CDS – UNIT I

Contemporary Challenges before Indian Society

For-V SEM B.Com & BB.A

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Communalism and Religious Fundamentalism

• 'Communism' derives from the French *communisme* which developed out of the Latin roots *communis* and the suffix *isme*, *communis* can be translated to "of or for the community" while *isme* is a suffix that indicates the abstraction into a state, condition, action, or doctrine, so 'communism' may be interpreted as "the state of being of or for the community".
Communism was an economic-political philosophy founded by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the second half of the 19th century. Marx and Engels met in 1844, and discovered that they had similar principles. In 1848 they wrote and published "The Communist Manifesto." They desired to end capitalism feeling that it was the social class system that led to the exploitation of workers.
• **Introduction**

• The word communalism is derived from the word community. It implies extreme sense of pride into identification with one’s own community.

• Communalism, is referred in the western world as a “theory or system of government in which virtually autonomous local communities are loosely in federation”. 
What is Communalism?

• It is basically an ideology which consists of three elements:

• A belief that people who follow the same religion have common secular interests i.e. they have same political, economic and social interests. So, here socio-political communalities arises.

• A notion that, in a multi-religious society like India, these common secular interests of one religion are dissimilar and divergent from the interests of the follower of another religion.

• The interests of the follower of the different religion or of different ‘communities’ are seen to be completely incompatible, antagonist and hostile.

• Communalism is political trade in religion. It is an ideology on which communal politics is based. And communal violence are conjectural consequences of communal ideology.
Evolution of communalism in Indian society

• Ancient India was united and no such communal feelings were there. People lived peacefully together, there was acceptance for each other’s culture and tradition. For example, Ashoka followed religious tolerance and focussed mainly on Dharmma.

• Communalism in India is result of the emergence of modern politics, which has its roots in partition of Bengal in 1905 and feature of separate electorate under Government of India Act, 1909. Later, British government also appeased various communities through Communal award in 1932, which faced strong resistance from Gandhi ji and others. All these acts were done by the British government to appease Muslims and other communities, for their own political needs. This feeling of communalism has deepened since then, fragmenting the Indian society and being a cause of unrest.

• (by Communal award colonial government mandated that consensus over any issue among different communities (i.e. Hindu, Muslims, Sikhs and others) is precondition for any further political development)
Stages in Indian Communalism and How it Spread

• India is a land of diversity. And it is known for lingual, ethnic, cultural and racial diversity. As, we have discussed above, communalism in India is a modern phenomenon, which has become threat to India’s Unity in Diversity.

• First stage was rise of nationalist Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, etc. with only first element of communalism as discussed above. Roots of this were led in later part of 19th century with Hindu revivalist movement like Shuddhi movement of Arya Samaj and Cow protection riots of 1892.

Second stage was of Liberal communalism, it believed in communal politics but liberal in democratic, humanist and nationalist values. It was basically before 1937. For example organisations like Hindu Mahasabha, Muslim League and personalities like M.A. Jinnah, M M Malviya, Lala Lajpat Rai after 1920s
• Third was the stage of **Extreme Communalism**, this had a fascist syndrome. It demanded for separate nation, based on fear and hatred. There was tendency to use violence of language, deed and behaviour. For example Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha after 1937.

• **Divide and Rule**

• Communalism was a channel for providing service to colonialism and the jagirdari class (land officials). British authorities supported communal feelings and divided Indian society for their authoritative ruling.
Bal Gangadhar Tilak popularised Ganesh pooja and Shivaji Mahaotsav and taking dip in Ganga, etc. The programmes related to “Ganesh Pooja” and “Shivaji Mahotsav” was not initiated to support the interests of Hindus. However, both “Ganesh” and “Shivaji” were associated with the emotions of a number of Hindus. This was to be used by Leaders as tool to politically awaken Indians. But, Indian history in schools and colleges were given Communal and unscientific colour. This kept Muslims largely away from Congress till 1919. In early decades only 8-9% of members of Congress were Muslims.
Causes of communalism in India

• (1) A Legacy of Past:
• On the basis of the “Two Nation” theory of Jinnah, India was partitioned. Communal politics had played its nasty game during the immediate past of independent India. The “Divide and Rule” policy of the British Government served their colonial interest. The partition of India was the ultimate outcome of their politics. Despite the emergence of Pakistan, a large number of Muslims are staying in India. India has adopted the principles of secularism and equality of the people. But communalism as a legacy of past, is continuing and expressing itself in various form.

