A Socio-Cultural Study on the Stroke of Communalism in the Preferred Indian English Literature

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Communalism as a phenomenon needs to be interpreted again and again in the light of fast changing global affairs. Communalism has been a topic of detailed study for the past several years and many research works are done in this field. The most important threat that the globe is facing is the rising communalism. The western countries having religious singularity were free of this menace in the past. But the incidents happened in the previous one decade show that they are also facing the threat of rising communal problem. India having a population of above 100 Crores with a variety of religions is a breeding ground for communalism. The religious pluralism and the contradictions between the faiths tend to create communal identities, which in turn develop to a stage of communalism, when passing through the democratic process. Religion, when deliberately used as a tool for attaining political gains often nourished the growth of communalism. The rising trend of communalism and the violence followed is the major threat posed towards the integrity of nation. So, efficient measures are to be adopted against communalism and its spread in order to check

cracks on the social harmony and bondage. Taking into account the history of communal problem in the past, more non-violent methods are inevitable in combating the communal tension which takes place in the new millennium. In this section, an effort is made to trace the origin of the so called communal problems in India and its ramifications.

Classically understood, communalism is rivalry kept and practiced by one community or religion towards another or each other. Bothering only about the well -being of one's own religion and viewing the welfare of another community as a threat is a common characteristic of communalism. The primary feature of communalism is that one community is being viewed doubtfully in every social development. "Communalism can be considered an ideology which states that society is divided into religious communities whose interests differ and are at times even opposed to each other. The antagonism practiced by members of one community against the people of other community and religion can be termed communalism. This antagonism goes to the extent of falsely accusing, harming and deliberately insulting a particular community and extends to looting, burning down the homes and shops of the helpless and the weak, dishonouring women and even killing persons." Richard Lambert defines communalism as "something colours political behaviour and produces a community oriented outlook." Louis Dumont states that "communalism is an affirmation and assertion of the religious community as a political group." In the words of Satish Sabarwal, "communalism in our sense means the channeling of personal sentiments and actions

primarily with reference to the ascriptive group whose boundaries are determined by the accident of one's birth."

According to Bipan Chandra "communalism is the belief that because a group of people follow a particular religion, they have as a result, common social, political and economic interests."

"Some authors have defined communalism as a form of indifference. Condescension, hatred or aggressive attitude to all the members of a religious community other than one's own, based on a real or imaginary threat from an individual or a group of that community or an actual damage done to one's personal interest or way of life or to those of one's religious community."

Many scholars hold the view that communalism is not essentially a product derived out of religious feelings. Prabha Dixit in her book, 'Communalism, a Struggle for Political Power' states that: "Communalism in India is neither the reaction to anti -communalism nor an outgrowth of religious and cultural differences but it is a triangular power struggle of the elite."

According to D.E Smith, "communalism is the term used in India to describe the political functioning of individuals or groups for the selfish interest of particular religious communities or castes."

Communal identities are given primacy over any other identity of an individual in a communal minded society. Linguistic, political, regional and other sorts of identities are comparatively irrelevant or of lesser importance in a communally polarized situation. The existence of some sort of antagonism among religions or communities can be termed as situation of communal disharmony. "The term communalism connotes the state of communal disharmony and the reverse situation is not an absence of communal violence but communal

harmony. In the strict sense, communal harmony may be taken to mean as a state or condition of peace, normal or good relation and presence of fraternal relations between communities. Regarding Indian situations communal harmony means the persistence of fraternal relationship between Hindus and Muslims."
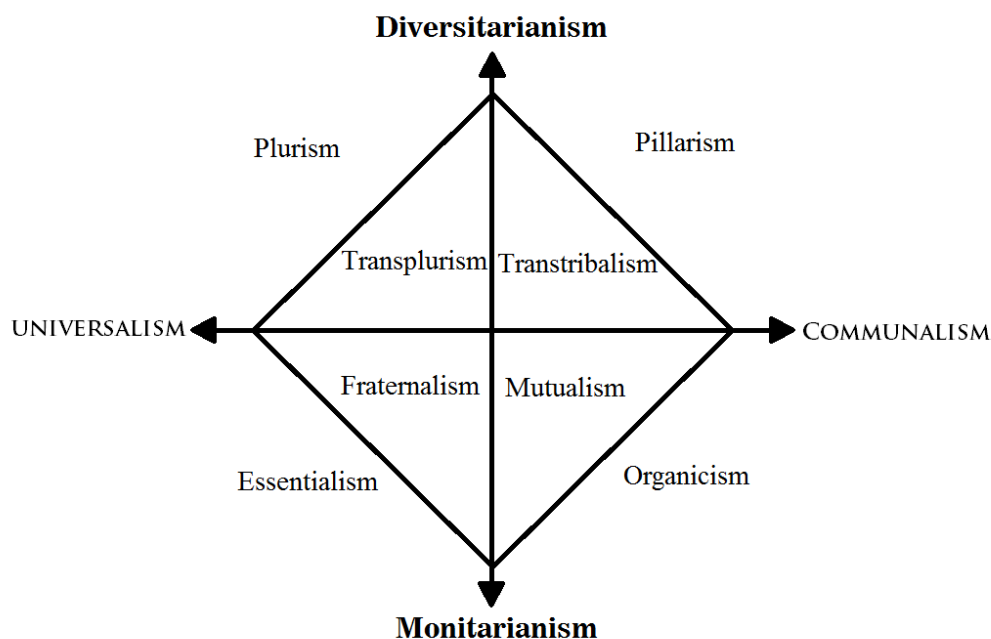
To define simply "the opposition to each others of religious communities is commonly designated as communalism."

