

COMMUNALISM- A CURSE FOR INDIAN FEDERATION

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Introduction :

India is one of the few countries that has consciously chosen a democratic form of government and followed the choice with a series of progressive measures meant to empower the people. On examination it is clear that India has fallen short of realizing what it had set to achieve. It is the same state of affairs with many other countries claiming to be democracies. As we move forward, we see that democracy has entered a period of prolonged crisis, with growing ambivalence about the specific goals that should be pursued. As a system of good governance, today's democracy is viewed with increasing uncertainty. Federalism is one of the important aspects of Indian constitution. The Indian federation is mostly suited to all the communities with a diversified pattern of objectives, interests and traditions who seek to join together to obtain common objectives and interests and the cultivation of common traditions. The basic objective of Indian federalism is unity in diversity, devolution in authority and decentralization in administration. Its fundamental characteristic is the division of powers between two sets of governments - a Central Government and state government - each independent of the other in its own sphere of activity. The unity which federalism achieves is not unity through compulsion but unity through willing consent and voluntary cooperation. Whenever and wherever the necessity arose for setting problems for a multilingual and multi-racial character and welding together diverse communities living over a vast area into a single, compact governmental system, federalism alone offered a possible solution. The choice of federalism as a constitutional form and as the basis of a national government in India was not a sudden development upon the transfer of power on 15th August, 1947¹. It was there for many years, and in a limited form it was already in operation when India was under British rule. For the solution of the constitutional problem of a multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-communal country like India with a vast area and a huge population, federalism was only a natural choice. The framers of Indian Constitution were cautious to ensure that the unity they sought to establish through federalism was of an abiding nature, and in case of a future conflict between the unity and diversity preserved under the Constitution, the former should prevail over the latter. The framers actually wanted to create an indestructible union. Fully conscious of the many disruptive tendencies prevailing in the country, the framers provided for special powers to the Central Government to act during emergencies in the interest of preservation of national unity.

Tradition and Democracy :-

Democracy provides the impulse towards change, an impulse that is deeply ingrained in the Indian tradition and provides the motivation of its current awakening, engulfing large masses of people and informing a wide array of social movements. The most striking aspect of India's historical culture is the great variety and heterogeneity that it has encompassed and preserved. This unique nature is the result of the diversity of ethnic and religious groups that have entered the Indian sub continent in succession and settled down. It is more eclectic rather than proselytising style of spiritual integration which is a peculiar characteristic of Indian tradition, the absence of either a unifying theology or a unifying and continuous secular tradition and above all a highly differentiated social system that has brought functional hierarchies, spatial distinctions and ritual distances into a manifold frame of identifications and interdependence. The consequences have been a continuous pattern of coexistence between diverse systems and life styles; persistence of local subcultures and primary loyalties; an intermittent, unstable and discontinuous political centre, and an essentially plural social tradition in which the government functioned as only one among many centres.

India is perhaps the only great historical civilization that has maintained its cultural integrity without identifying itself with a particular political centre. In contrast to the great empires of history, the unity of India owed not to the authority of a given political system, but to the wide diffusion of cultural symbols, spiritual values, and structures of roles and functions which is the characteristic of a continuous civilization. The essential identity of India has been cultural, not political. To be sure, there always was a secular component in India's culture, and it was through the constant interplay between the secular and the spiritual that the system was able to adapt itself to changing situations. By long experiences India has learned to be tolerant of pluralism, dissent and opposition. It has displayed a high tolerance of ambiguity. Over the centuries Indians have got used to wide disparities in material comforts and in their access to positions of influence and power. Consequently they have shown a marked tolerance of deprivation and humiliation.

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Growing Uncertainty

Focussing on the educational process and the role of the social sciences, specifically in enabling the lower reaches of society to engage in the politics of transformation, we are reminded that while we live in an age of turbulence, particularly at the grassroots, little seems to be changing in the world at large. It is only by seeking to unravel this deep uncertainty about the direction in which India is moving—both the dominant structures and those opposed to them - that we may be able to begin unraveling what is at work, and on that basis comprehend the future of Indian democracy. India, being a traditional society is compelled to adopt the dominant ideology of forced modernization and supposedly a deep socio cultural crisis is likely to emerge. If the state surrenders its autonomy, then civil society has to fall back on its own resources. These societies are already experiencing deep convulsions as a result of two powerful impacts: first, the aggressive thrust of ruthless technologism, the new form that world capitalism has assumed and second, the social and ethnic conflicts generated by formal electoral democracy. The use of the formal apparatus of democracy as a vehicle of modernization worked smoothly so long as it was controlled by an alliance of feudal and bourgeois elements. With the rise and assertion of the masses which had in good faith believed in the formal pretences of bourgeois democracy, the feudal landowning interests and the industrial bourgeoisie orchestrated a backlash. This has found expression in the massive repression of the poor on the one hand, and on the other hand, the promulgation of a depoliticised technocratic state that is impervious to the social and political aspirations of the masses. We need to comprehend and assess the bewildering interface between these powerful trends, each heralding a strong current of domination and destruction. Time has come to consider the multiple dimensions of domination, exploitation and marginalization in their interrelated manifestations and to similarly interrelate the large variety of counter trends and their ideological underpinnings and this can be best met by working on one central issue of our times - the changing nature of the Indian State and its role in civil society. It is the appropriate time to reexamine our assumptions about the state and its presumed role as liberator, equaliser, moderniser and mobiliser. India's relationship with its people is not just a series of interactions between the classes and the masses but also between the principal carriers of modern capitalism and technology and the social order; between the military and the civil orders; between the development policies of the State and its transnational sponsors, and the economic and ecological catastrophes threatening the survival of many; between the global information order and the citizens reduced to packages of consumption, social prejudice, and the dazzling circuses organised by agents of the State and corporate entities; and finally, between dominant races and ethnic entities that are in control of the state and those that are at the periphery. Those in the periphery are still members of the civil order, but are being pushed out by the repressive and genocidal policies pursued by the state and the transnational entities. It is this capture of the state by a convergence of class, ethnic, technological and military actors, by developmentalists, communicators and managers that has set the stage for the confrontation between them and the people—between the classes and the masses. The most dangerous element in Indian context is the stirring of communal passions.

