Majority versus Minority Communalism - A Threat to Composite Nationalism

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In a multi-religious society like India, the followers of all religions live and practice their faith. Periodically communalism is showing its ugly face in many manifestations: Demolition of mosques, killing of devotees in train at Godhra and thereafter Gujarat carnage, shameful assault on Taslima Nasreen at a book release function in Hyderabad. Communalism poses a serious threat to secularism and consequently, a danger to democracy, and peaceful, harmonious co existence of Indians belonging to diverse religious faiths and belief systems. Communalism may be regarded as an ideological concept. It may take in its fold the social, economic and political aspects of the group of people. All political parties, including secular one, indulge in this policy, to consolidate vote bank on communal lines. Communalism cannot be understood without understanding the concept of "Secularism". Secularism allows its citizens to profess and practice their respective faith freely and fearlessly. Secular state does not interfere with the religious and spiritual affairs of the people. Post Nehru witnessed weakening of secular commitment and policies of opportunism, if not outright communalism. Instead of promoting secular and socialist ideology, the winning of elections became sole aim, though the rhetoric of socialism continued. The gradual de-ideologisation of politics further strengthened politics of communalism. The biggest example of majority communalism was demolition of Babri Mosque on 6th December 1992. Majority communalist has long been hostile, primarily towards Muslims, but over the last several years, their offensive against Christians has grown intense as well. It should be understood that Communalism breeds terrorism and terrorism also gives incentives to communal-mongers to incite riots and carnage at the same time in retaliation. Majority communalism does not seem to impact territorial integrity of the nation and hence treated as relatively harmless. On the other hand, few minority extremist groups dream of taking over the nation and hence easily identified as anti- national. Despite constitutional restrictions against polarizing votes on communal lines, none of the political party follows the constitutional mandate in letter and spirit and that undermines the very basis of democratic process. Leaders of post Nehru era are lacking in true commitment to the secularization of Indian society, not only in terms of developing non-religious outlook but also in terms of developing a rational and scientific temper. This failure of the leadership has thwarted the progressive separation of religion and politics in India. Communalism has major implications for the subcontinent as a whole, because this will undeniably lead to continuous tension. To me the solution lies in the concept of "Composite Nationalism", only then "Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas" will turn from rhetoric into reality.

Majority versus Minority Communalism-A Threat to Composite Nationalism

In a multi-religious society like India, the followers of all religions live and practice their faith. As per the Census of India 2011, Hindus constitute bulk of population with 78.35 per cent of the total population of 121.05 crore and live in entire part of country, though in some states, they are in minority. Muslims constitute the largest religious minority with population share of 14.2 percent. J.K are the only state in which Muslim constitute majority, though in state like UP, Maharashtra, Bihar, West Bengal & Assam they constitute sizable population. The share of other religious groups like Sikhs and Christians in the total population is at a little over 2 per cent each.(1)

Periodically communalism is showing its ugly face in many manifestations : Demolition of mosques, killing of devotees in train at Godhra and thereafter Gujarat carnage, shameful assault on Taslima Nasreen at a book release function in Hyderabad, Recent Hindu Muslim riots in Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur, destruction of churches in Madhya Pradesh & Chattisgarh, rape of Christians nuns, killing of priests, harassing and terrorsing of minority communities, reconversion of dalit and tribal Christians and so on . These uncivilized, inhuman and barbaric manifestations of the fundamentalist forces, point to an insecure, divisive and dangerous future for the country. Communalism poses a serious threat to secularism and consequently, a danger to democracy, and peaceful, harmonious co existence of Indians belonging to diverse religious faiths and belief systems.

Communalism is basically "a loyalty to a sociopolitical grouping based on religious or ethnic affiliation or a social organization on a communal basis". (2)   Communalism is regarded in our country as blind loyalty to one's own religious group.. Communalism is sometimes equated with religious fundamentalism. The social scientist Asghar Ali Engineer links communalism with the conflicts of the elites of communities. Communalism is described as a tool to mobilize people for or against, by raising an appeal on communal lines. Husain Shaheen views that "If a person is deprived of his or her rights or privileges, just on the basis of his or her community, this would constitute communalism." Abdul Ahmad describes communalism as a social phenomenon characterized by the religion of two communities, often leading to acrimony, tension and even rioting between them. Another Social Scientist Prabha Dixit explains "communalism as a political doctrine which makes use of religious and cultural differences to achieve political ends." Asghar Ali Engineer, Moin Shakir and Abdul Ahmed try to explain communalism as an ideological tool for propagation of economic and political interests. According to them, it is an instrument in the hands of the upper class to concentrate power by dividing people. The elites strive to maintain a status —quo against transformation by dividing people on communal and religious lines.(3)