• (2) Presence of Communal Parties:
• Religion in India has become an important agency of political socialization and it is also reflected in the ideology of a number of political parties. A number of communal and sectarian political parties and organisations are present in India. Muslim League, Jamaat—Islami, Hindu Mahasabha, Akali Dal, Vishwa Hindu Parishad are directly or indirectly responsible for the emergence of communalism.
• The so called secular political parties also enter into alliance with communal forces for electoral benefit. Candidates are selected by different political parties taking into account the communal composition of the constituency.

• Some political leaders preach communalism to attain their immediate political goal. They have become leaders and continue to remain as such only due to the adoption of communal and sectarian interest. When political leaders and their organizations are not away from communalism, obviously this spirit will be promoted in the society.
• **(3) Isolation of Muslims:**
  - Indian Muslims have developed a tendency of isolationism even long after the creation of Pakistan. They remain aloof from the mainstream of national politics. Most of them are not interested to take part in the secular-nationalistic politics of the country. They insist on to be treated as a separate entity.
  - With their separate culture and different customs, they have a distinct identity. Some orthodox and biotic organisations not only uphold Islamic fundamentalism, they also demand reservation facilities for Muslims. Their isolation creates a psychological separation and misunderstanding which promote communal tensions in the society.

• **(4) Poverty:**
  - Mass poverty and unemployment create a sense of frustration among the people. It generates backwardness, illiteracy, ignorance, etc. The unemployed youth of both the communities can be easily trapped by religious fundamentalists and fanatics. They are used by them to cause communal riots. Moreover, in comparison with the Muslims, Hindus are better placed in service, industry and trade which cause a sense of contempt among them. The weak economic status often breeds communalism.
(5) Hindu Chauvinism:
The growths of Hindu chauvinistic attitudes have further strengthened the communal tensions in India. The Hindu religious groups like Shiv Sena, Hindu Mahasabha, Viswa Hindu Parisad often pressurize the government to take steps suitable to the interest of Hindus. They consider each Muslim as pro-Pakistani and anti-national. To face the possible challenge of other communal forces, they encourage the growth of Hindu communalism.

- They oppose the minority protection policies of the government and treat it as appeasement policy. The controversy over the Ayodhya issue and the demolition of “Babri Masjid” was nothing but a manifestation of Hindu Chauvinism.

(6) The Social Cause:
- The two major communities of India have been suspicious towards each other. The Muslims complain of the threat of Hindu cultural invasion upon their lives and have become more assertive of their rights. Either due to ignorance or insecurity, they do not fully accept the need of family planning and help in increasing population.
- The recent controversy over the Census Report shows how the Hindu Chauvinists react towards the growing population of Muslims. Moreover, another social cause of communalism is conversion. Every Indian has the right to follow whatever religion he/she likes. But when conversion from one religion to another is made by offering some facilities like money, education, service etc. it creates negative reactions.
• (7) Communalization of Politics:
  Electoral politics in India has become more expensive and competitive. Different political parties are not hesitating to use any means, fair or foul, for electoral victory. They even create communal tensions and try to take political advantage out of it. Concessions are granted to various minority groups for appeasing them.
  Each and every party is playing communal card and if situation so demands, is not hesitating to join hands with the communal parties for coming to power. Communalization of politics as a process is supporting the growth of communalism in India.

• (8) Cross-Border Factors:
  Communal tensions in India sometimes are highly intensified due to the rule of two neighbouring theocratic countries. These countries try to create communal problems in the border states. The communal problems of Punjab and Jammu Kashmir are caused due to provocation of Pakistan. So long as this cross-border factor is not removed, communal problems are likely to stay in India.