Communal persons are those who practice politics using religion. To win some personal or political ends, the communal minded persons deliberately connect religion to that particular issue. For example, if the member of a community, who is in competition with his business rival belonging to another community and the rival business man is supposed to start a new venture in a specific area, problems may arise from the part of the former. The former will intentionally try to block the way of the latter through arousing communal feelings among the public.

This can be done in two ways:

(1) By spreading the rumour that the proposed spot which the rival business man intending to open a business or factory is a holy place belonging to a particular religion. Plea will be made that a temple or a mosque or a church should be built there on the basis of some assumed historical importance.

(2) By creating a sense of fear in the minds of the members of the community that the advent of this business or industry will weaken the economic condition of the community and result to the economic domination of other community leading to the deterioration of 'ours'. Those who deliberately use the religious sentiments to safe guard the vested interests and those who make religious issues a barrier for the misconduct in public and private life are the real master minds behind the propagation of communalism. "Among leaders, those religious leaders are communal, who run their religious communities like business enterprises and institutions, which raise the cries of 'Hinduism, Islam or Christianity in 'danger', the moment they find that donation into their holy corporations begin to dwindle or their leadership has been challenged or their ideology has been questioned. Thus 'communal' is not one man who is 'a man of religion' but 'one who practices politics by linking it with religion."

"K.P. Karunakaran states that communalism in India mean that philosophy which stood for the promotion of the interest of a particular religious community or the members of a particular state."

The communalists assume that the most meaningful distinction among the Indian people on social cultural, economic and political issues is to be made on the basis of such units of religious communities. This distinction overrides all other distinctions. On the other hand all other identities are either denied or when accepted in theory either negated in practice or subordinated to religious identities."

The communalist tries to divide the society on the basis of religion and they are not doing so for the sole good of the religion, but to attain materialistic benefits in the name of religion. Social activities of the communalists appear on the basis of religion. They limit their transaction as far as possible only with the same community, try to educate the children in the schools run by the community or by members of the community and even try to settle down in areas where the so called community's people reside in large. The communal minded persons shall not be necessarily religious in nature. The control of the communal organizations, the interested persons who propagate such a divisive ideology in society are usually the elite class in the respective community.

"Communalism is a modern phenomenon and its fundamental causes are secular like competition for share in political power or government jobs. Religion is not its fundamental cause but an instrumental cause because it has great mobilizing power."

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the father of Pakistan and the advocate of the theory of a separate nation for Muslims (the two nation theory), was essentially a communalist but not essentially a man of religion. M.A. Jinnah did not represent the masses of Muslim population. "Jinnah a product of Lincoln's Inn in London represented the Muslim elite, not Muslim masses. The 'orthodox' Ulama, on the other hand were closer to the masses and represented their aspirations. No wonder the Jinnah and the Deoband 'Ulemas never saw eye to eye on political matters. They were closer to Indian National Congress than to Muslim League, which was the party of the Muslim elite. They supported the composite nationalism than Muslim separation."

Similarly many religious persons who are having deep rooted knowledge in religion do not engage in propagating divisive communal thoughts. Those who possessed real knowledge in religion attached themselves to the morals and ethics of religion and kept aloof from acts of communal separatism.