Communalism may be regarded as an ideological concept. It may take in its fold the social, economic and political aspects of the group of people. Communalism is frequently used by political & religious leaders as an instrument for division and exploitation of the communal identities of the masses for furtherance of their opportunistic political and economic interest. Communalism strikes at the roots of democracy, secularism and national integration and shakes the very foundation of the country. Communalism is regarded as an urban phenomenon. Though 68.84% of India's population lives in the villages, only 3.5 percent of that population are affected by riots. Riots mostly take place in urban areas or villages adjacent to urban area. Communal violence is triggered more often by secular issues, like land disputes, eve-teasing etc and later acquire a communal fervor. Communalism is used as part of political strategy. All political parties, including secular one, indulge in this policy, to consolidate vote bank on communal lines. Further, all political parties mobilize the vote bank, on the basis of primordial group identities like caste and religion as in India, organization of societies on the   democratic ideologies has not matured and the political parties exploit semi-modernized, semi-westernized middle classes, who have not shed their primordial group identities. Sometimes, communalism also receives moral and material support from abroad, either some country want to destabilize the country or some non-resident or NGO's want to establish its ethnic or religious identities.

Communalism can not be understood without understanding the concept of "Secularism". The concept of Secularism was born in England on Separation of Church from the State, (4) and the significance of secular ideals was assimilated by Human civilization. In present global context of secularism and democracy, there is growing consciousness to support and nurture this type of society. In the last hundred years, secularism has come to be accepted as an alternative to religious orthodoxy and fundamentalist ideology. Secularism is lived and practiced in diverse ways in different countries. A secular state is one that allows its citizens to profess and practice their respective faith freely and fearlessly. Secular state does not interfere with the religious and spiritual affairs of the people. It respects all religions equally. It does not prefer one religion to the other. Today almost all the countries in the world accept secularism sine quo non – for democratic governance. Secularist principles and democratic polity are indispensable to establish a just and peaceful society. With these ideals in mind, India braced the concept of "Secularism' though this word was Omitted from Constitution when it was adopted in 1950.

The preamble to the constitution of India declares India as a secular state (5). The concept of Secularism (6) in India is different from the western concept of the state in confrontation with the

church. Indian secularism was born out of an experience, a painful process of national liberation struggle. The Fathers of our Constitution had reasons to introduce secularism in our country: fear of disorder arising from dangerous divisive political movements associated with militant Hindu nationalism, Muslim separatism, Hindu – Muslim communalism and so on.

Post Independence, Nehru practiced the Western notion of secularism and was against clubbing religion with politics. His ideas of secularism found great approval among the intellectuals, besides this, it was acceptable to the minorities as well, particularly Muslims. Nehru was always looked upon by the Muslims, orthodox and the modern, as the champion of their cause. Nehru was anagnostic and thus indifferent to religion but he was fully aware of the contribution of religion to society and its grip over the minds and hearts of the people.

Post Nehru witnessed weakening of secular commitment and policies of opportunism, if not outright communalism. Instead of promoting secular and socialist ideology, the winning of elections became sole aim, though the rhetoric of socialism continued. The decade of eighties and nineties proved to be much more dangerous from this point of view. There has been continuous development of Hindu chauvinism; the state has been continuously failing in its secular polity. The result has been disastrous for the nation, On the other hand, leaders created a system of vote bank i.e. polarizing Hindu and Muslim as separate electorate. At the time of election, the politicians try to woo each vote bank, conceding certain concessions to each group of people. The gradual de-ideologisation of politics further strengthened politics of communalism. The de-ideologised "pragmatic approach" then began to deteriorate into opportunism and even unabashed use of caste and communal rhetoric by the "secular leaders to capture power.

The weakened secular commitment of political parties and much more aggressive communal rhetoric of the Hindu communalists brought about in communal violence in the decade of eighties and nineties. The Hindu communalists raised new issues and began to seriously question the very concept of Nehruvian secularism as "pseudo- secularism" arguing appeasement of minorities. Such overtly communal discourse was never employed before as part of secular political discourse.