The dual economy and the social consequences thereof are likely to generate restlessness and revolt from the lower tiers of society and the politicised members of the middle classes, a new canard has been set in motion. It is meant to detract attention from the socio-economic sphere. Public opinion and people's emotions are being directed towards the highly volatile communal and ethnic spheres. This has released strong religious, linguistic and cultural sentiments, pitched people against people, utilized mafia operations; and unleashed a reign of terror on vulnerable castes, communities and regions. Obscurantist sentiments and fundamentalist ideologies are mobilised for this purpose, the state then acquires more firepower, now legitimised in the name of threats to national and cultural unity. In the process, the social movements that had challenged the hegemony of the upper classes earlier are undermined. Stringent laws against terrorism are enacted and then used to deal with popular unrest and suppress social movements. This extremely serious development has been a direct consequence of the ruling elite wanting to somehow hang on to power and to this end inject the political process with strong doses of violence and civil strife. The caste and class basis of social interactions are communalised, threatening to tear the social fabric. In India, we are now witnessing some new currents - like technologism, fundamentalism and communalism. As these currents coalesce, the exercise of power becomes increasingly cynical. The result is civil war, ethnicisation of civil society and collapse of secularism as a mode of organizing plural societies. Communalism and fundamentalism undermine the very idea of pluralism and the conception of unity that not only respects diversity but also draws its resilience and strength from it.

Challenges Ahead

In the present scenario it is found that masses of the civil society are unorganized, they lack politicization, they are unable to withstand cooption and conditioning despite constant struggle and growing consciousness. The poor, the

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minorities, those outside the mainstream of civil society - the tribal's ethnic groups, caste groups, large segments of women - all suffer from this state of deep disorganization. The typical avenues of mass mobilization and redress for disabilities and deprivation - political parties and trade unions - have given way for corrupting forces. Unfortunately political parties have lost their capacity to serve the masses, particularly the destitute and the backward. As regards the trade unions, they have collapsed, no longer able to function as catalysts of a working class consciousness and a working class movement. Even the press and the judiciary are failing in their appointed tasks, they too are being corrupted by the theory of development and the miasma of a national security state backed by corrosive fundamentalism and communalism. The masses are on the rise but the institutional channels through which they ought to have found expression and which should have provided a springboard of radical action are absent, or have been simply coopted and corrupted. In this state of vacuum, within the traditional infrastructure of the liberal polity, the real new challenge of electoral politics and the multilevel politics of state and regional powers are emerging. Today the civil society has become a new arena of counter-action, countervailing tendencies, counter-cultural movements, rise of communal sentiments, clash of interests.

Communalism is perhaps one of the greatest enemies of the Indian Democracy in the present era. Communalism is not a new feature and has been a latent force of Indian political and social reality for a long time. At present it has acquired a very dangerous shape. Threats of communal discord and communal riots loom large over the Indian State and society and its secular credentials. Communal violence is killing large number of people and destroying extensive amount of resources. It is one of the social evils with which everybody is aware but nobody knows the way out of that problem. The problem of communalism, fundamentalism, and religious prejudice has got deeply rooted with the social fabrics of Indian society. To understand the dynamics of the concept we can see its manifestation in the form of competition, riots, processions, and violence. Although India has achieved its independence a long time back, but its journey has not been that smooth and easy. There have arisen a number of challenges that have shaken the very basis of our polity. The challenges keep emerging and communalism factor has taken its toll on the functioning of the Indian political system. The administration being fraught with corruption has created dissatisfaction among the people and the constant demand from civil society activism is questioning the efficacy of Indian political system.

