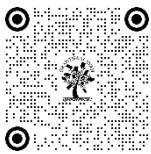


# THE ROLE OF COMMUNALISM IN INDIAN POLITICS –AN OVERVIEW

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## ABSTRACT

Communalism is an extremely complex phenomenon. It is generally associated with plural societies. While in the West, communalism alludes to the feelings and a concern for the community and is used in a positive sense in India the term 'communalism' has a negative connotation; it is used to designate the process of mobilizing a community to confront another community. More specifically communalism is regarded as a manifestation of confrontation between the minority community and the majority community. India, the multicultural and religious nation has also a very special political feature, the different caste and communal elements determining the stability and instability of the Indian politics. In India, no coalition ministry can come in to political power without the support of caste and communal groups, the caste ridden politics in India, in the context of secular state is also analyzed in this study. Here, the researcher uses the term 'communalism' to denote the major religion based or community based political parties and how it influences the stability and instability of the power politics of India.

**Keywords:** Communal Politics, Coalition Politics, Power Politics, Regional Politics, Communal Clash, Communal Exploitation, Casteism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The seeds of the communal disharmony can be seen in the Pre-British period in India. Number of communal clashes recorded during that time. However, the British used that 'communal clashes' for 'communal exploitation'. Thus, the seeds of the communal disharmony sworn by the British during the colonial period, as part of their policy of "Divide and Rule policy" changed the political landscape of India. The Minto Morley Reforms Act of 1909 introduced a system of communal representation for the Muslims by accepting the concept of 'separate electorate'. Under this, the Muslim members were to be elected only by Muslim voters. Thus, the Act legalized Communalism In India, and Lord Minto came to be known as the 'Father of communal electorate in India.' In August 1932 another incident that was Communal Awarded that was introduced by the British Prime minister Ramsay Mac Donald, he announced a scheme of representation of the minorities, which came to be known as the Communal Award. The award not only continued separate electorate for Muslims, Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians and Europeans but also extended it to the depressed classes (scheduled caste). But Gandhi had strong disagreement with the extension of the principle of communal representation to the depressed classes. At last there was an agreement between the leader of the congress and the depressed classes, the agreement known as Poona pact that retained the Hindu joint electorate and gave reserved seats to the depressed classes. Through this representation, Britishers injected the communal difference and feelings in the minds of Indians. But in course of time the Indians itself exploit the communal elements as a political weapon for personal interest and capturing of political power.

### **Communalism in Indian Politics:**

Affinities become the primary channels through which electoral and political support is mobilized within the political system of a country. Kothari says that, "It is not Politics that gets caste - ridden, it is caste that gets politicized." According to Rudolph and Rudolph, the relationship that caste bears to politics can best be understood in terms of three types of political mobilization, each suggestive of different phases of political development. Vertical, horizontal and differential. Vertical mobilization is the marshalling of political support by traditional notables in local societies that are organized and integrated by rank, mutual dependence and the legitimacy of traditional authority. In India traditional elites were characteristically the leaders of locally dominant castes. Horizontal mobilization involves the marshalling of popular political support by class or community leaders and their specialized organizations. Differential mobilization involves the marshaling of direct or indirect political support by political parties from viable but internally differentiated communities through parallel appeals to ideology, sentiment and interest. In the words of Rajni Kothari, 'casteism in politics is thus no more and no less than politicization of caste'. Bipan Chandra identified three conditions for the birth of communalism. These are:-

- People who follow the same religion have common secular interest.
- The secular interests of different religions are dissimilar or divergent from the followers of other religion
- Interests of different religions are seen to be incompatible, antagonistic and hostile. Features of communalism
- Communalism is associated with religious affiliation
- It unites people of a particular religious' faith for secular causes and thus uses religious for political purposes
- Communalism arises from a perceived or even concocted, threat from other religious group

It creates greater in - group solidarity by creating negative stereotype about the out - group Communalism expresses itself in violent tensions designed to hurt the other party riots, arson and even attack

On the religious faith of the other party. It also derives support from the followers of the same faith but belonging to other political regimes such external support not only emotional but also financial, and even in terms of arms, tends to internationalize the conflict and thus goes beyond disrupting internal peace by threatening the very integrity of the nation. Secessionist tendencies exhibited by the extreme form of communalism result in terrorist activities.

Influence of communalism on coalition Politics of India. Coalition in Indian politics is a common feature. Casteism, linguism, regionalism, factionalism, corruption, bribery etc. are very common problem in Indian politics; therefore, the influence of communalism in Indian politics is a common thing. The history of coalition politics in India can be traced from pre independence years. After the 1937 elections, a sort of coalition government was formed in Punjab and Assam. The Interim government established in India in 1946 was also a sort of coalition government and it included the representative of the congress , the Muslim league the Akali Dal and some other small parties, this also reflect the existence of caste and communal elements even in pre-independence period The first idea to formulation of coalition can be seen in India from 1967-1972, during this period the loss of majority in eight states in the 4th general election compelled the Indian National Congress also to think in terms of creating alternative political combinations and coalitions on its agenda, that agenda is still continuing in the electoral politics of India.

