub-continent into two political entities, India and Pakistan. Both the communities were now paid the price of communalism nurtured by them through centuries. The Hindus got their motherland dissected, whereas the Muslim majority of Pakistan threw their own ex-Muslim compatriots in a situation of hopelessness and frustration, mental, spiritual and psychological decadence in new independent India.

The partition of the subcontinent leading to the emergence of two independent nations, India and Pakistan (1947) ended the

15. Ajit Singh Sarhadi, *India's Security in Resurgent Asia*, New Delhi, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

British rule in the subcontinent. But the partition did not quench the fire of religious madness and communal hatred between the two groups. The Muslim minority left behind in India was not only at the mercy of the Hindu majority, but now they were also subjected to their pent up anger and wrath.¹⁶

Communalism in Post Independence Era

As a legacy of the past, communalism in independent India, instead of getting pacified, attained a new dimension of violence, militantism and fanaticism. Since India's independence in 1947, Hindu-Muslim communal violences have been occurring with almost predictable regularity. A distinction should be made between the pre-partition and post - independence communal riots. Before 1947 the communal riots evidenced the mass participation of the members of different communities as larger issues were involved, whereas the post-independence riots were marked by unhindered rampage and killing of innocent Muslims by the mob of the majority community.¹⁷ A table of communal incidents is furnished here to show a sequence of communal incidents occurring between 1968 and 1980. Besides, some of the worst communal violences of the eighties as recorded in India are Hyderabad (1981), Meerut (1982), Bhiwandi (1984), Ahmedabad (1985), Meerut (1987).¹⁸

Close to 4000 people have been killed in the communal riots during the 1980s. That is almost four times the figure of the 1970s.¹⁹ In most of these communal riots, the Muslims suffered a great loss of human lives and property. Also the riots were marked by attacks on 'economic and political interests of the

16. Wali Khan, *Facts are Facts : The Untold History of India's Partition*, New Delhi : Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1987, p. 154.

17. Moin Shakir, *Islam in Indian Politics*, *op. cit.* p. 45.

18. *India Today*, June 15, 1987, p. 11

19. *Ibid*, p. 37.

Table on Communal Incidents in India : 1968-1980

Name of State/Union Territory	(Up to June)													Total
	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	
Andhra Pradesh	44	6	18	16	8	12	13	8	6	6	22	44	15	218
Assam	11	14	34	22	9	10	9	3	7	2	7	20	21	169
Bihar	98	99	79	66	30	31	28	44	35	27	34	43	39	653
Delhi	1	5	8	1	2	6	5	3	5	3	4	6	3	52
Gujarat	4	213	19	28	22	17	25	24	15	19	21	27	15	449
Haryana	1	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	2	—	2	—	7
Jammu & Kashmir	—	—	4	3	—	4	—	—	—	2	4	11	5	33
Kerala	8	22	5	14	13	7	5	4	2	11	17	6	8	122
Tamilnadu	2	4	7	7	3	13	5	4	5	4	14	12	6	86
Madhya Pradesh	18	26	44	21	22	25	21	17	10	9	10	24	19	166
Maharashtra	39	23	164	55	30	23	35	15	15	14	15	14	15	438
Karnataka	7	11	8	12	16	9	12	11	5	7	6	10	10	124
Orissa	6	12	7	9	3	1	1	1	2	3	6	7	6	64
Punjab	—	—	1	3	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	6
Rajasthan	10	15	13	10	8	16	20	8	4	9	4	10	13	140
Uttar Pradesh	83	28	48	43	45	47	42	35	33	43	46	45	35	573
West Bengal	13	41	60	30	25	20	26	27	22	25	17	22	18	346
Total	346	519	519	321	238	242	248	204	166	186	225	303	228	3747

Source : Mashirul Hasan, "Indian Muslims Since Independence in Search of Integration and Identity" *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 19 April 1988, p. 820

Muslims in well marked centres' by the Hindu communalists.²⁰ What is more abominable is the increasing ferocity with which the recent riots have occurred. Both the groups behaved as if they belonged to two barbaric groups - one determined to exterminate the other²¹. Moreover, the current phase of communal violence is characterized by direct violence unleashed on the Muslims by state machinery, police, paramilitary forces, administration, self-seeking politicians and the underworld.²² The horrors of the atrocities perpetrated on the innocent Muslims in Maliana following the Meerut riot in 1987 by the PAC in unison with the Hindus, are still vivid in the living memories of the Muslims.²³ It seems that the administration, in most of these cases of violence, were unable to tackle the situation efficiently. Thus, J. Nehru was sincere enough to declare from his own inquiries that the local Congress leaders had made no attempt to calm the communal frenzy that swept over Jabalpur and other cities and towns of Madhya Pradesh during the riots of 1961.²⁴ The Muslims were also victims of organized communal violence in Jamshedpur and Rourkela districts (1964) who were aggrieved at the Congress's failure to contain such perpetual assaults.²⁵ The Muslims also suffered the most at the hands of the communal mob in series of 515 officially recorded communal outbursts occurring between

