



**CHAPTER 13**

**DEMOCRACY IN INDIA :  
PERSPECTIVE OF  
CHALLENGES FACED :**

**(CASTE, COMMUNALISM, REGIONALISM, & POLITICAL VIOLENCE, AND  
STRENGTHENING INDIAN DEMOCRACY)**

The people of India and their elected representatives realise fully the need to meet the challenges being faced by their democratic polity. There is present a strong commitment and resolve to meet these by strengthening the social and economic foundations of Indian democracy.

### **KEY CHALLENGES FACED BY INDIAN DEMOCRACY**

Let us study some of the key challenges being faced by Democracy in India. Such a study is essential because only by understanding their nature that we can be in a position to initiate necessary steps for meeting them.

The following can be listed as the major challenges being faced by Indian Democracy

- (I) Caste
- (II) Communalism
- (III) Regionalism
- (IV) Political Violence

### **THE CHALLENGE OF CASTE AND CASTE SYSTEM**

Caste is a social phenomena found in several human societies. However, it is functioning in its most elaborately defined and rigid form in our country. Indian society has been basically a caste based social system and castes and caste system still continue to be a major input of Indian society and polity. Caste system has several disadvantages which come in the way of social progress and political development. Casteism acts as a hindrance in the way of national integration and nation-building. It has been responsible for existence of caste communalism and caste violence in our society and polity.

Caste system has been one of the obstacles in the way of our national unity. It demands foremost allegiance to itself. It comes in the way of national integration and nation-building. It has been a hindering factor of process of socio-economic development of all sections of our society, The rigid rules of caste system often compel some persons to follow their hereditary occupations and this acts a big limitation on the economic empowerment of the individual and society. Casteism has been acting a major source of continued presence of social inequality and injustice. It has been also behind the continued presence of social exploitation and injustice against the people belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

### **THE CHALLENGE OF CAST AND CASTEISM TO INDIAN DEMOCRACY**

Caste continues to be a major determinant of social and political life of India. Its presence as one of the most ancient features of Indian society has been naturally acting as a factor of social and political relations. Jai Parkash Narayan once observed that caste has acted as "the most major political party in India". It has been a determinant of political participation, voting behaviour and almost all other aspects of Indian politics.

Political parties and leaders use caste to secure their objectives in politics. Caste determines the nature, organisation and working of political parties and interest groups, legislatures, bureaucracies,

and in fact almost all political structures and functions. Caste voting, caste based candidatures, caste based riots, caste violence, caste conflicts and the issue of reservations versus non-reservations, have been factors of Indian politics. All these have been constituting a big challenge to Indian Democracy.

Caste based behaviour and caste based decisions and policies constitute casteism in India.

## CASTEISM IN INDIAN POLITICS

The nature and role of caste and casteism can be discussed as follows:

(1) **Caste and Political Socialisation.** Different caste groups have their loyalties behind different political parties and their ideologies. Right from his birth, an Indian citizen inherits a caste and grows up as a member of a particular caste group. He belongs either to one of the 'High Castes' or to the 'Scheduled Castes.' In the process of picking up his political orientations, attitudes and beliefs, he naturally comes under the influence of caste groups and casteism. 'Caste values' and 'caste interests' influence his socialisation and consequently, his political thinking, perceptions and participation. He begins banking upon caste solidarity for occupying and performing a leadership role in society.

(2) **Caste and Leadership Recruitment.** Caste influences the process of leadership recruitment. This is particularly true of 'Caste conscious' people of states like Haryana, Bihar, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. In Haryana the leadership comes either from Jats or Bishnois or Brahmins. In Andhra Pradesh the Reddys, or Kammas and Valamas provide state leaders. Similar has been the case of almost all other states.

(3) **Caste and Party Politics.** Caste factor is a constituent of Indian party system. Some of the political parties have direct caste bases while others indirectly bank upon particular caste groups. BJP has been largely perceived as a party of caste Hindus. In particular, some regional political parties stand predominantly influenced by the caste factor. The DMK and AIADMK are non-Brahmin rather anti-Brahmin political parties of Tamil Nadu. In Punjab, Akali Dal has a Jat based identity. It stands influenced by the issue of Jatts vs non-Jatts. BSP banks upon the support of Scheduled Castes. All political parties in India use caste as a means for securing votes in elections.

