

Communalism

POINTS TO DEVELOP 1. Typical results of communal riots often reported in the media.

Broad definition of communalism and the problems associated with causes.

causes of rise of communalism in India.

communalism is a vicious circle.

Politics and communalism.

Efforts needed to check communalism.

It has become quite common nowadays to find news reports in the print and electronic media referring to violence between religious communities resulting in heavy loss of lives. The law machinery, almost always unable to check such disturbances at their outset, plays a poor part in ultimately restricting the damage. Often, a number of houses and commercial and their buildings are burnt down and many people are seriously injured and even killed before the police and the local administration take control of the situation. Curfew is generally clamped for a few days following the violence in extreme cases. All these features are typical of communal riots in our country.

Broadly – speaking, communalism refers to the existence of two or more communities divided along regional, linguistic, racial, class, caste or religious lines in the same political, economic and social set-up. In India, communalism generally implies religious conflicts. The existence of such communities in a place is a matter of no great concern by itself. However, communalism becomes a problem when the communities develop an aversion to one another in certain areas and indulge in repeated clashes. These clashes may be caused by attempts on the part of a member or few members of one community to intentionally create trouble by indulging in an offensive behaviour towards the other community or communities, or else by outside elements paid to create such trouble. Misunderstandings and opposed views of the communities may also result in communal violence. Sometimes a trifling incident, even a rumour, could result in a conflict. Communalism is not unique to India. It has been witnessed on a global scale though in varying degrees. Racial clashes have been witnessed between the blacks and the whites in America. Even clashes between the various sects of the same religion are heard of. In India, apart from strife

among various religious communities, there are instances of conflicts based on caste, the tribal factor and the linguistic factor .

The rise of communalism in India has been consigned by many to the modern times. It is said that for centuries different communities have co-existed peacefully in India. The British government greatly encouraged rise of communalism in India by adopting various measures and design. These were essentially aimed at stemming the tide of the national movement which was strengthening its grip upon the masses. Thus the British encouraged the leaders of the national movement to think on communal lines in order to bring about the good of their respective communities. The British also played communities in turn. However, the growth of communalism in India can be traced to certain factors that grew of the national movement itself. The Congress and leading social reform and political movements fighting for India's freedom did not totally ignore the communal viewpoint. The messages of Dayanand Saraswati and Vivekananda were based almost entirely upon the ideology of Hinduism. The Punjab Hindu Sabha founded in 1909 lay the foundation of Hindu Mahasabha and the Aligarh movement (in its later stages) sought the interests of specific communities. The use of religious symbols and idioms by some leaders, the press and writers to mobilise support of the people intensified communal politics. The growth of communalism from that time onwards to this day has had a negative impact on the progress of the nation.

India was partitioned along communal lines at the time of its independence. Communalism continues to pose hurdles in the way of nation-building by thwarting steps towards growth and prosperity. Progress is possible only when a nation can unitedly march onwards. Divisive forces such as communalism provide only a setback to the realisation of this goal. Where the communities involved in communal violence are concerned, the sufferings of their people and their near and dear ones only intensify the pain, anger and hatred. In other words communalism breeds communal feelings. The destruction of material, wealth and, above all, men is not only a loss for the communities concerned but is also a national loss. In spite of this knowledge, however, little has been done since the time of independence to check communalism in India. Actually, the constitution itself may have come with loopholes allowing different rules for different communities. But there has been no attempt to check communal passions. With politics increasingly taking up a communal form, political parties and leaders, even if not communal outright, have encouraged communal feelings by catering to the demands of religious communities for the sake of winning votes and popularity. Parties during elections do not ignore the communal factor. The administrative machinery and the police do not function uninfluenced by communalism. The

communal fever has risen to such a pitch that now communalism is openly flaunted by political leaders and common people alike. What must be done to check the spread of the communal virus?

The government must sincerely recognise communalism as a social ill and condemn it while encouraging the various administrative organs to give up communalism. Communalists must be debarred from contesting elections. The law to discourage the use of communalism must be tightened and implemented at the earliest. Most of all, it is the spread of education among the people that can check the evil of communalism. People need to become aware that it has no sustaining impact on their well-being and prosperity; it only strengthens ill-feelings in a society and exposes it to degeneration. People also need to realise that they are often exploited by vested interests that encourage communalism for their petty gains.

Communalism is an ill that has pervaded modern India. All it can do is affect the harmony and feelings of amity among communities. It thus leads to degeneration of a society by attacking its power to stay united. A society plagued by communalism cannot progress. It is thus important that this evil is fought tooth and nail unitedly.