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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. Communalism was and continues to be one of the major challenges to democracy in our country. Critically examine. (250 Words)

23 Mar, 2020 GS Paper 1 Indian Society

Approach:

- Briefly define communalism.
- Highlight why communalization occurs in India.
- Highlight how communalization threatens Indian democracy.
- Prescribe some measure to overcome the challenges posed by communalism.

Introduction

Communalism is aggressive chauvinism in politics based on religious identity i.e. attitude that sees one's own group as only legitimate and others as inferior, illegitimate and opposed in interest. It has been a recurrent source of tension and violence in India, reasons being historical, economic, socio-economic-politico in nature.

Body

Reasons for persisting communalism in India

- Divide and Rule Policy of Britishers leading to the formation of political groupings based on religion like Jinnah led the Muslim League, ultimately leading to partition based on religious lines.
- Rise of Communal Political Parties among other religious groupings like Akali Dal, Hindu Mahasabha in the 1920s-30s basing their ideology and demands on religious interests.
- Socio-economic backwardness of minorities especially Muslims in India, forcing them to become vulnerable towards extremist ideology, especially among younger age groups.
- Communalization of Politics especially in the 1990s and a rising security threat from terror groups like Pro- Khalistan, SIMI etc. leading to polarization among the general populace.

Such socio-politico processes present many challenges to Indian democracy:

- The threat to Basic tenets of Indian Constitution like Fundamental Rights, Secularism, Fraternity, Unity and Integrity, as chauvinism of majority religious group in an area hinders the enjoyment of such by minorities.
- Frequent disruption in the process of development as riots, forced displacement, damaging public property raises the economic cost.
- Such skirmishes lay down seeds of dissonance among social groups based on religion for the future, thereby continuing the cycle of violence.
- It also makes the country vulnerable to external threats like terrorism, allowing influence by state and non-state actors in domestic politics, thereby challenging the sovereignty.

Thus there is a need to curtail such phenomena and move towards social harmonization among the different religious group:

- Establishment of Peace committees that mediate in times of volatile situations like in case of Ayodhya Verdict.
- Regulation of Media, especially social media so that rumours and fake news are not spread.
- Check on Communal Agenda and politicization by way of strict implementation of law like on speeches during electioneering.

Conclusion

Apart from communalism, there are other pressing concerns like corruption, poverty, widening inequality that India as democracy needs to address. India has cherished unity in diversity since ancient times. Tenets of Bhakti movement and Sufism reflect this. The struggle for independence itself is evidence of how various communities came together and believed in the collective sense of belongingness.