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20. Zafar Imam, "Internal Subversions : The Face of Muslim Communalism", in Aruna Asif Ali (ed), *India's Unity and Security*, New Delhi : Patriot Publications 1984, p. 144
 21. Kuldip Nayar, "Bitter Lessons of Meerut" *The Bangladesh Observer*, June 07, 1987.
 22. Zafar Imam. "Internal Subversions : The Face of Muslim Communalism" *op. cit.*, p. 144
 23. See *India Today*, June 15, 1987, pp. 32-34.
 24. Moshirul Hāsan, "Indian Muslims since Independence in Search of Integration and Identity", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 2, April 1988. p. 827.
 25. *Ibid.*, p. 823

1965 to 1967.²⁶ Summing up the Muslim feeling about these communal riots, a leading political scientist noted in 1968: "The Muslims in India are in a quandary. They appear lost and out of grips with the evolving reality of contemporary Indian life".²⁷

What causes these communal riots is now an all pervasive issue confronting the historians, sociologists, political scientists, economists and religious leaders. While it was easy to argue before independence that the occasional communal riots were the result of the British policy of divide and rule, the reality now is known to be more complex. In post-independence era the communal issue in India has become such a sensitive one that even a minor incident like 'cow slaughter' has the potential of inciting communal feeling ultimately resulting in gruesome and bloody carnage.²⁸ Even Muslim jubilation over Pakistani victory in the the game of cricket played anywhere in the world can spark off communal violence in India.

Human behaviour is a very complex phenomenon, and some human activities are the outcome of complex psychological factors driving the individuals to behave in an irrational manner at a given point of time. Thus, many communal instances are just like volcanic eruption of ultra emotions and sentiments resulting in eccentricity and irrationality of both the groups.²⁹ While other

26. *Ibid.*, p. 827

27. *Ibid.* p. 823

28. Cow is venerated by the Hindus as 'Mother' while the bull is venerated as the mount of Lord Shiva one of the Gods of Hindu Trinity. On the other hand, the Muslims eat both the meat of cow and bull. Their slaughter is also religiously celebrated on the occasion of Eid-ul-Azha by the Muslims.

29. Ahmedabad riot (1969)-A communal riot sparked off when some cows of the Jagannath Temple while being brought back from their grazing grounds accidentally hurt one Muslim woman and her child. The Muslims who were observing their Urs (a function held at the tomb of saint) chided the Sadhus (Hindu Saints) who retaliated. Soon there was stone throwing and street fighting. News spread that the temple was

communal violences took place on issues like 'Anti-cow slaughter movement', 'the Babri Masjid case', etc. Whatever may be the case, the factors engineering such communal frenzy are to be understood in the context of a socio - economic, politico - religious, and psychological setting in which these two antagonistic groups are living. This demands an examination of various factors, both perceptual and real.

Attitudinal Problem—Mutual Allegation and Recriminations

It has been observed that the negative attitudes of one community towards the other have created a vicious circle of continuing mistrust and estrangement between the Hindus and Muslims. In a process of interaction, the action of one was met with a reaction from the other—both being negative and destructive in nature.

As indicated, the partition of the sub-continent was in a way the culmination of the communal politics of pre-independence days. The partition left behind in the Hindu mind a feeling of hatred and mistrust towards the Muslims. As a result, the Muslims were having to bear the brunt of Hindu wrath against the partition which in their opinion was a vivisection of their Bharat Mata (Mother India), and rightly characterized by Pandit Nehru as 'cutting of a living structure'.³⁰ It was difficult to convince a Hindu that Pakistan was not created to accommodate all the Muslims of the subcontinent. The majority community also questions the loyalty and allegiance of the Muslims to India, and they are despised as unpatriotic and traitors in their eyes. Here it is relevant to mention that Hindu patriotism has always been mystical in its conception, and from time immemorial 'Bharat Mata' (Mother India)

stoned and mobs went berserk. The Hindu Dharma Raksha Samity held a meeting to discuss what step could be taken to tackle the situation. The people returning from the meeting were so incensed that they indulged in looting and arson. See *Sunday*, 27 July-7 August, 1986. p.17.