Majority Communalism began political ascendency, when the Jan Sangh, the predecessor of the Bharatiya Janata Party merged with Janata Party, which came to power in 1977 after an overwhelming victory in the 1977 election, over the Congress Party led by Indira Gandhi. M. D. Deoras, who was third President of RSS played active role in merger of Jan Sangh with Janata Party and thus the RSS, which claimed to be a cultural organization began to actively engage in political activities. The RSS also has close ties with the religious organization, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP, World Hindu Council), organised in 1964 as a union of India-wide Hindu groups aimed at

strengthening the bonds of Hindu society at home and abroad. The emergence of diverse Hindu communalist groups, forming what is known as the Sangh Parivar (RSS Family) centering on the RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal and BJP(formed in 1980) formed a compact political Hindu family, fanning its communal agenda on the political stage of India. Their political aspiration led to the outbreak of frequent communal riots. A communal incident that symbolised the period was occasioned by the massive conversion to Islam of former untouchables in the village of Minakshipuram, in the State of Tamil Nadu in southern India, in February 1981. In response, a Hindu communalist organisation in the Tamil area linked to the Sangh Parivar launched a movement to convert them back to Hinduism. The biggest example of majority communalism was demolition of Babri Mosque on 6th December 1992. Since 1980s, the Vishva Hindu Parishad was carrying on its campaign for the construction of a temple dedicated to Rama at the Babri Mosque site, claiming it as birthplace of the God-king Rama. Bharatiya Janata Party gave political voice to the campaign. The movement was bolstered by the decision of a district judge, who ruled in 1986 that the gates would be reopened and Hindus permitted to worship there. In September 1990, BJP leader L. K. Advani began a "rath yatra" to Ayodhya in support of the Ram Mandir movement. The yatra sparked off communal riots in several cities, leading to Advani's arrest by the government of Bihar. Despite this, a large body of 'kar sevaks' or Sangh Parivar activists reached Ayodhya, and attempted to attack the mosque. This resulted in a pitched battle with the paramilitary forces that ended with the death of several kar sevaks. The BJP withdrew its support to the V.P. Singh government at the centre, necessitating fresh elections. The BJP substantially increased its tally in the union parliament, as well as winning a majority in the Uttar Pradesh assembly.(7) On 6 December 1992, the RSS and its associate organizations organised a rally involving 150,000 VHP and BJP kar sevaks at the site of the mosque. The rally was addressed by BJP leaders such as Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharti. The inflammatory speeches by these leaders made the crowd restless and they attacked the disputed structure.(8) The police cordon, vastly outnumbered and unprepared for the size of the attack, fled. The mob set upon the building with axes, hammers, and grappling hooks, and within a few hours, the entire mosque was leveled. (9) Riots broke out in many major Indian cities including Mumbai, Delhi and Hyderabad, in which More than 2000 people were killed.(10)

Hindu communalist has long been hostile, primarily towards Muslims, but over the last several years, their offensive against Christians has grown intense as well. More recently, their attacks on Christians in the State of Gujarat, commencing towards the end of year 1998, drew much attention, and all India was shocked when an Australian missionary Dr. Graham Stuart Staines and his two children Philip (aged 10) and Timothy (aged 6) were burnt to death on the night of January 22, 1999,

in a village in the State of Orissa. (11) Perhaps the defenseless and weak Christians are easier targets of Hindu communalist rage.

Another big example of Majority communalism is the Gujarat riots in 2002 following the burning of a train in Godhra on 27 February 2002, causing the deaths of 58 Hindu pilgrims and religious workers returning from Ayodhya, is believed to have triggered the violence. Gujarat witnessed a three-day period of inter-communal violence, which continued against the minority Muslim population for three months in the state, in which approximately 2000 people mostly from minority community lost their lives.(12) The most recent incidence is "Ghar Vapsi" of Muslims and tribals by reconverting them to Hindu fold in the state of UP and MP. Majority communalism are not stopping at this, they want further propagation of their ideology through systematic change in school curricula.

Newton's third law says that for every action, there is equal and opposite reaction. The same is applicable in case of communalism also. Asaduddin Owaisi's Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen moving out of its stronghold in Hyderabad and won two seats in Maharastra. Winning two seats in different state provide a mirror to the mood of minority. Asaduddin Owaisi is a person who also spit fire against majority community. It must be understood that communalism breed only communalism. It should be understood that Communalism breeds terrorism and terrorism also gives incentives to communal-mongers to incite riots and pogroms at the same time in retaliation. On December 6, 1993, dozens of trains were bombed by suspected Indian Mujahideen jihadists, many of them had training in Pakistan. The blasts marked the first anniversary of the infamous Babri Masjid demolition in Ayodhaya. Similarly, post-Godhra Gujarat showed a sharp increase in the recruitments of jihadists by invoking the killings, rapes and injustice done to Muslims and minorities. Thus every communal riots fuels terrorists groups to recruit more cadres. The recent controversial comment by the Congress Vice-President, Rahul Gandhi, on the ISI attempting to recruit the Muzaffarnagar riots victims is just the tip of an iceberg. Citing atrocities on Indian Muslims (ISIS) i.e. Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, a terrorist's group, is planning attack in India, as conveyed by British officials to their Indian counterparts at the India-UK counterterrorism joint working group meeting held in London on January 15-16, 2015. (13)

