

**Communal Harmony – The Greatest Challenge for India**

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**Abstract:-**

India, being a pluralistic society with, different religious groups started identifying themselves, and pressing their cases for a better place in the society. It is challenging for people of India to assess them again. The political movement has widened the sphere of such thinking. It has created an interest amongst people of different religions all over India to know more about their religion and the roles they are in performance. Though the Indian Constitution and number of progressive legislations have removed many disabilities of minorities, the social equality is not yet unquestioned.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:-** Society, Religion, Equality, Idea, Community.

**Introduction:-**

India has been the home for centuries to all great religions of the world. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has stated that religious tolerance and the ability to evolve, despite differences, is the basis of India. Swami Vivekananda says that what makes our civilization great is the fact that it is based on the idea of the co-existence of faiths - Sarva Dharma Sambhava. This notion implies that we have equal respect for all Dharmas, for all faiths. Elaborating this idea Swami Vivekananda used the metaphor of many rivers flowing into one mighty ocean. India is the place of origin of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. So, co-existence has been a part of faith in India. Hinduism, the largest Indian faith by population, is itself pluralistic and polytheist which gives each individual enough space to practice one's faith. Also, Buddha has been considered as one of the incarnations of Vishnu and worshipped by Hindus for years<sup>2</sup>

One of the main problems about religion is its plurality or diversity. Not only are there several religions but they differ from one another in many ways. Further, each claims to show the right way of life, each claims to provide supreme peace and fulfillment. The phenomenon of plurality of religions raises several philosophical questions. These questions lead to another field known as 'Comparative Study of Religions', and so they are not discussed here. Diversity of religion, however, is not merely a philosophical problem. It has immense social, cultural and political consequences. Differences among religions have been one of the main causes of wars and communal riots all through human history. Even

in normal, peaceful society, many people harbor prejudice and ill will towards followers of religions other than their own. More than a hundred years ago, Swami Vivekananda said: 'And thus we find that, though there is nothing that has brought to man more blessings than religion, yet at the same time, there is anything that has brought more horror than religion. Nothing has made more for peace and love than religion; nothing has engendered fiercer hatred than religion. Nothing has made the brotherhood of man more tangible than religion; nothing has bred more bitter enmity between man and man than religion. Nothing has built more charitable institutions, more hospitals for men and even for animals, than religion; nothing has deluged the world with more blood than religion.'<sup>3</sup>

**Definition of Communal, Communalism:-**

'Communal' means: i) for common use or benefit shared;

ii) Of or relating to a commune;

iii) Of or relating to the community and iv) Between different communities.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately British Raj perused "Divide and Rule" policy to extend their domination and sowed the seeds of communal disharmony by creating fear, hatred and suspicion among diverse linguistic and religious cultures. These policies lead to territorial division sharpening the communal divide among the communities. After independence it was expected that the fear, hatred and suspicion among the communities would be diluted gradually and Indian identity would be strengthened. The Constitution of India committed to preserve, promote and defend the secular, pluralistic, socialist and democratic values. But unfortunately the polity of the country, perused power politics of hate and misinformation campaign for electoral gains, resulting in divisive politics of setting one community against the others. Never has been the question of communal disharmony and social disintegration raised to such a wide range of emotions as of today. Communal tension in India has been mounting year after year and fundamental and anti national groups is engaging themselves to reap the harvest of hatred among the communities by encouraging the politics of vote banks at the cost of nation's disintegration.<sup>5</sup> (Refer Table No 1).

<b>After 15 August 1947 (Independent India)</b>				
Partition of India	1947	Punjab	Estimated 1 million on both sides	Massacre of Sikhs and Hindus by Muslims in West Punjab and of Muslims by Sikhs and Hindus in East Punjab
Hyderabad massacre of 1948	1948	Hyderabad	27 - 40,000 killed.	Massacre of Muslims.
1969 Gujarat riots	1969	Gujarat	660	Hindu-Muslim riots; 430 Muslims killed
Turkman gate demolition and rioting	1976	Delhi	officially 6, unofficially 150 killed by police (nearly all Muslims)	Killing of Delhi residents who refused to move residence.
Marichjhapi incident	January 31, 1979	West Bengal	Official figures 2, Hindustan Times quotes 50 to 1000	Killing of refugees who came from East Pakistan
Moradabad riots	1980	Uttar Pradesh	Officially 400; unofficial estimates as high as 2500.	Started as a Muslim-Police conflict; later turned into a Hindu-Muslim riot
Mandai massacre	1980	Tripura	255-500 Bengali Hindu refugees	
Nellie massacre	18 February 1983	Assam	2,191 Muslims	
Train Passenger massacre I (part of	23 February	Punjab	11 Hindus	

