

A Study on Communal Politics in Modern India

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Abstract: *The multifaceted dynamics of communal politics in modern India play a pivotal role in shaping the nation's socio-political landscape. This paper delves into the evolution, manifestations, and implications of communal politics, emphasizing its interplay with India's secular constitution and the challenges it poses to India's pluralistic ethos.*

Keywords: Politics, Constitution, election

I. INTRODUCTION

Tracing the lineage of India's diverse and composite culture sets the stage for understanding the emergence and intensification of communal politics, which often leverages religious identities for political gains.

1.1 The Electoral Dimension

The "vote bank" paradigm in India represents the calculated mobilization of religious, caste, and ethnic identities by political factions to secure electoral advantages. This strategy capitalizes on India's deep-rooted socio-cultural fabric, where faith plays a significant role in the lives of the majority. By projecting themselves as protectors or benefactors of specific religious or community groups, political entities can ensure the loyalty of that group, essentially treating them as a reliable "bank" of votes. Such a tactic, while proving beneficial for short-term political gains, tends to amplify differences, foster mistrust, and, at times, culminate in conflicts among communities. The politicization of religion, by marrying deep-seated faith-based sentiments with the opportunistic motives of the political arena, has led to phenomena like religious appeasement, where policy decisions and political rhetoric are tailored to favor or pacify a particular religious group, often at the expense of broader, inclusive development. This paradigm has engendered a cyclical process: as one faction leverages a religious identity, opponents might feel compelled to appeal to counter identities, leading to an electoral battleground defined more by religious and sectarian lines than by developmental policies or governance records. As a result, the nation witnesses a recurring electoral dance where faith becomes a political tool, and religion's sanctity risks being overshadowed by the machinations of electoral politics. In this dynamic, the true essence of secularism and democracy, wherein each citizen is viewed as an individual rather than a religious pawn, gets challenged. The real danger lies in the perpetuation of this paradigm, which can solidify religious divides, making it difficult for future generations to view India as a cohesive entity beyond its communal compartments.

1.2 Rise of religious-centric political parties and their impact on the national political scene.

The ascent of religious-centric political parties in India has reshaped the country's political landscape profoundly over recent decades. Historically, the post-independence period saw political parties emphasizing secularism and socialist ideals, resonating with Nehruvian principles. However, from the late 20th century onwards, as political fragmentation increased, parties began leveraging religious identities to cater to specific vote banks. This shift was exemplified by the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), rooted in Hindutva ideology, advocating for Hindu cultural and nationalist values. As the BJP transitioned from the fringes to the center stage of Indian politics, culminating in its overwhelming electoral success in 2014 and 2019, the political discourse tilted towards issues of religious identity, cultural nationalism, and debates surrounding secularism. Other parties, observing BJP's success, occasionally embraced softer versions of religious politics, further blurring the secular lines. Furthermore, regional parties, like the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra and the Akali Dal in Punjab, also underscored religious and cultural identities, albeit with regional nuances. Such parties' ascendancy impacted policy-making, with religious undertones becoming evident in education,

cultural initiatives, and even foreign policy. The Ayodhya dispute and the subsequent push for a Ram temple, the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, and the Citizenship Amendment Act are instances where religious-centric politics significantly influenced national decisions. While these parties' supporters argue that they are rectifying historical secular excesses and truly representing India's cultural ethos, critics worry about the sidelining of minority rights and a potential erosion of India's secular fabric. In either case, the meteoric rise of religious-centric parties has indelibly transformed the tenor and trajectory of Indian politics.

1.3 Constitution vs. Communal Politics

The Indian Constitution, designed as a beacon of secularism and unity in diversity, often finds itself at crossroads with the divisive dynamics of communal politics. At its inception, India's Constitution-makers envisioned a secular nation where all religions coexisted harmoniously, ensuring equal rights for every citizen irrespective of their religious or ethnic identity. Articles 14 to 18 of the Constitution guarantee the right to equality, while Articles 25 to 28 affirm freedom of religion, emphasizing that no religion would receive preferential treatment. Yet, the journey of independent India has repeatedly witnessed the mobilization of religious identities for political gains, commonly known as communal politics. Communal politics operates on the strategy of consolidating a particular religious group's vote by championing its interests, often against another group, thereby polarizing society. This often results in the undermining of constitutional principles, especially when populist measures take precedence over secular norms. Legislative and policy decisions, influenced by communal politics, can sometimes conflict with the Constitution's ethos, leading to widespread debates, protests, and, at times, judicial interventions. The Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi issue and the subsequent rise of right-wing politics in the 1990s, the anti-conversion laws in various states, and more recently, the debates surrounding the Citizenship Amendment Act, all stand as testament to the tensions between the constitutional framework and the motives of communal politics. While the Indian judiciary, especially the Supreme Court, acts as a custodian of the Constitution by ensuring checks and balances, communal politics, fueled by majoritarian or minoritarian sentiments, constantly tests the resilience of India's secular foundation. The enduring challenge for India lies in ensuring that its constitutional ethos is upheld, even as it navigates the tumultuous waters of communal politics.