Another bugbear that the majority communalist sincerely and frequently resorts to is that Muslims should become a part of the national mainstream, as if; they were not part of the same. This is though a euphemism for Muslims having their Personal Laws. Majority communalism have always made a hue and cry of polygamy among Muslims (according to them, Muslims marry more and produce more children in order to outnumber Hindus in India) and the question of talaq and alimony. They also talk of uniform civil laws. However, it is a myth that the Muslims are not part of

the national mainstream. All those who accept the Constitution and the law of the land are part of the national mainstream, whatever their religion, culture, and language are. Amidst accusation and counter-accusation, a distorted comparison of two types of communalism comes into picture since majority communalism is able to hide behind militant nationalism. Majority communalism does not seem to impact territorial integrity of the nation and hence treated as relatively harmless. On the other hand, few minority extremist groups dream of taking over the nation and hence easily identified as anti- national.

The Constitution itself allows this pluralism. In fact, pluralism is the very soul of our Constitution. Communalism defies of the real constitutional spirit and intolerance of other cultures and religions. Muslims like Hindus are part of the national mainstream not only because they accept, the constitution of India but also because they have been part of Indian society for centuries. Indian traditions are as much in their blood as part of anyone else. They have also contributed to the enrichment of Indian society and culture in no small measure and they should shoulder responsibility to take India to new technological and economic height. It is sheer arrogance to suggest that only the Hindus have contributed to the Indian culture, civilization and society.

 The fact is that in-spite of all the hyped up: Appeasement of Minority, levied by majority Communalists, 53 % of the Indian Muslim community lives below the poverty line as against 33% for India as a whole . Illiteracy among Muslims is 40.9% as compared to 35.2 % for India as a whole.(14) Less than 4% of employees in either government or corporations are Muslims. In addition to the economic, social and educational backwardness far in excess of the national average, as a community, Indian Muslim citizens are marginalized, stereotyped and often considered suspects in their patriotism towards their motherland, ignoring the fact that the 130 million Indians are as indigenous and they are as much home-grown, as the majority Hindus. Branding them as having foreign moorings became fashionable in the 1900s thereby accelerating the process of their alienation from mainstream.

The enactment of Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill that overruled the Supreme Court's decision by Rajiv Gandhi government at centre, at the instance of some minority leaders, in the wake of the Supreme Court Judgment in the Shah Bano case(15) angered Hindu communalist and reported move by Rajiv Gandhi to lay foundation stone for Ramjanambhoomi further accelerated the process of Muslim alienation from congress, which concluded with demolition of Babri Masjid, a disputed structure. In this way, the congress sacrificed the very principle of secularism, which Nehru nurtured until his death. The demolition of the Babri Masjid and the

Gujarat riots has brutally torn apart the screen of disillusionment of the 130 million Indian Muslims. For most of them, this is the end of secularism in India.

Despite constitutional restrictions against polarizing votes on communal lines, none of the political party follows the constitutional mandate in letter and spirit and that undermines the very basis of democratic process. If elections are polarized on communal lines, then minorities may abstain from voting and their vote would not impact the outcome, in polarized election, as happened in successive election in Gujarat and general election of 2014. But such action, take away the last shred of dignity from that person, who nurtured the belief, a belief- albeit false - that at least, for a day, he had the power to elect the ruler. The Polarization conveys the unambiguous message that we do not want you and we do not care for you.

After Sixty Eight years of independence, Indian economy is finally in the position of reckoning. It should be a matter of happiness for all; however, buoyed by economic success, rhetoric of Hindu militancy has taken an even more sinister turn. In States where these forces are in power, it is evident for anyone to see that less educated and less successful Muslim Minority is already being portrayed as a burden on State resources and as an impediment to Nations economic progress.