the terrorist incidents in Punjab)	1984			
1984 anti-Sikh riots	31 October - 4 November 1984	Delhi	2,700-4,000 (nearly all Sikhs)	Rioting by Indian National Congress Party members after Assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards
Hondh-Chillar massacre(part of the 1984 anti-Sikh massacres)	2 November 1984	Hondh-Chillar, Haryana	32 Sikhs	Rioting by Indian National Congress Party members after Assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards
Desri Ground massacre (part of the terrorist incidents in Punjab)	28 March 1986	Ludhiana, Punjab	13 Hindus	
Mallian massacre (part of the terrorist incidents in Punjab)	29 March 1986	Jalandhar, Punjab	20 Hindu labourers	
Bus Passenger massacre III (part of the terrorist incidents in Punjab)	25 July 1986	Mukatsar, Punjab	15 Hindus	
Bus Passenger massacre IV (part of the terrorist incidents in Punjab)	30 November 1986	Khudda, Punjab	24 Hindus	
Hashimpura massacre	22 May 1987	Meerut, Uttar Pradesh	42 Muslims	

Bus Passenger massacre V (part of the terrorist incidents in Punjab)	July 1987	Fatehbad, Haryana	80 Hindus	
Jagdev Kalan massacre(part of the terrorist incidents in Punjab)	6 August 1987	Punjab	13 Hindus	
Rajbah massacre (part of the terrorist incidents in Punjab)	31 March 1988	Punjab	18 Hindus belonging to 1 family	
Bhagalpur riots	October 1989	Bhagalpur, Bihar	1,070 mostly Muslims	More than 50,000 Muslims were displaced from their ancestral homes.
Ethnic cleansing of Hindu Pandits	1990s	Kashmir	219-399 Hindus	140,000 to 192,000 Hindus were forced to abandon their ancestral land.
Gawakadal massacre	20 January 1990	Srinagar, Kashmir	35 Muslims	Firing on procession by Indian CRPF
Rajbah massacre (part of the terrorist incidents in Punjab)	31 March 1988	Punjab	18 Hindus belonging to 1 family	
Train Passenger massacre II (part of the 1991 Punjab killings)	15 June 1988	Ludhiana, Punjab	80 (mostly Hindus)	

Train Passenger massacre III (part of the 1991 Punjab killings)	December 1988	Ludhiana, Punjab	49 (mostly Hindus)	
Bombay Riots	December 1992 - January 1993	Mumbai	575 Muslims, 275 Hindus, 45 unknown and 5 others	
Sopore massacre	6 January 1993	Sopore, Kashmir	55 Muslims	Firing on procession by Indian BSF
1997 Laxmanpur Bathe massacre	1 December 1997	Arwal district, Bihar	58	Upper caste Ranvir Sena enter village at night and kill 58 Dalits
1998 Wandhama massacre	25 January 1998	Wandhama, Jammu and Kashmir	23 Hindus	Terrorist groups
1998 Prankote massacre	17 April 1998	Jammu and Kashmir	26 Hindus	
1998 Chapnari massacre	19 June 1998	Chapnari, Jammu and Kashmir	25 Hindus	Terrorist groups
1998 Chamba massacre	3 August 1998	Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh	35 Hindus	Communal Riots
Chittisinghpura massacre	20 March 2000	Chittisinghpura, Anantnag district, Jammu and Kashmir	36 Sikhs	Terrorist groups
Gourangatilla massacre	2000	Tripura	16 non-tribal Hindus	By Christian extremist. Part of Christian

				terrorism in Tripura
Bagber massacre	20 May 2000	Tripura	25 non-tribal Hindus	By Christian extremist. Part of Christian terrorism in Tripura
Tripura Tribal massacre (Part of Christian terrorism in Tripura)	1999-2000	Tripura	20 tribal Hindus	Includes murder of tribal Hindu spiritual leader Shanti Kali, and Hindu religious leader Labh Kumar Jamatia.
Nanoor massacre	27 July 2000	West Bengal	11 labourers	
2000 Amarnath pilgrimage massacre	1 August 2000	Jammu and Kashmir	30 (Hindu pilgrims)	Terrorist groups
2001 Kishtwar massacre	3 August 2001	Jammu and Kashmir	19 Hindus	Terrorist groups
Godhra train burning	27 February 2002	Godhra	58 Hindus	Hindu passengers burnt alive in a train fire. Unclear whether fire was intentional.
2002 Gujarat violence	28 February 2002	Ahmedabad	790 Muslims and 254 Hindus were killed; Unofficially more than 2000 Muslims were brutally killed by Hindu Extremists.	Communal Violence
Gulbarg Society massacre(part of the 2002 Gujarat violence)	28 February 2002	Ahmedabad	69 (mostly Muslim)	