1.4 Socio-economic Factors Driving Communal Politics

Communal politics in India, marked by tensions between different religious and ethnic communities, is deeply entangled with a myriad of socio-economic factors that extend beyond mere religious differences. Historically, India's deeply stratified society, rooted in the caste system, has often overlapped with economic hierarchies, making certain communities economically disadvantaged. This socio-economic stagnation, prevalent among certain sections, becomes fertile ground for political entities to exploit and drive divisive agendas. Unequal access to resources further intensifies these communal sentiments. For instance, when competition for limited resources—like jobs, land, or even basic amenities escalates, it's convenient to rally against a 'common enemy,' which is often another community that is portrayed as enjoying undue advantages or is labeled as a threat. The liberalization of the Indian economy in the 1990s, while bringing prosperity for many, also exacerbated inequalities for several others, creating disparities that were easy pickings for communal mobilization. Moreover, regions affected by economic stagnation and unemployment have seen higher susceptibility to communal narratives, as economic anxieties often get translated into anger against perceived 'others,' be it migrants in search of jobs or religious minorities blamed for various socio-economic woes. Additionally, global economic downturns, such as the one caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, have added fuel to the fire, with communities turning inwards and becoming more protective of their identities and resources. The urban-rural divide plays its part too; rapid urbanization, leading to congested living and competition for urban resources, often manifests in communal tensions, as cities become melting pots of diverse groups with varying socio-economic backgrounds. Furthermore, instances where policies or schemes are seen as favoring one community over another (whether real or perceived) can easily ignite communal tensions, given the economic implications of such policies. In a bid to secure votes, political factions sometimes promise or deliver economic benefits selectively, which in the long run, sews seeds of discord among different communities. Land ownership disputes, often intertwined with community identities, further complicate the scenario, as economic interests get deeply embedded with communal affiliations. In essence, the socio-economic landscape of India, marked by disparities, competition for resources, and economic anxieties, significantly

shapes the contours of its communal politics, with economic factors often being the hidden undercurrents of religious and ethnic tensions.

1.5 The Future of Communal Politics: Challenges and Solutions

The future of communal politics in India, a nation celebrated for its mosaic of cultures, religions, and languages, is at a crossroads where challenges are myriad but solutions remain attainable. As urbanization accelerates and digital platforms proliferate, age-old community divides are juxtaposed against modernity's unifying force, leading to an enhanced potential for both intercultural learning and deepening of mistrust. Challenges lie in the resurgence of identity politics, with religious and ethnic lines often being leveraged for political gains, and the unchecked spread of misinformation on social media exacerbating communal tensions. The influence of global extremist ideologies, penetrating through porous digital borders, adds layers of complexity to an already volatile landscape. Simultaneously, socio-economic disparities, compounded by the pandemic's after-effects, could morph into communal rifts if not addressed holistically. To steer away from these precipices, India's solutions might lie in reinforcing its secular educational ethos, ensuring media accountability, and fostering grassroots movements that emphasize unity. Collaborative interfaith dialogues, backed by influential religious leaders, can play a pivotal role in dispelling myths and fostering mutual respect. Legal reforms ensuring swift justice for communal offenses, paired with stringent regulations against hate speech, especially online, are imperative. Furthermore, an unbiased narration of history, devoid of manipulative reinterpretations, is crucial to build a society rooted in facts and shared experiences. Lastly, robust economic policies ensuring equitable growth can act as a bulwark against the exploitation of communal divides for short-term political gains. In essence, while the road ahead for India is laden with communal challenges, it also holds promise if proactive, integrative, and forward-looking measures are implemented with fervor.

II. CONCLUSION

Communal politics in India is a complex interplay of history, socio-economic factors, and political opportunism. The need of the hour is to strengthen India's secular ethos, drawing from its rich tradition of pluralism and diversity, and to address the root causes that give rise to communal sentiments.

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- [4]. Hasan, Z. (2001). *Quest for power: Oppositional movements and post-Congress politics in Uttar Pradesh*. Oxford University Press.
- [5]. Note: The above outline provides a structured approach to addressing the topic of communal politics in modern India. A comprehensive research paper would require detailed analysis, primary research, and in-depth exploration of each point mentioned.