



Communal Violence

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The way things have unfolded in New Delhi reflect a paradoxical situation. On one hand, Shaheen Bagh has emerged as an **inspiring model of protest** (a peaceful protest led by women of all ages including the elderly, invoking nationalist symbols and adopts the Preamble to the Constitution as its manifesto).

On the other hand, New Delhi witnessed one of the worst **communal violence** in the history of the national capital. The premise of the New Delhi 2020 riots is based on growing animosity and destabilisation of communal harmony in the background of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

Earlier also, there have been a series of cases of hate speeches and violence in New Delhi. These events signify a turning point in contemporary Indian politics which seems to be trapped in the **vicious cycle of Majority Communalism and Minority Extremism**.

Factors Promoting This Vicious Cycle

- **Disruptive Effect of Social Media:**

- Social Media played a critical role in circulating fake news at break-neck speed, as the copious audio-visual documentation of violence, hate messages are delivered to the masses almost immediately.
- However, these graphic depictions of inhumanity have not elicited remorse or changed minds; rather, they have deepened biases and hardened stances.

- **Role of Media:**

Instead of adhering to media ethics and neutrality, most of the media houses show an inclination towards particular political ideology, which in turn widens the societal cleavage.

- **Post Truth Era:**

- Today, a large mass of people have been injected with hate and prejudices. They are programmed to regard arguments against their worldview as proof of a conspiracy against them.
- Communal interpretation of history, especially of the medieval period, forms the bedrock of communal ideology in India
- This is the fruit of long and painstaking ideological work at the grassroots, done by fundamentalist sections in the society.

Post-Truth

Post-Truth denotes circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief. It relates to the situation where people tend to accept an argument based on emotion and beliefs rather than facts.

- **Pseudo-Secularism:**

- The majority groups believe that any act done them even if it pertains to violence can be legitimised in name of fulfilling nationalistic aspirations.
- However, even a peaceful protest or any genuine demand put by a minority group is dubbed as anti-national.

- **Institutional Biases:**

- Communal violence any time, anywhere happens due to the **inefficiency or collusion or both of those in power.**
- A raging issue in the ongoing debate is whether New Delhi 2020 riots is a **pogrom**, not simply a riot.
 - Pogrom is a **special class of riots** when the police, instead of acting neutrally to crush riots, look on while mobs go on a rampage against minorities, or it explicitly aids such violent mobs.
- During recently held Delhi elections, the Election Commission chose to place an embargo on some of those who spoke to polarise the communities, **it chose not to register FIRs.** The words uttered in the course of such speeches are actionable.

Note: Section 153A of the Indian Penal Code makes it an offence if by words, spoken or otherwise, attempts are made to promote, on grounds of religion, disharmony, feelings of enmity, hatred or ill-will between different religions, or acts are committed which are prejudicial to maintenance of harmony between different religions — such activity can be met with imprisonment up to three years.

Impact of Communal Violence

- **Violation of Human Rights:** During the communal violence, the innocent ordinary people get caught into the circumstances beyond their control. This leads to abuse of human rights.
- **Economic Loss:** Communal violence leads to loss of life and public property. As it leads to exploitation by way of plundering and indulging in activities only for their personal gains.
- **Social Dissonance:** Communal Violence strengthens vote banks of political parties and further disrupts the cohesiveness in society.
 - It causes serious damage to communal harmony for a prolonged period.
 - It also tarnishes the country's image as a pluralistic society.
- **Erosion of Constitutional Values:** Communal violence dampens constitutional values like secularism and fraternity.

Steps To Be Taken

Measures to meet the challenge of communalism and communal violence can be of two types: long-term and short-term.

The long-term remedy lies:

- There is a need to initiate the process of de-communalising the people at all levels. Communal assumptions should be proven wrong, by explaining people the socio-economic and political roots of communalism.
- Need to Check communalisation of the state and of the political elite in power as it leads to inaction against communal violence, and covert or overt political and ideological support to communalism by the state apparatuses, including the media under state control.
- The communalisation of civil society also needs to be checked because it leads to more communal riots and other forms of communal violence.
 - People with communal ideas and ideologies pressurise the government to act in a manner which is always against the principle of secularism.
 - It is here that intellectuals and voluntary organisations can be most effective.
- The role of education, particularly emphasising value-oriented education both in schools and colleges/universities, is important in preventing communal feelings.
 - Education-based on new cultural ideologies can protect the young people against philosophies and ideologies of hate.
 - The teaching of history along scientific lines in educational institutions has to be a basic element in any ideological struggle against communalism.
- The media can also prove to be significantly useful in preventing communal feelings. The communal press can be banned and legal action can be taken against communal writers.

- Considering the disruption caused by social media there is a need to strengthen cybersecurity architecture.

Immediate measures that can be taken:

- Peace Committees can be set up in which individuals belonging to different religious communities can work together to spread goodwill and fellow-feeling and remove feelings of fear and hatred in the riot-affected areas.

This will be effective not only in diffusing communal tensions but also in preventing riots from breaking out.

- The fear and hatred can be checked if the press, radio and TV report events in a way conducive to soothing the frayed nerves of people instead of inflaming the temper further.

The media can contradict rumours in a sober manner.

- Strengthening of the local intelligence network and pro-active deployment of force to curb any violence.

Drishti Mains Question

Communalism is on the march and secularism is on the retreat. If the surging tide of communalism is not reversed, it will swamp India. Discuss