• (9) Failure of Government: Both the Union and the State Governments often fail to prevent communalism in the country. Due to lack of prior information, they fail to take any preventive measures. So the communal violence can easily take innocent lives and destroys property. The post-Godhra riot in Gujarat shows the inefficiency of the government to control the communal riot. Failure of immediate and effective steps has been a cause of the continuance of communalism.
Remedial Measures

• Abolition of communal parties in our country

• Promotion of secular worldview

• Healthy public opinion

• Interreligious marriage
Religious Fundamentalism

• Religious fundamentalism refers to the belief of an individual or a group of individuals in the absolute authority of a sacred religious text or teachings of a particular religious leader, prophet, and/or God. These fundamentalists believe that their religion is beyond any form of criticism, and should therefore also be forced upon others.

• The term “fundamentalist” was first used with reference to a group of US Protestant churches that arose in the 1920s.
Early Concepts of Modern Religious Fundamentalism

• The concept of modern religious fundamentalism was introduced with the publication of the *The Fundamentals*, a series of books published between 1909 and 1920 appealing to Christians to believe in certain religious doctrines of Christianity. The term ‘fundamentalist’ was soon used to describe a section of Protestant Christians who bore a separatist attitude towards modernity. In the later years, the term was used to relate to the most extreme believers of every religion in the world.
The dominating religion in Europe is Catholicism; Hinduism is very strong in eastern Asia; Judaism is the ranking religion in Israel and Israeli's political decision; and finally, Islam is the principal religion in the Middle East. Islam is the second largest religion in the world, second only to Christianity which is the main religion in the United States and is actually making a strong comeback in America.
Christian Fundamentalism

- Christianity -- the world’s largest religion
- Three main divisions: Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant
- Political significance of Christianity declined with advance of liberal constitutionalism
- Emphasis on single and moral issues
- Ethnic nationalism in Northern Ireland appealed to working-class Protestants as well as fundamentalists
- 60 million US citizens say they are ‘born again’ Christians; of those, half describe themselves as fundamentalists
Islamic Fundamentalism

• Guided by the teachings of Muhammad (570—632AD) and revealed in the Quran
• Two main sects: Sunni (majority) and Shiite/Shi’a (10% mostly in Iran and Iraq)
• Islamic fundamentalism was revived in 1928
  when the Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Egypt (Led by Hassan al Banna)
• Brotherhood pledged to revitalize Islamic faith and provide alternative to Western domination.
• Egypt’s defeat in Arab--Israeli War of 1967
• Israeli War of 1967 provided an opportunity for the Muslim Brotherhood to expand
• Since 1970s, fundamentalist groups attracted growing popular support.
• Led by popular revolution in Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini proclaimed the first Islamic Republic in 1979.
Hindu fundamentalism

- What is usually called “Hindu fundamentalism” in India has been influenced more by nationalism than by religion, in part because Hinduism does not have a specific sacred text to which conformity can be demanded. Moreover, conformity to a religious code has never been of particular importance to Hindu groups such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). For the members of such groups, Hinduism is above all a symbol of national identity rather than a set of rules to be obeyed.

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The nationalistic orientation of the BJP is reflected in its name, which means “the Party of the Indian People.” Similarly, the name of the Rashtriya Swayamesevak Sangh (RSS), a “self-defense” force associated with the BJP, means “National Volunteers Corps.” Neither the BJP nor the RSS advocates the creation of a Hindu state. The principal concern of both groups is the danger posed to “the Hindu nation” by Islamic proselytization among the Scheduled Castes (formerly untouchables) and lower-caste Hindus; both groups have also vehemently opposed Christian proselytization in India for the same reason. In RSS tracts, there is little reference to specific Hindu beliefs, and its members acknowledge that they are not themselves religious.
• The nationalism of the BJP and the RSS is also reflected in their religious and moral demands; in this respect they differ significantly from Christian fundamentalist groups in the United States. In a notorious incident in 1992, the Babri Mosjid ("Mosque of Bābur") at Ayodhya was demolished by a mob of Hindu nationalists; the subsequent rioting led to the deaths of more than 1,000 people. Although there was real religious fervour associated with the belief that the site of the mosque was the birthplace of the Hindu god Rama and the location of an ancient Hindu temple, the attack was above all a reflection of the Hindu nationalists’ belief in the essentially Hindu character of India and their perception of Muslims as inherently alien. The fact that Hindu nationalism is sometimes called “Hindu fundamentalism” illustrates how indiscriminately the term fundamentalism has been used outside its original American Protestant context.
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