

COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN INDIA: TOLERANCE AND SOCIAL COHESION IN HINDUISM AND ISLAM

By: Shafquat Usmani

Research Scholar, Department. of Political Science,
Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, shafquatusmani
@gmail.com

India is a multi-cultural, multi lingual as well as multi religious country. Due to its vastness and diversity, it is often called a sub-continent. But, this open pluralistic Indian society has continuously been facing various kinds of internal security threats; such as casteism, communalism, naxalism, and cross border terrorism. Among all these threats, communal strife is often considered to be the most serious problem which has threatened to destabilize its unity, integrity, and democratic values. In this paper, an attempt has been made to explore the principles and provisions which strive to promote social cohesion and pluralism in Hinduism and Islam. Through a comparative analysis of the tenets and principles of the two religions, efforts can be made to evolve a common programme of action which may lead to better communal harmony between the two communities. Communal harmony, we must realize, is not only beneficial for both but is also essential for combating communal confrontation and to develop mutual understanding, respect and trust. The principles promoting peace in society are absolutely necessary for social progress and strengthening democratic and secular structure of our political system. The aim of this paper is to attract more attention of scholars, academicians, policy makers and governmental agencies towards the concept of tolerance and social cohesion. The paper has been divided into four parts, the first part is introductory in nature while the second deals with the concepts of tolerance and social cohesion in Hinduism and Islam. The third part is related to communal harmony that professes essential oneness of all

communities. The last part contains conclusion followed by recommendations and suggestions.

Keywords: *Communalism, Naxalism, Democracy, Secular, Policy, Violence, Political System*

India is a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi religious as well as democratic and secular country. The people of the country speak 16 major languages in over 200 dialects. There are about one dozen ethnic groups, seven major religious communities with several sects and sub sects and 68 socio culture sub regions.[2] Due to its vastness and diversity, it is often called a sub continent. But this open pluralistic Indian society is continuously been facing various kinds of internal security threats such as casteism, communalism, terrorism, naxalism and cross border crises. Among all these threats, communal problem is the greatest insidious problem which has destabilized its, unity, integrity and democratic values. The paper tries to address the major problem faced by India today which is also a hurdle in the path of its development that is communalism. The paper focuses on the basic teachings of Hinduism and Islam and points out as to how both these religions are an epitome of peace and its only because of false and malicious intentions of its followers that today India is gripped with communalism. The paper suggests that the Government and people both should make sincere concerted efforts for eradication of communal tensions and conflicts.

Communalism is loyalty to a socio-political grouping based on religious or ethnic affiliation rather than to the society as a whole. This paper deals with communal problem, as communal problem mainly occurs in India between two major religious communities of Hindus and Muslims in the name of religion. India is home to all the great religions of the world. While some were born here, others took root in this ancient land of ours. The sub-continent has for centuries provided a unique social and intellectual environment in which many distinct religions

have not only co-existed peacefully but have also enriched each other. Going back to the Indian history, Muslim rule in India during medieval period led to a greater degree of socio-cultural interactions between Hindu majority and the ruling Muslim minority. Freedom of religion or beliefs of Hindus were ensured. The general policy and attitude of Muslim polity was one of accommodation, religious tolerance and respect to the religion and culture of Hindus. This policy continued from the times of early Sultans of Delhi and reached to its peak in the great Mughal ruler Akbar's reign. The past legacy of accommodating socio-culture diversities is not reflected in contemporary India. The level of socio-political and cultural interaction between Hindus and Muslims in today's India does not correspond to the one that prevailed in medieval India.

There are many reasons behind this current pathetic state of affairs. The British policy of divide and rule during colonial period, the partition of Bengal in 1905, introduction of separate/communal electorates for Muslims and untouchables and the partition of India are some of the significant factors which have affected the process of accommodation of cultural diversities in contemporary Indian society. Moreover, in the 20th century, many communal organizations were established, such as the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha, Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh(1925), Jamat-e-islami(1941) Bhartiya Jana Sangh (1951), the Bhartiya Janta Party (1979), the Vishva Hindu Parishad (1964) and Bajrang Dal(in the 1980s). These socio-political organizations are mainly responsible for communalizing and dividing society on the groundS of religion and culture. The writingS and speeches of V.D Savarkar and MS Golwalkar contributed greatly to the ideology of Hindutva. This is also anti-thetical to the concepts of pluralism, secularism and the accommodation of cultural diversities. Though communal riots have occurred sporadically since independence, what is of grave concern is the alarming increase in their number and

intensity since the 1980s and 1990s.[3] Moreover, demolition of Babri mosque (1992), Gujarat riots (2002) Shamli and Muzaffarnagar communal violence (2013) and the most recent incident of Dadri (lynching of Mohammad Ikhlq Saifi) and suicide case of Rohit Vemula (2016) added more towards provocation of the communal trends in the country.