30. Quoted in Moin Shakir, *Islam in Indian Politics*, *op. cit.* p. 11.

has been deified.³¹ The Hindus have branded the Muslims as Pakistani agents or Pakistani spies. In most of the instances of communal riots in the late fifties, the Muslims were branded as Pakistani agents to incite those communal riots.³² The Hindus also consider the Muslims a threat to their majority status. The idiosyncrasies of a large number of Hindus in developing a *minority complex* is a curious phenomenon that draws one's attention. Many Hindus fear an increasing rise in Muslim population adopting polygamy and refusing family planning measures. Moreover as already indicated, muslim proselytization has been a matter of alarming concern to the Hindus. Today, many Hindu stalwarts are convinced, however ludicrous it might sound, that a conspiracy of sociology and demography will soon render the Hindus a minority within their own country, bereft of economic and political power. Such a contention held within the confines of mass psyche seems to be ironical as when 600 million Hindus comprising 80% of the population feel threatened by a handful of disparate minorities.³³ It seems that the political problem in Punjab has added a new dimension to the Hindu's threat perception from the minority communities. The prosperity of a handful of Muslims is often a source of jealousy among a section of Hindus who find their economic interests offset by Muslim advancement.³⁴ Somehow it seems that the

31. M. R. A. Baig, *The Muslim Dilemma in India, op. cit.*, p. 74.

32. Following the Ahmedabad riot in 1969, one prominent leader, Jai Prakash Narayan remarked, "The division of India and creation of Pakistan resulted from communal riots. Pakistan would like that the same thing happen again. If the rioting goes on and Muslims are able to say that the government is unable to protect them, they will ask for some territory to be given to them where they can protect themselves and live in peace. This will mean partition. This is the interest which extremist Muslims and pro-Pakistani elements have in keeping up the riots. Cited in Moin Shakir, *Islam in Indian Politics, op. cit.* p. 46

33. *India Today*, May 31, 1986, p. 79

34. The 'economic resurgence' is often ascribed to Islamic fundamentalism and a new sense of confidence among Muslims, now that their co-religionists

recent influx of gulf money into the hands of certain section of Muslims has turned out to be an irritant in Hindu attitude vis-a-vis the Muslims. There is a widespread impression that some Arab countries are pumping tons of money into the country to finance various Muslim institutions including the construction of mosques of grandiose nature. The contention that the Indian Muslims now look to 'Arab World' as their protege has probably lowered down the imaginery Hindu view of Pakistani hand behind a perceived aggressiveness of the Muslims, but deepened the Hindu mistrust over Indian Muslim's ultimate intentions.

Such attitudes have had adverse repercussions on the Muslim community of India, which as a result of partition suffered a greater loss, and paid the heaviest price in terms of culture and political status of the community. The accusations against the Muslims by the majority community that Islam has communalized the national life of India has denigrated the Muslim image, and has often led a Muslim to shy away from his own Muslim identity. This had a deleterious psychological effect on the Muslims who have been propelled to attach to their anti-Hindu feeling as a counter reaction to the majority's anti-Muslim feelings. Because of the majority community's negative attitude, the Muslims have become a psychopathic personality, and it seems in the ultimate analysis a Muslim has become a stranger in his own country. This is primarily because of a feeling among them that they have become second class citizens.³⁵

in the Gulf have acquired wealth and considerable global influence. The connection is at best tenuous, though the Hindu petty bourgeoisie has not hesitated to use this argument in order to whip up communal sentiments against the Muslims. The motive is to displace the emerging Muslim entrepreneurial class in certain crucial areas of trade and business and to reduce the possibility of keen competition. This was attempted in Moradabad and Meerut where Muslims witnessed the destruction of their hard-earned capital, invested in small factories. See *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 10. No. 2, April 1988. p. 834.