(4) **Role of Caste in Electoral Politics.** The caste factor continues to be a major factor of electoral politics in India. All political parties give special weightage to the caste factor in selecting their candidates, in allocating constituencies to their candidates and in canvassing support for their nominees in the elections. In constituencies predominated by Muslims, Muslim candidates are fielded and in areas predominated by Jats, Jat candidates are fielded. Even 'secularist parties' take into consideration caste factor in selecting their candidates.

In the election campaigns, votes are demanded in the name of caste. Caste groups are tapped for committed support. No one can disagree with N.D. Palmer when he observes, "Caste considerations are given great weight in the selection of candidates and in the appeals to voters during election campaigns." In elections, caste acts as the most major party.

(5) **Role of Caste in Government-Making.** Since caste is a major feature of Indian society and acts as a key factor in various processes of politics, it also plays a basic role in the decision-making process. Even the issue of re-organisation of states is handled with an eye on the prevention of undue predominance of a particular caste group or community in a particular territory. Caste factor

influences the policies and decisions of the state government. The party in power tries to use its decision-making power to win the favour of major caste groups. Most of the political parties always try to nurture people belonging to Scheduled Castes as their vote banks. Dalit–Brahmin approach has been recently adopted by the BSP. Political Parties, whenever these get a chance to rule their respective states, always use political power for furthering the interests of the caste groups which support or can support their regimes. Recruitment to political offices is mostly done with due considerations for the castes of the persons. The caste factor always acts as a determinant of people's voting behaviour, their political participation, the party structure and even the government-making process.

**(6) Caste and Local Politics.** In the Indian rural context, caste has been a plank of mobilization, a channel of communication, representation and leadership, and a linkage between the electorate and the political process. The role of caste in the working of Panchayati Raj and other institutions of local self-government has been a known reality. We can go to the extent of recording that caste based factionalism in India has been the most major hindering factor in the organisation and effective working of Panchayati Raj and Urban local institutions.

**(7) Caste Violence.** Caste based violence very often finds its way into Indian politics. The traditional differences between higher and lower castes have acquired a new strength. These are often converted into a violent and fierce struggle for power in society. The growing intimidation of the lower castes by the higher or even intermediary castes, has been becoming a part of rural India's political reality. In states like Maharashtra, Bihar, Haryana, Rajasthan and UP, caste violence has raised its head even in some urban areas.

Thus, caste continues to play a major role in all dimensions of Indian politics. Gujjar politics, Dalit politics, Jat politics and similar other terms reflect the presence of a caste approach to politics.

steadfastly to remove casteism from our society. This can be done by conscious efforts to secure the objective of Fraternity. " We must remember what Dr. Ambedkar said in our Constituent Assembly "Fraternity means a sense of common brother-hood of all Indians—of Indians being one people. Castes are anti-national. In the first place they bring about separation in social life. They are anti-national also because they generate jealousy and antipathy between caste and caste. We must overcome all these difficulties if we wish to become a nation in reality. For fraternity can be a fact only when there is a nation. Without fraternity, equality and liberty will be no deeper than coats of paint."

Casteism has to be totally eliminated by adopting and promoting fraternity as the objective and secularism as the way of life. Fraternity is needed most for securing the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation. It is the cement needed for securing national integration and nation-building.

## II. THE CHALLENGE OF COMMUNALISM

Communalism continues to be a sad and hard reality of Indian politics. Even after the adoption of the objectives of justice, secularism and equality of all the people, communalism continues to afflict Indian Democracy. The fact remains that it has been even increasing in intensity and spreading its fangs. It constitutes the biggest strain on the unity and integrity of India as a nation. Communalism in India has been basically present as Hindu-Muslim Communalism. However at the same it must be stated unchaste communalism, regional communalism and castes communalism have been also present in India.

The communal riots which accompanied the dawn of independence and the unfortunate partition of India greatly shook the people of India. The leaders of free India decided to end this menace through the adoption of secularism as a fundamental feature of Indian Constitution. Justice, liberty equality and fraternity were accepted as the four cardinal objectives to be secured for all the citizens of India. The decision to secure an emotional integration of people was made. The Constitution guaranteed right to religious freedom to all and refrained from adopting any religion as a state religion.

For nearly 20 years after the independence, the people of India lived in peace characterised by almost total absence of communal riots. And then, unfortunately in 1960s, communalism resurfaced in the form of Hindu-Muslim riots in U.P., Bihar, West Bengal and Odisha. Since then the communal virus has been spreading to various parts of the country. In February–April 2002 communalism, in its ugliest form became visible in Gujarat. In 2014 Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur (UP) experienced communal violence. Currently UP, Odisha, Karnataka, Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand, and Maharashtra have been facing the problem of controlling the activities of some communalist groups and organizations. Prevention of communal polarization continues to be a major concern of some of the states of India.