The main cause behind communal riots²/violence between Hindus and Muslims lay not in the belief and practices or in the teaching of different scriptures but in a defective understanding of real message.[4] It is quite vivid that no religion teaches violence or hatred. No religion endorses animosity towards another human being. Those who use religious symbols and forums to talk of violence, sectarianism and discord cannot be called the true spokespersons of their respective religions. Different religions are like many leaves of a tree, they might look different but at the trunk they are one. All religions are rooted in the concept of one God. All religions are good. Only the followers of different religions quarrel with one another, therefore, refute their respective religions. Different roads are going towards the same point. The followers' approach in different ways is to suit their nature. Although, there is no physical equality between the leaves but none is superior or inferior to the other. The religion cannot be a decisive force. Only the followers of different religions quarrel with one another, therefore, deny their respective religions.

Human nature is basically responsible for the origin of conflicts. It is asserted that human beings have certain innate features, such as aggressiveness, love/lust for power, position and authority love for war and so on. These opposite instincts exist side by side in the unconscious mind of every human beings with no disharmony. Conflict occurs only when the overt, verbal, symbolic or emotional responses required to fulfill one's motives are incompatible with those required to fulfill

another. When a person is motivated to engage in two or more mutually exclusive activities, a conflict situation arises.[5]

With this idea at the backdrop, this paper is an attempt to explore the principles and provisions which strive to promote social cohesion and pluralism in Hinduism and Islam. Through the comparative analysis of these principles, the paper tries to find out a common policy and provision which promotes communal harmony. It is also an ardent attempt to attract the attention of scholars, academicians, policy makers, general masses and governmental agencies towards these concepts.

Social Cohesion and Pluralism in Hinduism and Islam:

As already mentioned in the paper, India is a multi-cultural, multi-religious and pluralistic society. Mere presence of different religions, castes, races and cultures is not enough for a pluralistic/multi-religious democracy. It requires each of these communities to flourish & receive equal treatment. Now the question erupts as to how can this diverse community of people be treated equal within the framework of democracy? This is the question that multi-religion/pluralism begins with the understanding that granting equal civil and political rights, was an important achievement within democracy. To address this dilemma, going in-depth of those principles and tenets which are related to social cohesion & pluralism in Hinduism and Islam is the need of the hour to secure our country from communal clashes and strengthen values of our civilization.

This question is unique in both Hinduism and Islam. The word Islam is derived from the root word Slim or Salama which means to provide peace and security, any act which is against peace and security of the humanity irrespective of religion, race and colour, is considered to be un-Islamic or anti-Islamic. The constitution of Madina (first world constitution) provided moderate and

balanced aptitude towards all communities living in the society and gave the idea of a geographical nation for the first time in the history, which included all faiths and cultures together in a single nation. It gives the concept of respecting the local customary laws of all tribes and religion living in the Madanian society. It guarantees protection of human rights, women rights, social rights, cultural rights, religious freedoms, and rights of minorities living in the state. The rule of law and the concept of devolution of powers (which later became the practical foundation of democracy) emerged out of this constitution.[6]

The holy Quran wants people to have good relations with others. The Quran quotes:

"O mankind! Verily we have created you of a male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that yet may know one another. Lo! The noblest of you, in sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is knower 'Aware.'"[7]

Similarly, the Bhagavad-Gita states it eloquently:

"Whoever approaches Me, In whatever manner, I accept him. All paths men are struggling through head unto Me."[8]

These verses of both religions preach oneness of human beings. While differences in language, color, culture, homeland and means of power, they worship one God. No one can be master of another, or a color superior to another, since they descend from the same origin and turn to the same God. People should know each other with setting up good relations and shouldn't try to view one another with mutual suspicions, malice and hatred. Thus both religions must eliminate all kinds of discrimination from their racial and ethnological concepts and must try to establish mutual acquaintance among people.

Allah is the god of, merciful and compassionate, His mercy embraces every thing.[9] In Islam, no one should be forced to convert or adopt Islam by any means or under any situation. There are many verses of the holy

Quran that promote religious freedom. "Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from error: Whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that never breaks. And God hears and knows all things".[10] . Furthermore, the holy Quran says "It is the Truth from your Lord, wherefore let him who will, believe, and let him who will disbelieve." [11] To each among you We have prescribed law and a path. And if God had enforced His Will, He would have made you one nation or people. But His plan is to test you in what He hath given you.[12] And, 'if thy Lord had enforced His Will, surely, all who are on the earth would have believed together. Will you then compel mankind against their will, to believe! [13] You have your own religion and I have mine.[14]

Despite Islam's missionary nature, it is prohibited to unnecessary argument with the people of other religions on the question of true religion. God declares, "Do not argue with the people of the book unless it is in the most courteous manner, except for those of them who do wrong. We believe in Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you. Our God and your God is one. To him we surrender ourselves." [15] Thus, in Islam every person is completely free to decide to believe or not, there is no place of religious tyranny.