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*"Outstanding theologian Maulana Asad was irreconcilably opposed to separatist politics. He was a great champion of Hindu-Muslim unity and found legitimacy for this unity in Holy Quran. He came up with the concept of Wahdat-e-din, i.e. unity of religions. According to this, laws and rituals might differ but the essence of religion is one…."*16 *The apostles of communalism hold religion as the most important distinction or distinguishing mark in the society rather than any other distinguishing matter like language, gender, politics, etc….. "Religious rigidities were over stressed by the respective elite of both the communities even cutting across the pressures of science and technology in the country. The elites on both sides have made use of religion for securing political and economic ends."*

Religion is deliberately used as a tool for mobilizing communal passions and the spiritual element in religion is not given importance.

"Religion in the hands of the communalists is divested of all that makes it vital and eternal; it is reduced to a slogan, a symbol, an instrument to excite passions or to obscure reason- an opiate or a heady wine."

Jawaharlal Nehru while delivering a speech in Punjab provincial congress in 1928 clearly stated that the Hindu- Muslim antagonism was rooted in the economic exploitation stimulated by imperialism. The role of religion is too less in a communal issue and the economic and political aspirations of both the communities play the major role.

"It is an outcome largely of anger and passion and when we regain our tempers, it will fade into nothingness. It is a myth with no connection with reality and it cannot endure. It is really the creation of our educated class in search of office and employment….. What does it matter to the Muslim peasant whether a Hindu or Muslim is a judge at Lahore? Economic issues run along different lines. There is a great deal in common between the Muslim, Sikh and Hindu (Landlords) and a great

deal in common between the Muslim Sikh and Hindu peasantry; but very little in common between a Muslim peasant and a Muslim landlord."

Partition of India is one of the most influential events for Indian. This traumatic event affected Indian Literature directly or indirectly. The Partition and the freedom of India bring misery to millions of people on both the sides of the border for no fault of their own. Most of Indian Fiction writers including Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand were also deeply anguished with this. The second generation writers like Khushwant Singh, Amitav Ghosh and Manohar Malgonkar presented this holocaustic event very painfully and truthfully that followed in the wake of the partition of the country. It was indeed one of the bloodiest upheavals of history that claimed innumerable innocent lives and loss of property. The civil war during the Partition took the shape of a religious war between Hindus and Muslims and the whole country in an unparalleled mass destruction.

Manohar Malgonkar, along with the likes of R.K. Narayan, was one of the front-runners of Indian Writing in English. But it is a matter of regret that his contribution to the genre we refer to today as Indian Writing in English remains largely unacknowledged. However we must remember that Manohar was a prolific writer whose prose and grip of the English language was as good as any of his contemporaries. His major novels and short stories taken together reveal him as a writer keenly interested in Indian social life. In *'Bend in the Ganges'* Manohar is in full flow and one cannot but appreciate that not only was he a master story teller, but also had an exceptional command over the English language. No less than a writer of the caliber of RK Narayan referred to Malgonkar as his favorite Indian English novelist.

A Bend in the Ganges, like Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, takes up the theme of partition and riots after it. Malgonkar presents here a powerful story against the background of the troublesome event which starts with partition. The novel starts with Civil Disobedience Movement of Mahatma Gandhi and ends with the Partition riots, violence and brutality.

The novel starts with the slogan of "*Boycott British goods*", in the whole country on the call of Mahatma Gandhi. Another powerful slogan, "*Bharat Mata Ki Jai*", gives expression to the fire of freedom that was burning in the heart of the Indian masses "just one of hundreds of thousands of similar fires all over the country". The novel portrays the communal violence, brutality and riots which shook the very foundations of the nation on the eve of Independence and also focuses on its impact on the thought and behaviour of people. The communal riots give rise to mutual distrust and hatred between Hindus and Muslims. The mood of the novel is introduced with a quotation from Gandhiji about his experiment with non-violence.

"This non-violence, there seems to be due mainly to our helplessness. It almost appears as if we are nursing in our bosoms the desire to take revenge the first time we get the opportunity. Can true, voluntary non-violence come out of this seeming forced non-violence of the weak? It is not a futile experiment I am conducting? What if, when the fury bursts, not a man, woman, or child is safe and every man's hand is raised against his neighbour? "(A Bend in the Ganges, Author's note)

A Bend in the Ganges also presents the ideological conflict between violence and non-violence. Malgonkar has chosen a wide canvas for his novel. The novel mainly focuses on the transformation of three young men—Gian Talwar, Debi Dayal and Shafi Usman—as a result of their involvement in the events of the years preceding and following the Partition of India. Gian, believes in non-violence whereas Shafi and Debi believe in violence. These freedom fighters form the Hanuman Club, ostensibly for physical culture but it is really intended for todians contribute to their slavery.

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