India is a land of diversity . Its diversity is expressed in terms of multiple religions who reside here like Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and other religions. The Constitution of India in its Preamble declares India to be a Secular State and not a theocratic State, possessing no official religion of its own. Articles 25 to 28 of Indian Constitution relate to religious freedom of all its citizens² . Article 14 embodies equality before law and equal protection of law for all citizens³ . Article 15 ensures the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, sex, place of birth⁴. Article 16 states there shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office and no one shall be denied on grounds of religion, sex, caste , place of birth on this matter⁵. Despite such novel ideals and lofty provisions the reality is grim and depicting a bleak future. Although India is modernizing keeping at par with the western developed nations, the internal principle of tolerance of secularism is deeply hurt by the ever-increasing waves of religious violence. Indian solidarity reached a crisis point with the demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on 6 December 1992⁶ . In the pre-independence period, the Britishers had planted the seeds of communal harmony by enacting several legislations which created a division between the two communities- the Hindus and Muslims like the Government of India Act of 1909, 1919, and 1935 and ultimately the division of the country into two- India and Pakistan⁷. In the post-independence period the riots increased and became more frequent⁸. There grew a number of Muslim organisations which tried to protect Muslim interests. Simultaneously there were Hindu organizations that advocated for Hindu nationalism⁹. One landmark incident has been the State of Gujarat witnessing communal violence with the Godhra train fire incident in 2002¹⁰ . These tensions and clashes between different communities like between Hindus-Sikhs, between Hindu-Christians, between Hindus -Buddhists have crippled down the very stability of the political democracy in India. The noteworthy point is that religion is an integral part of Indian politics and almost all parties use religion to create their influence and consolidate their vote banks.

Conclusion

In the light of the above discussion we may remark that Communalism involves unfavourable predisposition of one community towards other. This implies that one community holds some prejudices which are pre-concieved attitudes and hence that community develops a kind of narrowness and rigidity. Here prejudices are unfavourable attitudes towards members of other community which once again brings to light a prejudiced person negatively disposed towards members of the 'other' community. It is this prejudice which is the life blood of all communal violence. Communalism robs off an individual behavior its very individuality. An individual behaviour becomes an integral part of communal behaviour and thereby it organizes a communal essence. Communalism creates a feeling of self-righteousness. Once

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this self-righteousness is prejudiced it degenerates into arrogance. This prompts us to intensify our bitterness towards other communities and this is perhaps the motivating force behind all communal upsurges. The forces of Communalism lead to exploitation of minority by the majority groups. This majority-minority relationship makes the democratic picture of India more unethical and irrational. Actually prejudices lead to maximization of the community's interest which again cause exploitation of one community by the other. The task of a responsible citizen is to find the rationale behind such behaviour. If we can reach the root of such atrocities and violence that affect our society then perhaps we can justify such acts as irrational ones. Communal violence constitutes one of the darkest chapters of human history. It has become more intensified with lot of bloodshed. Though the State property are the chief targets of the communities but individual losses cannot be overlooked.

The media today is very much sensitive to such communal issues and they can depict the picture of communal atrocities and make the people aware of its impact. The governmental apathy is becoming more pronounced over the years. It is the duty of the State to preserve communal harmony. If these trends continue then there will be a mockery on Indian Parliamentary democracy. The loopholes existing in the Executive and Legislative departments must be rectified. The policy-makers must concentrate on sound and effective decision-making. Any political system survives on its decision-making process and concrete feedback system. Decisions are the expressions of the demands and needs of the people. In order to do away with the discontent and frustrations of the people the communication system must be strengthened and relevant policies should be made. Emphasis to be given on educating people and making them aware about their rights and duties as citizens of a Democratic Secular Republic.

Notes:

1. There has been extensive discussion on this issue by M.V. Pylee in his book *Constitutional Government in India*, (S. Chand & Company Ltd., New Delhi, 2003), pp.47-48.
2. For a detailed discussion on these perceptions of Fundamental Rights see Dr Durga Das Basu, *Introduction to The Constitution Of India, 20th Edition*, (Lexis Nexis Butterworths Wadhwa Nagpur Publications, Haryana, 2011) Chapter 8.
3. *ibid.*
4. *ibid.*
5. *ibid.*
6. These views have been discussed in detail in Paul R. Brass, *The Politics of India Since Independence, Second Edition*, (Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 1990) Chapter 7.
7. *ibid.*
8. See S. L. Sikri, *Indian Government And Politics*, (Kalyani Publications, New Delhi, 2002) for a detailed discussion. Chapter 13, pp 277-293.
9. *ibid.*
10. For a detailed discussion on this incident can see Rajni Kothari, *Rethinking Democracy*, (Orient Blackswan, New Delhi, 2010) pp. 72.

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4. Khan, Rasheeduddin, 1994. *Bewildered India; Identity, Pluralism, Discord*, Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi,
5. Murray Li Tania, 2007. *Governability, Development and the Practice of Politics*, Duke University Press, Durham.
6. Kohli Atul, 2009. *Democracy and Development in India: From Socialism to Pro-business*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.