In Islamic culture, the term Al-dhimmah is formed to define the status of people such as the Jews and Christians who lived within the Islamic political domain. It means pact, trust, surety; a Dhimmi is a party to covenant who has been given a promise to feel secure about his property, honor and religion. Al-dhimmah grants the Christians and Jews an equal status with Muslims in religious, economic and administrative domains. In return, they are asked to pay, jizyah, the poll tax. Although al Dhimmah itself was initiated for Christian and Jews, it was also applied to Zoroastrians when Persia was conquered and to Hindus when India

came under the rule of Islam. The Prophet (PBUH) said that, "feed the hungry, visit the sick and release the captive". [16] This order was not only for the Muslims or their people, but, it was a duty for Muslims to do for others as Prophet did it himself to set an example for the whole mankind. He paid a visit to a young Jew who fell ill, which means that it is permissible to visit, compliment and entertain non-muslims. The constitution of Madina and other covenants of the Prophet (PBUH) with Jews and Christians, laid down the principle for building a multi cultural and multi religious community. These fundamental rules that were established by Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) have been practiced throughout Islamic history. After Prophet (PBUH), caliphs and Muslims in general followed in the same manner, such as in the case of Jerusalem, when it came under the rule of Islam, caliph Omar, signed a pact with the inhabitants of Jerusalem, which granted security to them and their property as well as granted rights to the Jews and Christians of Jerusalem and they were free to practice their religion, their Churches and Synagogues were respected and left intact.

In the Vedic period equality of all human beings was reiterated with no one being superior or inferior. The early Hindu teachings, as reflected in Bhagavad-Gita and Upanishads, propounded, equality of all human beings, equality of men and women in all fields, the idea of universal brotherhood, unity and diversity, and above all, oneness (unity) of all religions. What better expression of human right, human dignity and catholicity can be found in Hinduism than the following verse in the Bhagvad-Geeta:

*"I am Impartial and equal to all beings.
None do I despise not love more than any other."*

III. Communal Harmony and Internal Security:

Communal harmony and internal security of India are two faces of the same coin. Communal harmony is

necessary for the unity, integrity and feeling of oneness among the people. Communalism and communal harmony are different connotations. Communalism is 'the loyalty to a socio-political grouping based on religious or ethnic affiliation rather than to society as a whole. While communal harmony refers to the principle that different people within a community or society live together peacefully in pursuit of mutual goal. So, communal harmony is necessary for unity and integrity and feeling of oneness among the people of India.

Only when internal security is ensured, can a nation embark on the path towards socio-political progress & economic development. If the vision to make India a developed nation and economically prosperous then internal security of a nation and security of its inhabitant is prerequisite for the attainment of this vision. As long as the communal extremism inside the country does not ease, security of India can not be ensured despite the strength of army or paramilitary employed to control the situation. Once the communal fervor inside the country subsides and India becomes internally secured, then only we can talk of the other goals like making India an economic superpower.

All kinds of communalism are dangerous but the communalism of majority which is often expressed in the nationalistic fervor is far more dangerous to India's democratic culture.

It is the need of hour to check the menace of religious violence and promote communal harmony. At the community level too we need to follow, to extent possible, Asoka the great king, the Buddhist-Gandhian principle of non violence and religious tolerance of great Mughal emperor Akbar the great.

Conclusion:

If we want to do something really helpful in order to reach a pluralistic society or to prevent conflicts at any

level, we should first check and reform our social, cultural and religious acceptances against others while eliminating our exclusive side and bring humanistic values. For this purpose, revamping the whole school curriculum, introducing secular contents in education system and inter faith dialogue should be encouraged to develop understanding and respect for other communities. Because, 'it is education which is the right weapon to cut the social slavery and it is the education which will enlighten the downtrodden masses to come up and gain social status, economic betterment and political freedom (Ambedkar).'^[17] The activities of all communal political parties and religious groups must be monitored and communally inflammatory speeches be banned as they are often responsible for fanning communal sentiments. Police and paramilitary forces should be broad-based so as to be a true representatives of all communities. Mass media can play a responsible and positive role through objective reports of the causes of violence without sensationalizing the issue. In today's information age, media has a significant role to play in educating the masses through both print and electronic media. But, in the end, it's us, the citizens of this great country, India, on whose shoulders peacekeeping lies, and it's not our need, it is our responsibility.

1. Malik,V.P, Internal security management: challenges and policy options, CLAWS, no 17,april 2010
2. Vijapur,Abdulrahim, Accommodation of Cultural Diversity in India: Reflections on Past and Present
3. Gandhiji in Harijan
4. Vijapur, Abdulrahim P, K.Savitry, Sources of Conflict: Perspectives.
5. <http://www.constitutionofmadina.com/firstislamicstate>
6. The Koran, 49:13
7. Nanda, Ved P. 1997.'Hinduism and Human rights' in Daniel Warner (ed.) Human Rights and Humanitarian Law. The Hague: Kluwer Law International, p 33
8. The Koran, 7:156
9. The Koran, 2:256
10. Holy Quran, 18:29
11. The Holy Quran, 5:48-59
12. The Holy Quran, 10: 99-100
13. The Holy Quran, 109:6
14. The Holy Quran, 29:46
15. Narrated by Al-Bukhari,Mishkat Al Masahib, Hadith no 1523
16. Kishan, N.Ramnath, Privatization of Education (2008)