Naroda Patiya massacre(part of the 2002 Gujarat violence)	28 February 2002	Naroda,Ahmedabad	97 Muslims	Riots between Hindus and Muslims after Sabarmati Express is set afire at Godhra railway station allegedly by Muslims
Raghunath Hindu temple massacre I (part of 2002 Raghunath temple attacks)	30 March 2002	Jammu & Kashmir	11 killed, 20 injured (mostly Hindu devotees)	Terrorist groups
2002 Qasim Nagar massacre	13 July 2002	Jammu and Kashmir	29 Hindus	Terror Attack
Akshardham Temple attack	24 September 2002	Gujarat	29 killed, 79 injured (mostly Hindu devotees)	Terrorist groups
Raghunath Hindu temple massacre II (part of 2002 Raghunath temple attacks)	24 November 2002	Jammu & Kashmir	14 killed, 45 injured (mostly Muslim devotees)	Terrorist groups
2003 Nadimarg Massacre	23 March 2002	Jammu and Kashmir	24 Hindus	Terrorist groups
2002 Kaluchak massacre	14 May 2002	Jammu and Kashmir	31	Terrorist groups attack Tourist bus and Army's family quarter attacked.
Marad Massacre	May 2003	Kerala	8 killed, 58 injured - All Hindu Fishermen	Planned Attack by Muslim Group.



2006 Varanasi bombings	March 2006	Uttar Pradesh	28 killed, 101 injured -Devotees of Sankat Mochan Hanuman Temple targeted	Terrorist attack Hindu temple.
2006 Doda massacre	30 April 2006	Jammu & Kashmir	35 Hindus	Terrorist groups
Tumudibandh massacre (part of the Murder of Swami Lakshmanananda)	August 2008	Orissa	5 Hindus	By Christian extremists
Kandhamal riots	August 2008	Orissa	42	
Mumbai massacre	26 November 2008	Mumbai	164	11 coordinated attacks by Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists; casualties include people of various nationalities, and Israeli victims were reportedly tortured before being killed.
2010 Dantewada bus bombing	17 May 2010	Chhattisgarh	76	Maoist terrorist attacked civilian bus
2010 Deganga riots	6 September 2010	North 24 Parganas district, West Bengal	Attack on Hindu by Muslim mobs led by Haji Nurul Islam	23 houses ransacked, 250 shops had been looted during the several days of rioting, while 50 houses had been burned and 5 temples desecrated.
2012 Assam violence	July 2012	Assam	77 deaths	Communal violence between Bodos (Tribal, Christian & Hindu faith)

				and Muslims
2013 Naxal attack in Darbha valley	25 May 2013	Chhattisgarh	28	28 people from a Congress Party motorcade
2013 Muzaffarnagar riots	25 August 2013 - 17 September 2013	Muzaffarnagar district, Uttar Pradesh	42 Muslims and 20 Hindus killed and 93 injured	Double murder of two Hindu boys triggered communal riot between Hindu Jats & Muslim Jatavs

Data's are taken from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_massacres\\_in\\_India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_massacres_in_India).

Communal disharmony and conflicts are fuelled by fear, suspicion and hatred. It depends on local conditions whether the division expresses itself along religious, economic, political, caste or colour lines. Whatever be the form, insecurity is perhaps the major cause of individual and social dissensions. We have not till now had many instances, of societies or communities that are fully integrated and therefore fearless. The societies and individuals must rise above fear, jealousy and hate. When such individuals combine themselves into a community, the problem of communal jealousy and discord will disappear. The positive assertive role of both majority and minority communities to lessen the fear, hatred and suspicion is essential to generate communal harmony.

Humanism, love and compassion are the core values of all religions and hatred and violence are travesty of religions. Genuine religion builds bridges of solidarity between peoples of different faiths. Religion, as Sri Ramakrishna explained, is like a river leading its followers to the great Ocean of God. When the human relates to the Divine, there flows a process of the human being elevated to the realm of the Divine. 'To be fully human is to be divine'. No religion preaches hatred. A true religion is transformative having the power to create "a new heaven and a new earth". Gandhi Ji referred to the religion "which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and whichever purifies". That was the reason why he was not afraid of religious pluralism or expressions of religious sentiments.<sup>6</sup>

It is the fundamentalist organizations that are mixing politics with religion. It is those who use religion for their own narrow, vested interests who are responsible for the sad state of affairs in India. It is the outcome of their inadequate knowledge, their institutionalized perception of religion and their fundamentalist attitudes and practices. It is their selective and literal interpretation of their scriptures, which is unhistorical. Civil societies have to join together to thwart the narrow-minded policies of the polity with an iron hand to create communal harmony. As Neera Chandhoke rightly puts it in her book "Beyond Secularism" (Oxford 2000), "This, as we can see, has serious implications not only for the multi-religious, multilinguistic, and multi-ethnic nature of Indian society, but also for the cultural and religious rights that the Constitution has granted to the minorities. Promotion of Indian identity through the processes of creating multi-cultural, multi-social and multi-sectoral group will smoothen and cover other divisive identities."<sup>7</sup>

From the beginning of this century, the leaders of our country's freedom struggle proclaimed their commitment to secularism. For Gandhiji, secularism, in other words, the equality of all religions was founded in the doctrine of Sarva Dharma Sambhava. Dr. Radhakrishnan phrased this concept aptly: "We hold that no one religion should be given preferential status, or unique distinction, that no one religion should be accorded special privileges in national life, or international relations; for that would be a violation of the basic principles of democracy and contrary to the best interest of religion and government..."

