

Foundation Course
Semester 1
Concept Of Disparity - 2

5. Communalism

5.1 Communalism

5.2 Factors contributing to Communal Conflict

5.3 Steps to Combat Communal Violence

Communalism:

India is a secular nation where several religions co-exist and the Constitution asks of each citizen to be tolerant of other religions. However despite the provisions of the Indian Constitution to protect the interests of people belonging to all religions, communalism has often endangered peace and harmony of our country in several instances in the past.

Communalism actually stems from religious fundamentalism that makes one believe that one's own religion is the only true faith. Communalism itself is the ideology of a social, political or a religious group that their religion and practices are superior to that of other groups. Religion is a personal and sensitive issue for most people. Therefore any hint of antagonism or a sign of disrespect towards one's religion immediately triggers hatred and violence. Communalism is divisive in that it stresses the significance of one religion over the others. While effectively the preaching and values of all religions do not differ, it is the conflict of interests and desire for dominance that provokes hostility. It has also been observed on various occasions that religious leaders arouse fanatic behaviour among followers through fundamentalist speeches and political leaders do the same to ensure themselves of a vote bank for attaining power. Historically communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims have occurred regularly. The seeds of this conflict lay in the Partition and formation of Pakistan. A case in point is the Ram Mandir – Babri- Masjid issue that was responsible for violent communal clashes across the nation and resulted in loss of innocent lives and property. Religious fundamentalism and fanaticism have left such wounds on the psyche of the people that it has led to building of stereo types. Muslims are viewed suspiciously and often experience difficulties in assimilation. The New York Twin-Tower terror event has brought in its wake other issues like racial profiling at airports which is creating a greater sense of alienation in the Islamic community.

In recent times communal strife has also spread to rural areas of the country implying prejudices can exist anywhere.

Factors contributing to Communal Conflict

The roots of communalism are found in the 'Divide and Rule' Policy of the British rule in India. The British in order to establish their supremacy in its colonies and expand its power used divisive tactics of turning Hindu and Muslim rulers against each other. They also encouraged the setting up of communal organisations having extremist religious tendencies.

1. Vested political interests:

Certain politicians or political parties in order to further their own gains give indirect support or patronage to communal groups or activities. Some of them may have non-secular tendencies themselves and make political decisions partially encouraging communalism.

2. Flexibility in religion's civil code:

There is a lack of a uniform civil code. To assure itself of votes and return to power the government affords special provisions to certain religious communities to follow their own code while other smaller communities are not allowed the freedom to follow their own personal laws and may feel discriminated against.

3. Rise of communal organisations:

Communal organizations established on the pretext of propagating and promoting religion socially through cultural activities have instead worsened the problem of communal politics.

4. Religious fundamentalism:

Some religious leaders followed ardently by herds of devotees use their influence through inflammatory speeches to misguide the masses. Especially the ignorant masses get caught up in religious fever and are willing to act violently.

5. Conversions:

Religious conversions are a sensitive issue in India. It is often undertaken by religious organizations on the promise of food , shelter.etc. to the poor and viewed suspiciously by everyone.

6. Politicization of local problems:

Local issues or problems involving different communities, which can be resolved by the local authorities, are sometimes magnified and given political dimensions to are use communalistic passions and often lead to riots. Ex. Malegaon and Bhiwandi.

7. Law and Order:

The administration may fail to take care of minor communal disputes that could flare up into a major clash. There may be several anti-social elements who in the name of religion may engage activities such as drug-peddling, smuggling , trafficking, robberies, murder and so on. Their activities need to be curbed and they need to be brought to book to maintain social balance.

8. External threats:

There exist many foreign forces which train extremists and supply them with modern weapons to undertake terrorist activities to fuel communal unrest in the nation.

Steps to Combat Communal Violence

1. Role of Law and order Administration:

The police have an important role to play in intercepting and diffusing communal riots and flare-ups before it assumes huge proportions. They should act responsibly to combat violence and work with the cooperation of peace committees and members of conflict in communities to resolve tension.

2. Role of Education:

The study contents should be devoid of any communal content and partial views about particular religions. It should in fact teach secular principles, appreciation and respect for all religions. Schools and higher educational institutions should use various teaching aids promoting national values and communal harmony. Teachers should be trained to motivate students to conduct community programmes with involvement from their parents, neighbours and others to promote secularism, nationalism, cooperation and tolerance.

3. Role of Religious Leaders:

Religious leaders have an important role to play as the preaching is followed by the masses. People look up to their leaders and hence these leaders should teach the importance of communal harmony through their discourses.

4. Role of Media:

The media should act responsibly and avoid delivering news in a manner that will further encourage violence. Instead the media should identify and expose communal elements. It should create a forum for discussion where information about the ill effects of communal activities.

5. Role of NGOs:

NGOs should go for large-scale publicity campaigns in media promoting communal harmony and national unity. They should draw public focus on more pressing national problems and educate people about the ill consequences of riots and destruction based on religious intolerance.

6. Ban on communal political parties:

The political parties having any direct or indirect connections with communal forces should be de-recognized by the government. They should not be allowed to play with the religious sentiments of the public and exploit them for their political gains. This will help in force harmony among various communities.

7. Public Awareness:

Public awareness needs to be raised about the harmful impact of communalism. Our constitution, which labels India as a secular nation makes provisions to protect the interests of all religions and goes beyond the code of any religion. Hence one must learn to put national interests above one's religious views.

8. Security:

All communities must be treated equally. The people belonging to smaller communities should not feel isolated. Instead confidence should be instilled in them so that they feel safe and secure to partake in the growth of the nation.