Communalism has been a recurrent phenomenon in Indian politics. Between 1967—2018 around 45 major incidents of communal riots took place in various parts of the country. Communalism in India has been present in several forms but chiefly as Hindu-Muslim communalism. Its other forms of manifestation have been : sectarian violence, religious riots, regional riots, tribal riots, linguistic

communalism, Shia-Sunni conflict (mostly in U.P.), Sikh-Nirakaris conflict (mostly in Punjab), Sikh-Dera Sacha Sauda conflict in Punjab, Lepchas-Bhutias conflict (in Sikkim), Tribal vs. Non-Tribal conflict as well as conflicts among the tribal groups (Naga-Kuki) in Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, and Mizoram. Assam has been now facing the problem of communal violence.

## CAUSES OF COMMUNALISM IN INDIA

Communalism involves the exploitation of social pluralism of Indian society by fundamentalist groups, organisations and sects for securing their respective narrowly conceived political, religious and sectarian goals. Communalism has been a national menace, a mental disease and a big evil. The need is to eliminate this menace. For finding remedies, it is essential for us to identify the causes behind the presence of communalism.

**1. Communalism as a bad Legacy of History.** The immediate past of Independent India was an era of communal politics initiated and encouraged by the British rulers and nurtured and practiced by some Indian Political parties like, Muslim League and other sectarian organisations. The introduction of communal electorate as a device for implementing the British policy of Divide and Rule gave fuel to the communalisation of Indian politics. This led to the birth of a communal divide and gradually to the outbreak of widespread communal riots. The partition of the country was a direct outcome of this process. The creation of Pakistan as a Muslim state gave strength to the idea of India as a Hindu state, despite the fact that a large number of Muslims continued to live in India even after 1947. The leaders of India realised the dangers of further disintegration of Indian pluralist society under the weight of communalism and hence decided to initiate a process of nation-building and national integration through the grant of right to equality and acceptance of secularism as the way of life. Unfortunately, some people in India, belonging to all communities, fail to forget the past. The legacy of past continues to live and mar the present.

**2. Communalisation of History.** This approach has been keeping communalism alive. Several historians have been guilty of playing a negative and dirty role. They have preferred to describe the History of India as History of Hindu rulers, Muslim rulers, Sikh rulers, Maratha rulers and the like. Sectarianisation of history has fanned communalism. The Hindus regard Aurangzeb as the Muslim ruler who pursued the policy of destroying Hinduism, and Muslims regard him as the ruler who acted boldly to defend Islam against the Hindu revivalists and fundamentalists. Even while writing the history of national movement, some historians consciously or inadvertently try to project the role played by various communities. Even freedom fighters are described as Hindu, Sikh and Muslim freedom fighters.

**3. Communalised Leadership.** In the process of political socialisation and leadership recruitment in India, religion and religious institutions have been playing a key role. In particular, the minority groups have always projected and supported only those leaders who stand fully committed to their respective religious and sectarian interests. Such leaders become and remain leaders by pursuing sectarian interests. The practice of choosing candidates on communal lines and communalised voting have been keeping this menace alive. Even the educated elites and the so called secularist parties adopt communal postures for getting acceptance and support in politics. The failure of the political leadership to remain away from communalism has been responsible for keeping alive this demon.

**4. Presence of some Communalist Political Parties and Groups.** A major reason responsible for the continuance of communalism has been the presence of a large number of communal and sectarian political parties and organisations in the Indian political system. Several sectarian and fundamentally religious organizations, Majlises, Senas, Samities, Jehadies, Federationists, have been all responsible for keeping alive the communal card. The activities of certain religious sects, at times, aggravate the fire of communalism in India. Even some self-proclaimed secularist parties have failed to avoid alliances with communalist parties and organisations.

**5. Religious Orthodoxy.** Another factor that has bred communalism, has been religious orthodoxy and obscurantism among some religious groups. Some Muslim religious organisations remain committed to obscure and medieval glories of Islam, the supremacy of Islam and the Shariat, and the Muslim personal law. These organisations usually toe the orthodox lines and refuse to accept the new realities of a modern society. Every attempt on the part of the government towards a restructuring of old practices is viewed with distrust and as an invasion against religion. These oppose even such amendments in some practices as stand now accepted in some Islamic states of the world. Formation of 'Muslim Senas' for protecting Muslim mosques, graveyards and other areas is being resorted to by these Muslim organisations. Attempts at modernisation and development are regarded by them as unwanted impositions upon Muslims in the name of Indianisation. Such a thinking, naturally, invites strong opposition and reaction from Hindu hard core organizations. The net result has been the presence of communalism in India. Some Hindu, Sikh and Christian orthodox and fundamentalist organisations have been also responsible for keeping alive communalism in India.