35. Quoted in Ram Reddy, "Language, Religion and Political Identity: The Case of the Majlis-e-Ittihadul Muslimeen in Andhra Pradesh" in

One important aspect of Muslim community having a minority status is that it is a significant and potent minority which has the potentialities of thrusting itself out as a distinct entity in India. Historically, the Muslims of India, although belonging to a minority group rendered valuable contributions to Indian culture which are worthy of the highest appreciation. The Muslims of India have a tendency to organize in politics on the basis of their faith. This is in line with the Muslims of other countries where their predominance is recognized.³⁶ But in India they are a minority community, and therefore, subscribe to age old view that 'Islam is in danger' which is somewhat a peculiar form of muslim melancholy. With such preconceived notion of a threat to Islam from the Hindus, the Muslims have, infact, rendered very little efforts to identify themselves with the mainstream of national life. The sense of being a seperate entity has even pushed the Muslim's aspiration to the level of having a separate state for all Indian Muslims.³⁷

The Indian Muslims are believed to possess a sense of exclusion and rejection from the society. Here it remains to be seen whether such a feeling is only a result of the psychological thrust exerted on them by the massess of mojority, or is also a direct outcome of some of the deliberate policies pursued by the authorities. The

David Taylor and Malcolm Yapp (eds), *Political Identity in South Asia*, London : Curzon Press, 1979, p. 115.

36. Francis Robinson, "Islam and Muslim Separatism", in David Taylor and Malcolm Yapp (eds), *Political Identity in South Asia. op. cit.* p. 78.
37. There is a demand of the Mollah community of Kerala in 1947 for the foundation of Moplastan within the Indian Union, there is the formal request made by the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen of Andhra Pradesh to the Indian Government in the 1960s that a separate state for all Indian Muslims should be carved out on the east coast between Vishakhapatam and Madras. Cited in Francis Robinson, "Islam and Muslim Separatism", in David Taylor and Malcolm Yapp (eds), *Political Identity in South Asia, op. cit.*, p. 78.

experiences of the past would, probably, reveal certain tangible factors towards fostering such a feeling of the Muslims. It is possible to debate the causes of the economic decline of the Muslims, but there is no denying that they have been on the lowest rung of the ladder in terms of the basic categories of socio-economic indicators of development like percapita income, literacy, consumption of food, condition of living, job opportunities, medical facilities, civic amenities, etc.³⁸

The Muslims feel that due to the government's discriminatory policy they have not been able to recover from the shocks caused by the partition. The major grievance of the community is that the Muslims are discriminated against in the field of services, trade and industry. The Muslims complain that the majority community who has a powerful hand in the administration pushes their interests to a subsidiary position. Thus, a great injustice is perceived by them in the matter of employment, in grant of licenses permits, contracts, and admission to various institutions.³⁹

Among the deliberate policies of the state that have caused doleful effects in the Muslim mind, the policy of cultural persecution of the Muslims is one. The Muslims are critical about some issues which they consider not in conformity with their Islamic spirit. For example, the guiding principles in the Indian constitution regarding the implementation of uniform civil code, which is an interference in religious sphere. The legal restriction on polygamy for government servants already enforced is also viewed as a usurpation of a right sanctioned by Islam. The Muslims also feel culturally persecuted due to some open policies like glorification of Indian history and culture with the nearest exclusion of medieval period. They also feel that Urdu, the

38. Moshirul Hasan, "Indian Muslims Since Independence in Search of Integration and Identity," *Third World Quarterly*, *op. cit.* p. 834.

39 Mojn Shakir, *Islam in Indian Politics*, *op. cit.*, p. 17

language to which most of the Muslims attach emotional ties for their material development, has been a victim of communal bigotry and linguistic jealousy.⁴⁰

Many analysts have also observed that behind the growth of communalism there has been electoral consideration. The Muslim resent at being manipulated by the majority community members who pander to them in pursuit of vote banks.⁴¹ The feeling of insecurity is another grievance of the Muslims. The Muslims are less represented in the police force, and in some states the recruitment of Muslims in police was stopped under ministerial orders on the plea that they were over represented in the past.⁴² However it appears that the agonizing factor of the Muslim is the communal feeling of the police who like the Hindu communal elements are given free hand to propagate communal hatred without any objection from the administration. This, they feel to be a threat to their life and security.⁴³

The attitudinal problems resulting in mutual allegations and recriminations have posed a psychological barrier to a rapport between these communities. On the other hand, the deliberate

40. Ajit Singh, *India's Security in Resurgent Asia*, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

41. In Pune riot (1973), one of the Muslims told that "the sufferings of the Muslims will end if our right to vote is withdrawn. We were opposed to the Congress in 1962, so the Congress harassed us. Now the Muslims support the Congress for which they are being harassed by the Jana Sangh and Shiv Sainika. Ultimately it all boils down to our vote. Why not take it away? Then we will be happy." Cited in Moin Shakir, *Islam in Indian Politics*, *op. cit.* pp. 52-53.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