The first formal coalition at the center was formed under the leadership of Morarji Desai. The primary objective of this ministry was to end the era of congress party but soon the basic nature of coalition that is 'instability' come in to the government as a no- confidence motion against Desai that tendered his resignation. After that, Charan Singh came to power in October 1979 his ministry got maximum support from CPI(m) and CPI but he can't seek a vote of confidence in the house within three weeks this also tendered his resignation. Hence he became the first Indian prime minister who did not face the house. The vigor form of caste and communal color can be seen in the coalition ministry that formed under the next leadership of V.P. Singh. He formed National Front government with the major support of BJP and they also got support from CPI, CPI(M), RSP, Forward Block, but the honey moon period was short lived because the BJP withdrew its support from the ministry because of the arrest of Advani on his 'Rath Yathra'. Thus the government remained in power only for eleven Months.

In November 1990, Chandra Shekhar formed the union government with the support of all major political, communal and regional parties. Congress(I), AIADMK, BSP, Muslim League, J&K National conference, Kerala Congress (M)-Christian dominated political party at central Kerala, Shiromani Akali Dal (Panthic) etc. formed the government, but in 6th March 1991 Chandra Shekhar offered his resignation and advised for dissolution of house on the issue of

maintaining surveillance of Rajiv Gandhi by some Haryana police men. During this period large number of communal and regional political parties is came in to the main streme electoral politics of India.

Then united front ministry came to power under the leadership of H.D. Deve Gowda. The united font was a coalition of 13 political parties. Congress, CPI, Samajwadi party, Assam Gana Parishad Tamil Manila Congress, Telugu Desam etc. H.D. Deve Gowda was like a chariot being pulled at times in different direction by 13 horses. But soon Congress revoked its support to Gowda amidst discontent over communication between the coalition and the government. Hence the united front government lost the vote of confidence with 190 in favor and 338 against. In April 21st I.K. Gujral headed the Government with the support of Lalu Prasad Yadav, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Indian National Congress, Left Parties and others. but Indian National Congress withdraw its support from the Ministry, that led to the 'majority crisis', finally he resigned from his post. In 19th March 1998 to 10th October 1999, the first BJP led coalition came into power under the leadership of A.B.Vajpayee The role of communal and regional parties played an important role in the formation of government. The BJP led coalition was supported by AIADMK, BJD, Akali Dal, and Shivsena. PMK, TRC and others. But this coalition of too many parties did not last long, Jayalalitha, would withdraw her support and Vajpayee moved confidence motion, it was lost by one vote 269 in favor and 270 against. Hence Vajpayee tendered his resignation to the President of India and came to an end that was a Shaky coalition. Again he formed first stable coalition was made by National Democratic Alliance under the leadership of A. B. Vajpayee. The National Democratic Alliance led by BJP and supported by 24 political parties including AIADMK, Telugu Desam National Congress, Trinamool Congress, Shivsena, Shiromani Akali Dal etc. The presence of the BJP as the strong pillar in the coalition and NDA was dominated by the upper and middle castes and it also contains ideologies, cultures, Social fabrics, religions and above all a coalition of regions.

The 14th coalition Government formed at the center in 2004 under the leadership of stalwart economist Dr. Manmohan Singh in the name of UPA. Political, communal and regional parties played an important role in the formation of UPA Government. The coalition support mainly from National Congress party, Rashtriya Lok Dal, J&K National conference, Indian Union Muslim League, Kerala Congress (M) and others including left parties outside support was given by Samajwadi party, BSP, Rashtriya Janata Dal etc. Prakash Karat, the general secretary of the communist party of India (Marxist) announced that the left front would be withdrawing support over Indo-nuclear deal. But the Government survived, a major criticism against this government was that 'Vote for cash. In May 2009 again Dr. Manmohan Singh came to be the Prime minister of India. The second coalition formed mainly with the support of Samaj Wadi Party BSP Rashtriya Janata Dal, Janata Dal Secular etc. criminal charges and caste based identity politics was the main feature of second UPA government. According to the National election study, 2009 published in the Hindu newspaper after the election the victory to the UPA government is attributed to saturnalias of caste-based identity politics. The 16th Lok Sabha Election held in the 2014, it was the largest election in the Country's history. The main contenders were two alliance groups of the incumbent united progressive Alliance and the opposition National Democratic Alliance led by Indian National Congress and Bharathiya Janata Party respectively. BJP won large number of seats as compared to Indian National Congress. BJP + NDA got 336 seats INC +UPA= 60 seats and others won 147 seats. Most of the regional and communal parties offered their support to the BJP led NDA government.

## 2. CONCLUSION

Thus, the political history of India shows the political stability or instability is not only the political ideology but also the combination and influence of caste, communal and regional elements. The period of 1980s is regarded as the most violent decades of the century. Number of caste and communal problems emerged during this period. For instance, Meenakshipuram conversions of Dalits to Islam, the demand for Khalistan by Sikhs in Punjab leadings to Operation Blue Star, Assam agitation, Demand by Kashmiri Muslims for secession, a series of communal riots in Moradabad, Allahabad, Meerut, Ahmadabad, Hyderabad, Bombay, Bhivandi, Aligarh and the mobilization of Hindus for construction of Ram Temple by the Viswa Hindu Paridshat at the site of Babri Masjid resulting in major Hindu-Muslim clashes not only in Ayodya but throughout the country in 1992.All these incidents adversely affected the stability of Indian politics and it also intensified the caste, communal and regional factors in the Indian politics.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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