**6. Communalisation of Political Struggle.** Some political parties of India do not hesitate to use the communal factor for securing advantageous positions in the struggle for power. These fully exploit the social appeal of communalism. Even the communist parties and self-proclaimed secularist parties do not refrain from using the communal card. The CPM does not hesitate to joint hands with the Muslim League or the All India Muslim League for wielding power. In fact, no party hesitates in getting support from a sectarian and religious party for getting political power. Opportunistic alliances like BJP-BSP & SP-CPM, CPM-BSP, Congress-Muslim League, Congress-SP and the list is long, reflects this practice. In July 2008, on the eve of trust vote in the Lok Sabha, we all witnessed unprincipled and corrupt exercises on the part of almost all political parties of India. Such activities of both the 'secularist' and 'communalist' parties do a great harm to the cause of secularism, nationalism and modernism, and conversely, these strengthen communalism in India.

**7. Religious Fanaticism.** Religious fanaticism has been such a big cause of communalism that many students of Indian politics tend to equate it with communalism. Movements for religious revivalism and fundamentalism have, of late, been gaining strength in India. Each religious community is getting engaged in celebrating its religious functions in bigger and bigger form with a view to demonstrate its strength to other communities. The use of *Mandirs*, *Masjids*, *Gurudwaras*, *Deras* and other religions places and celebration of religious festivals for spreading a particular brand of 'religion' has been a sad reality. Disputes over construction of religious places for worship have become common. Conversions from one religion to another are encouraged by resorting to unethical means. All these facts highlight the growing tendency towards religious fanaticism in India and a corresponding increase in communal politics. Political leaders and organisations do not hesitate to use religion for getting a share in political power.

8. **Poverty and Under-development.** Mass poverty, unemployment, scarcity of essential commodities, ever-increasing population, regional imbalances, economic backwardness, economic inequalities, illiteracy, ignorance and corruption have also contributed to the growth of communalism. The unemployed youth is easily drawn by the politico-religious leaders towards religious fundamentalism and fanaticism. The emergence of strong organisations which are pro or opposed to the reservation of jobs for the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes, has also been a source of communalism. Some scholars who have studied the causes of communal riots in Moradabad and Baroda have found out that difference in the economic status of persons belonging to Muslim and Hindu communities of these areas was responsible for communal riots. The continued socio-economic under-development has been breeding communalism.

9. **The Social causes : (Issue of Conversions).** Despite the fact of having lived together the Hindus and Muslims, the two major communities continue to be suspicious of each other. The Muslims continuously fear the threat of Hindu cultural invasion upon their religion and culture and hence resort to fundamentalism. In order to keep their numbers large, they do not fully accept the need for family welfare programmes and do not refrain from conversion of others to their religions. The Christians try to use conversion as a means to serve the humanity while the Hindus regard it as an exercise for exploiting the poverty of the poor for securing conversions. In this process communalism assumes a big role. The religious minorities justify conversions as a part of the right to the propagation of their religions, which stands accepted as the right to freedom of religion. Every Indian has the freedom to follow or not to follow any religion. He can change his religion at will. However, when 'conversion from one religion to another is secured through unethical means, it becomes an evil. Such conversions, particularly when these are publicised and secured in a big way, invite strong reactions from the community whose members get converted.

10. **Compulsions of Electoral Politics.** The electoral politics in India has been becoming more and more expensive and competitive. The stakes have become very high for the candidates/parties contesting elections. Consequently, they never hesitate to use fair and foul means—creating communal tensions to secure more votes—for securing advantages in the elections. The party in power offers doles to the different sections of population and their groups. It accepts communalist groups and grants them concessions for appeasing them. The opposition parties try to negate this by winning these groups through verbal supports, promises and recognition of their interests. Compulsions of coalition politics have been giving a communal colour to Indian electoral politics. All this strengthens communalism during elections and in post-election days, communalism starts posing hindrances in the way of every new government.