43. In Varanasi riot (1977) the curfew was imposed in Muslim areas, which were relatively quiet. During the curfew hours the police broke into the the house of the Muslims, arrested all men, including 10 years old children and over 100 year old bed-ridden people, looted and destroyed property of lakhs of rupees.... See Moin Shakir, *Islam in Indian Politics*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

policies of the authorities reflecting political, economic and cultural discrimination against the Muslims depict the realities of the Muslims in all these parameters. In the final analysis, a Muslim feels that nothing is being done to combat their fear psychosis, remove growing economic and political insecurity among them, stop the trend of their cultural genocide. It seems, the Muslims now perceive a communal onslaught on them both from the masses as well as from the authorities. To them, it is probably a covert recognition of a continued mistrust and misunderstanding between the Hindus and Muslims by the majority, seeking to maintain the status quo of this unnatural phenomenon.

Rise of Militant Communal Groups

In post-independence India, a number of communal groups have exploited the existing hostility between the two groups, and as a result, the Hindu-Muslim rivalry attained a new posture of overt communalism of militant nature⁴⁴. The tendency of these groups is to influence the political leadership from behind the screen, intensify the communal riots through propaganda and violent means. In this respect, both the Hindus and Muslim communalists are moving in the same direction.

The history of India seems to be repeating in the same pattern. The rumblings over the secular politics of the Congress have not ceased. So long Nehru was there the Muslims valued his secular credentials with varying degrees. However, it is not to say that communal violences did not take place during Nehru's time, rather in the 1950's a number of violent communal riots took place.⁴⁵ The post-Nehru period may be characterised as a politics directly

44. The ranks of the communalists and their supporters have swelled. Communal organizations numbering less than a dozen in 1951, have grown to over 500 now, with an active membership that according to govt. source runs into several millions. See *India Today*, June 15, 1987, p.18.

45. Moshirul Hasan, "Indian Muslims Since Independence in Search of Integration and Identity", *Third World Quarterly*, *op. cit.* p.827

or indirectly influenced by such cadre based organisations as Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) and its political wing, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh. Gradually the political parties started showing a tradition of accommodating these elements into their parties. They repudiated secularism, denounced the Congress for its policy of appeasement under the camouflage of secularism, and proposed the Indianization of Muslims to purge them of disloyal tendencies.⁴⁶

The unrepentent communal policies of the RSS have deepened the cleavage between the Hindus and Muslims in recent time intensifying mutual hatred and ill will. Such communalists do not join an open political battle by displaying their ideological wares in public. They use the technique of infiltration, subversion, duplicity and demagogy.⁴⁷ One peculiarity of Indian leadership is that while it does not advocate communalism in its open policy, in reality it tries to reap the benefits of the communal activities of these groups. Indeed, there have been evidences of ultra communalist organizations like the RSS joining the Congress in the name of security and stability of the country.⁴⁸

Hindu revivalism is as natural in a predominantly Hindu country as Islamic revivalism in a Muslim country. But what appears ominous is, perhaps, its militant attitude directed against the minority Muslim community. Thus, these organizations besides being engaged in public constructions, social and religious programmes, encourage the formation of Hindu self-defense groups in various parts of the country. The Shiv Sena, the Honuman Sena, the Shiv Sakti Dal and a host of others employ a large number of unemployed and illiterate youths as well as

46. *Ibid.*, p. 826

47. Cited in P. R. Goyal, "Communal Challenge Today", in Aruna Asif Ali *India's Unity and Security*, *op. cit.*, p. 147

48. In the 1984 election the RSS was openly behind Rajiv Gandhi, see, "The RSS Astride the BJP, Kuldip Nayar, *The Bangladesh Observer*, Dec. 28, 1987.

people with long criminal records.⁴⁹ These groups are reported to be engaged in rampage against the minority in the event of a riot. The handbills and leaflets distributed on the eve of the riot by these militant groups are quite alarming.⁵⁰

Looking at the other side of the coin, it will be found that the Muslim politics is not devoid of communalism in its content. The Muslims, rather from the very inception of India took recourse to communal politics by shunning the quasi-secular approach to politics as advocated by Moulana Abul Kalam Azad. The solidarity of the Muslims on the basis of Islam is the cardinal standpoint of the Muslim political parties like the Muslim League, the Majlis-e-Mushawarat, and the Jamat-e-Islam-e-Hind. The role of the Jamat as the vanguard of Islamic revivalist movement in India is critical. According to *Dawat*, an organ of the Jamat, "the Hindus and the Muslims are the two separate structures, standard bearers of two separate cultures and separate entities"⁵¹ Their objective is to inculcate in a Muslim the values and ideals of Islam so as to purify him, and make in him an Islamic personality to influence the non-Muslims. Their opposition to secularism brings them to a close parallel with the RSS which also aims at establishing Hindu State in India while trying to denigrate secularism. The Muslims also justify the formation of *Adam Sena* as a counter-reaction of the growth of Hindu militant defence organizations. These are some instances to show how these groups are acting in the same line. Many have termed the current Muslim communalism as being chauvinist in nature showing a tendency to proliferate by ignoring the fact of sheer arithmetical

49. *India Today*, June 15, 1987, p. 38.