Communalism is communalism and to compare its one form from the other is a dangerous phenomenon. India has both minority communalism as well as majority communalism. In fact, the majority communalism is a much more dangerous than the minority communalism. But the question remains that are the real catalyst, the clear answer is that the state is real catalyst, responsible for growth of communalism. If we take the example of demolition of Babri Masjid, the Masjid was demolished by a group of Hindu communalists, but the Indian State is equally responsible for it, because, their policy towards it was, one of isolation, indifference and to some extent corrupt. Now there is rush amongst political parties to re-write the history of India. What they are trying to achieve by creating new history. Anybody can imagine the havoc that ideological kind of fake history will play in coming years. Another play ground to implement communal ideology is education. Today there are 13,00,000 schools in India for different age groups. If in each year, from these 13,00,000 schools, even 10 students come out of ideologically brainwashed, you can well imagine, the havoc, such brainwashing may do the secular fabric of the country. The same is the case for Muslims, who run thousands of Madarsa, teaching radical and sectarian ideology. Now the communal parties are spreading their wings to establish power, social power, working through local cultural and social organizations to polarize the countrymen on religious , ideological and linguistic lines.

The responsibility of undermining India's limited secularism falls upon the shoulders of the leaders of the post-Nehru era, many of whom are not intellectually liberated, because of their traditional background, to understand and to appreciate genuine secularism. Due to their neo-traditional orientation, these leaders are lacking in true commitment to the secularization of Indian society, not only in terms of developing non-religious outlook but also in terms of developing a rational and scientific temper. This failure of the leadership has thwarted the progressive separation of religion and politics in India.

To me communalism has major implications for the subcontinent as a whole, because this will undeniably lead to continuous tension. Communal States, which will come into effect as a result of such effort, will only foster major antagonisms. What is happening in India, will have equal and opposite reactions with minorities living in their countries. So the implication of communalism is not only for India but for whole South-Asian subcontinent, from the point of view of development, peace and prosperity, because the attention of such States will obviously be based on, creating more antagonism. To me the solution lies in the concept of "Composite Nationalism".

 The concept of "Composite Nationalism" is an effective weapon in the hands of countrymen against the communal forces. The concept stands for religious tolerance and co-existence with others, who share a different world view. The concept shows how pleasant fraternal relations may be formed and sustained. Sustaining Economic growth and safeguarding Independence is most important now. That is not possible, unless, there is unity, cooperation and brotherhood in the country. Presently, the communal forces are engaged in, looking at every problem from their prospective and prism. In this scenario, the concept of Composite Nationalism is more relevant today than ever before. The citizens having different race, religion, caste and belonging to different regions speaking different language should live with their fellow country men with patriotic human feelings and goodwill, must eschew hatred confrontation and narrow mindedness. It should be understood that the purpose of religion is to obtain the blessing of God and to obtain salvation. The way to achieve such blessing and salvation are different in different religion but the aim remains the same. Religion teaches compassion, love for human being and universal brotherhood. No religion preaches hatred amongst human being. With, these feelings, every citizen should wage a joint struggle for peace, progress and stability of the country. The state has role to play in this endeavor, it must disassociate with every symbol of any religion, in its functioning. I believe that majority of my countrymen have deep faith in secularism. A consensus must be evolved amongst political parties about their faithful commitment to secularism; only then the feeling of composite nationalism will foster amongst citizens. The

process is arduous and lengthy but the beginning must be made now, only then "Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas" will turn from rhetoric into reality.

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15. The typical example of keeping status quo in respect to Muslim Personal Laws is Shah Bano case. Shah Bano, a 73-year-old Muslim woman, was divorced by her husband after forty-three years of marriage. According to the Sharia or Muslim Law, her husband was not required to pay her alimony. Shah Bano challenged this decision in the Supreme Court, which ultimately ruled in her favor and ordered her husband to pay her a monthly maintenance allowance. This caused chaos amongst the Muslim clerics who denounced the judgment and suggested that their religion, Islam was under attack in the country. In a fear of losing overall Muslim support, Rajiv Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, succumbed to the pressures of the Muslim community and his own party and backed the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill that overruled the Supreme Court's decision. Citation: JT 2005 (6) SC 266 Honourable Judges: Arijit Pasayat and H.K. Sema, JJ. Issue: Evidence Act, 1872 – Section 113B; Criminal Law (Second Amendment) Act, 1983; Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961; Indian Penal Code, 1860 – Sections 304B, 306 and 498A; Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), 1973; Constitution of India – Articles 14 and 32 Date of Judgment: 19 July 2005 .

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