While discussing the causes of communalism in India, Rajni Kothari blames the gradual decline of democratic institutions, the strains on Indian federal system, the evils of party politics, the failure of the grassroot level political institutions to work properly, and the fall in the credibility of the machinery of government due to increased cases of political corruption and corruption at high level. These have all combined to produce a decline in India's democratic institutions. This feature has adversely affected the ability of the political system to fight communalism. Communalism continues to pose a big challenge to Indian Democracy. The need of the hour is to STOP Communalism.



## Remedies against Communalism

For meeting the evil of Communalism, following remedial steps can be suggested :

- (1) **Reforms in the Education System.** Communalism is a mental malady and hence needs a mental remedy. It must be treated through a well-designed system of education. Special text books, general books, articles, publications, and other means of education should be used for checking communalism. Educational tours and exchanges should be used for creating awareness among the youth towards the need to put united and dedicated efforts for a cultural integration of our society.
- (2) **A Directed Socialisation Process.** Proper socialisation of children in favour of secular togetherness and living must be undertaken by the families, schools, colleges, community groups and social activists.
- (3) **Proper use of Mass Media.** Good use of Mass Media should be made to spread the message of secularism, religious toleration and fraternity of the people.
- (4) **Determined fight against Poverty and Under-development.** Since poverty and socio-economic backwardness provide a rich breeding ground to the forces of communalism, all efforts must be made for the economic regeneration of the people. The social mobility resulting from the development of an industrial society should be channelised for securing free and intimate contacts among the people living in all parts of the country.
- (5) **Awareness of Duties.** The list of Fundamental Duties of the people includes the duty to cultivate scientific temperament and a spirit of enquiry and humanism so that they may understand the significance of their composite culture. Steps should be taken to inculcate among the people respect towards this and other fundamental duties.
- (6) **Use of Social Service Schemes in Educational Institution.** Schemes like N.C.C., N.S.S., Scouting, Girl Guides, Village Level Volunteer Service and youth leadership and training programmes should be invigorated. Common and shared living among the youth in camps and hostels should be encouraged.
- (7) **Legal ban on all Communal Organisations.** BAN on the communal groups and their organisations should be imposed.
- (8) **Peace and Brotherhood Committees in Local Areas.** Monalla/Ward Committees, and Peace and Brotherhood Committees of all the members of an area/locality should be organised for maintaining and promoting communal harmony.
- (9) **Special Police.** Special anti-riot police force should be raised, trained and effectively deployed.
- (10) **Effective Use of Local Administration.** Local administration should be given clear-cut orders and power to prevent and control communal riots in its area.
- (11) **Healthy Role of Mass Media during Riots.** In the event of outbreak of communal riots, the mass media must provide reliable, objective and credible coverage. It should not indulge in making news sensational.

- (12) **Special Courts for punishing Communal Rioters.** Special courts should be established for trying and punishing persons guilty of engineering or organising communal riots.
- (13) **Special Steps in Riot Prone Areas.** Riot prone areas should be identified and special law and order maintenance machinery should be operationalised in such areas.
- (14) **Involvement of NGOs.** The non-governmental organisations and other philanthropist associations should be encouraged to spread secular way of life and to prevent communal riots.
- (15) **Keeping Religion separate from Politics.** The need to keep religion separate from politics should be stressed in religious functions. Concrete steps should be taken to prevent the use of religious places from preaching communalism.
- (16) **Minority Rights and Due Representation.** Due representation to minorities should be given in all governmental bodies.
- (17) **Review of Reservation Policy.** The reservation policy must be periodically reviewed and suitably modified. The time has come to decide whether it is going to continue for ever or it is to be terminated or phased out after a definite date. The issue must be decided at the national level and through a national consensus. It should not be politicised any further.
- (18) **Prevention of Communalisation of History.** Communalisation of history of India should be made a penal offence.
- (19) **Popularisation of the Principle of Unity in Diversity.** The inner unity of all religions, *i.e.*, their shared and common values, should be used as foundations for projecting the composite culture of our people.

All these steps can help us to fight the evil of communalism. Communalism has been a national menace and its elimination needs national level efforts.

Elimination of communalism must be our top priority. All Indians, as true sons and daughters of MOTHER INDIA, must come forward to unitedly isolate and fight the forces of communalism. ●

Answer the following:

1. Discuss the nature of caste and casteism which poses a challenge to Indian democracy.
2. Explain the causes of the development of Communalistic attitude in India.
3. "Communalism cannot be appeased, it had to be overcome with specific reference to India." Suggest the ways in which communalism can be overcome.