50. In Ahmedabad riot (1969) several handbills were distributed. In one of the handbills a call for *Dharma Yudh* (religious war) was given. In another the Hindus were told to wipe out those who have dishonoured their mothers and sisters. See Moin Shakir, *Islam in Indian Politics*, *op. cit.* p. 48.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

number, and widely scattered nature of Muslim population in India.⁵²

The activities of these groups in recent time reveal a very appalling picture of the Indian society today. There seems to exist polarization within the communities along vested interests. Infact, the militancy of these groups has been responsible for a series of communal violences in recent time, and these were all associated with alarming proportion of intense ferocity and madness. As a result, both the groups have suffered significant loss both in terms of human lives and property. Even today, communal violence is becoming a running sore in many parts of the country causing pernicious effects on the society as a whole. No concerned Indian should now remain oblivious of the present disastrous Hindu-Muslim communalism threatening to weaken the stability, development, and the common structure of national patriotism of the country. "A concerted struggle against communalism is a prerequisite for helping India solve her manifold problems as well as for keeping her unified and a valid democratic nation in the world. Perhaps, in the fifth decade of its independence, fight against communalism should be a major item on the agenda of its national reconstruction."⁵³

Outlook for the Future

Anyone trying to understand Indian society has to think in terms of its diversity - which is unique in character. A society comprising such a multi-lingual, multi-religious, and multi ethnic population presupposes a strong feeling of mutual trust and understanding between the groups for their peaceful co-existence. Any indifference to this attitude would have a divisive effect on the

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52. Zafar Imam, "Internal Subversion : The New Face of Muslim Communalism" Aruna Asif Ali (ed.) *India's Unity and Security*, *op. cit.*, p. 145.
 53. Rasheeduddin Khan, "Challenge of Communalism" *World Focus*, Nov-Dec. 1987, p. 6.

society as a whole. This has its application in the case of Hindu-Muslim relation too.

As has been indicated, today, the roots of communalism have penetrated deep down the soil of India, and thus its total eradication from its soil may be just a utopia. What is to be sought now is a lessening of the degree and incidence of communal tension and violence in the country. And this is possible once the groups come out of their psychological and emotional barriers which constitute a psychosis of mutual fear and hatred among them. Imbued with a new sense of tolerance, and believing in a mutuality of interests, spirit of good will and peaceful coexistence both the communities should be able to cope with the forces of irrationality and to sustain the vision of unity.

Considering the geographical factor dictating their physical placement as well as the reality of their minority status, the Muslims of India would require to develop a sense of adjustment to live with the Hindus, and be more accommodative, whereas at the same time, the Hindus have to accept the Muslims as their co-citizens to live in harmony and peace. Given a close positive cooperation between them there arises no question of any one's loss of identity. The long professed philosophy of 'we and they' now should yield to a new attitudinal change.

While the state machinery and leadership have not been able to escape from the influence of communalism, it is of utmost importance for the leadership to realize the negative implications of communalism in India. To say that communalism in all its manifestation act as an inhibiting factor in the process of national integration is to state the obvious. Moreover communalism brings the question of India's secularism to a controversy, it casts aspersion on India's pride in being the largest democracy in the world, it spells over negative reaction across the borders, it denigrates India's image of a progressive nation in this age of science and technology.

As a matter of fact, communalism which has bedevilled Indian society has to be tackled by both the masses and the government in unison. Realistically speaking it needs substantial economic, political and administrative measures to combat this evil. It is the demand of the day to produce a new generation of administrators who would be more humanist and objective rather than being communal and partisan. It seems secularization of Indian politics entails a solution of many other issues at the broader plane. Anti-communist measures should be a part of the concerted efforts to fight against poverty, illiteracy and erosion of social and moral values. Such an approach would help promote mutual accommodation, tolerance and appreciation of each others problems which would be conducive to social coexistence and harmony.