The Indian masses have been always been supportive for promoting harmony between various communities, but divisive efforts by fundamental sections and political groups have tried to create misconceptions through policies of fear, suspicion and hatred for narrow gains. The need of the hour is to preserve, promote and defend the secular, pluralistic, socialist and democratic values of our Constitution. The freedom of conscience to profess, practice and propagate one's own religion and culture as guaranteed in the Constitution must be strengthened. At the same time no inducement or coercion should be used to bring pressure on people for conversion or re-conversion. The differences if at all arise should be resolved through mutual understanding and dialogue. Peaceful methods of solving existing contentious through a process of give and take should be encouraged. Majority of citizens in India are concerned over this alarming situation of current communal disharmony and realize, if the situation is allowed to continue unchecked, secularism in India would disappear and the democratic fabric of India, the biggest democracy of the world, would collapse and the development of the people of India would be permanently deterred. This will also strengthen the process of disintegration of this

nation – fulfilling the desire of anti national elements. The need for mobilizing like-minded people at the national level and creating among them an awareness of the dangers involved in communal hatred and conflicts and of the need for joining hands and protesting against such divisive and destructive forces is now strongly felt. This process needs to be hastened by finding ways and means to change the mindset of people from narrow religious, linguistic and regional identity or allegiance to a broader identity of Indian ness. The biggest challenge is to merge the religious, linguistic and regional identity into a national identity, while maintaining the other identities and cultures. Lasting harmony between heterogeneous communities can only come through recognition of the ‘ oneness of mankind’, and awareness of a realization, that differences that divide us along ethnic and religious lines have no foundation. Just as there are no boundaries drawn on the earth to separate nations, distinctions of social, economic, ethnic and religious identity imposed by peoples is artificial; they have only benefited those with vested interests.<sup>8</sup> The Dalai Lama says the enduring harmony between India's many religions is proof to the world that different communities can live peacefully and solve problems together. The Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader has lived for decades in exile in India's Himalayan foothill city of Dharamsala, after fleeing China after a failed 1959 uprising. He said Saturday that "India is the only country where all major world religions live together; not only in modern time, but over 1,000 years.

The Dalai Lama was speaking to leaders from nine religious groups invited for two days of meetings to mull some of India's biggest problems, including poverty, attacks on women, environmental degradation and communal violence. He stressed that there was no justification for fighting in the name of faith, calling it "unthinkable."<sup>9</sup>

It is essential to commit ourselves to preserve, promote and defend the secular, pluralistic, socialist and democratic values of our Constitution. The freedom of conscience to profess, practice and propagate one's own religion as guaranteed in the Constitution must be strengthened. At the same time no inducement or coercion should be used to bring pressure on people for conversion or re-conversion. The differences if at all arise should be resolved through mutual understanding and dialogue.

**Resolution towards Communal Harmony:-**

Some of the major steps towards communal harmony are to:-

- Counter in thought, word, deed and collective actions the dangerous attempts to communalize the society and polity.
- Resolve to expose and contain the politics of hate propagated by majority or minority communalism.
- Protect, preserve and defend our Indian constitution in its entirety as enunciated by its founding fathers.
- Protect the pluralist tradition and the multi-cultural fabric of the country.
- Take all measures to contain the politics of hate and misinformation resulting in divisive politics of setting one community against the others.
- Stop communalization of national institutions like education, history, and the polity of the nation.
- Constitute state Human Rights, Minorities and Women's commissions in all States with statutory powers, ensuring adequate representation to people's organizations and ensuring time-bound disposal of cases involved.
- Bring to justice and take stringent action against those who incite and indulge in communal violence and riots.
- Set up in all States courts on par with High Courts for time-bound, speedy disposal of cases associated with communal riots.
- Take special measures to protect women and children who are the worst hit victims of communal violence.
- Sensitize and motivate enforcers of law to take effective and prompt action to prevent and contain communal violence. The public servants that fail in the above responsibility must be dealt with properly and severely.
- Wean away the youth of this country from falling victims to communalization and take steps to strengthen the spirit of Indian identity.<sup>10</sup>

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