

COMMUNALISM IN UP: A WALK THROUGH THE HISTORY

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INTRODUCTION

Communalism is the fruit of deep-rooted communal polarisation being sown decades ago in Indian society. These communal riots are infamous throughout the history of Uttar Pradesh. Both eastern and the western Uttar Pradesh have been thrilled with the incidents of communalism that specifically disseminate anti-Muslim sentiments. The omnipresent seat of religious hatred in UP is not a matter of present but has been in existence since the 1990s or even much earlier. Communal majoritarianism has been the root cause of such vehement draconian mishaps happening in the state.

*"communalism of the majority is far more dangerous than the communalism of the minority."*¹

– Jawaharlal Nehru, during an open session of the All India Congress Committee, May 1958.

RELIGIOUS COMPOSITION

As per the Census of 2011, Hindu population forms the majority in Uttar Pradesh with 79.7% of the total population of UP. The estimated figure is around 160 million. The Muslim population is on the second pedestal with approximately 38.4 million population constituting 19.2% of the total population of Uttar Pradesh. Sikh, Christians, Jains and Buddhists constitute less than 1% of the population of the state and are in the least minority category.²

HISTORY OF COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

History of communal riots in Uttar Pradesh has been in continuous writing since the past decades. These inter-religious tensions between the two opposing groups have always been the bone of contention that took lives of thousands.

¹ Prasenjit Chowdhury, *Communalism of the Majority*, D.H. (Jan. 20, 2020), <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.deccanherald.com/amp/opinion/comment/communalism-of-the-majority-796552.html>.

² Uttar Pradesh Population, <https://www.populationu.com/in/uttar-pradesh-population>.

The Babri Masjid Riot is an infamous incident witnessed by the majority and recognized by everyone. The place of the Masjid had always been the seat of tension between the Hindu and the Muslim community, former believing it to be the birthplace of Lord Ram, hence claiming to have the sole right to occupy the place. The first opposition occurred in 1853 during British Raj, when authorities allocated separate areas of the site to both the communities. However, after two years of independence, in 1949, the images of Lord Rama had been placed inside the mosque. After continuous conflicts, the site was closed for both groups. In 1984, a campaign had been initiated to build a temple in place of Babri Masjid hence demolishing it. This gave rise to incessant communal bitterness and riots in the state in 1990s. On 6th December, 1992, the mosque was demolished.

The Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013 are a horrendous example of communal hatred prevailing in the areas of Uttar Pradesh. The Muzaffarnagar riot has been considered the worst in the decade. Numerous people were killed and hundreds had fled their homes because of the apprehension of the conflict that heated up between Muslim and Jaat community. The circulation of fake news was the basis of this real genocide. The onus of the sin was on parties active in the area and the proximity of general elections. The opposition party blamed the ruling party while the latter blamed the former. However, after a deep scrutiny, three politicians were arrested on the charge of 'inciting communal violence'.

Everyday Communalism: Riots in Contemporary Uttar Pradesh authored by Sudha Pai and Sajjan Kumar explicitly delineates the horizons of communal violence prevalent in the state of UP. The authors have discussed the concept of *institutionalized riot system* that has been followed in the state. They have also discussed the nature of riots commenced in the western and eastern UP with stress on the 1990s riot of Babri Masjid. The authors have beautifully conveyed their words to their readers.³

INSTITUTIONALIZED RIOT SYSTEM

³ SUDHA PAI & SAJJAN KUMAR, *EVERYDAY COMMUNALISM: RIOTS IN CONTEMPORARY UTTAR PRADESH* (2018).

Paul Brass in his book, *The Production of Hindu Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, explicitly explains the mechanism followed in order to heat up tension between the two groups. As per him, Preparation, Activation and Explanation are three triggers of the *institutionalized riot system*. Preparation constitutes inciting acts and speeches which hold bitterness continuously between the two groups. Activation refers to the very act of violence led by potential rioters. The persons being recruited to start the crime are often from poor backgrounds, influenced by the sum of money paid to them. Explanation is the last mechanism used in such violence, it is the explanation of the violence done, filled with deceit and false accusations. The explanation is moulded by powerful politicians and personalities who want to achieve their motive through the same.⁴

COW SLAUGHTER ACT PREVENTION (AMENDMENT) ORDINANCE, 2020

On June 9, 2020, the UP government had passed the Cow Slaughter Act Prevention (Amendment) Ordinance in order to make the Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act, 1955 more robust and exhaustive. The ordinance mentioned that for the first offence of cow slaughter, the imprisonment of seven years and fine of 1 to 3 Lakhs shall be levied on the accused while for the second offence, the imprisonment of 10 years with 5 Lakhs of fine shall be levied on the accused. However, under the act of 1955, the punishment for the same was seven years imprisonment with a fine of not less than 1 Lakh and not exceeding 3 Lakhs.

No doubt, the Act is a good approach for the curtailment of such crimes. But, the Allahabad High Court in a judgement of 2020 stated that the Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act of UP has been costing lives of innocent people. It has been said that whenever meat has been recovered by the police, it is declared as *beef* without any scrutiny of the same. Also, approximately 4000 people have been arrested in 2020 under the Act, of which numerous have been acquitted as the police was not able to gather the sufficient evidence against them.

MOB LYNCHING

⁴ Thomas Blom Hansen, *Review Symposium: The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* by Paul R. Brass, 6(1), ETHNICITIES, 102 (2006), https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&url=https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/document/23030/1/ssoar-ethnicities-2006-1-hansen-politics_by_other_means.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwiCkrrs-uTyAhXF1bcAHaqwBeYQFnoECDIQAQ&usg=AOvVaw2H_gXkiinsmWCxF1tRQb39&cshid=1630746192463.

Mob lynching is one of the worst scenario in Uttar Pradesh. In the recent years, the state witnessed numerous lynching episodes out of which 69% have been related to cow slaughtering.

Lynching in one of the form of violence where mob inflicts physical torture on a person brutally and ruthlessly on the pretext of administering justice. Most cases of lynching in Uttar Pradesh led to the death of the person on spot or in hospital. The cases of mob lynching are either on the false belief of the masses, as a way to heat up communal bitterness or under the curtain of personal agony.

The case of Dadri mob lynching of 2015 is a notorious one. Here, a person named Akhlaq was beaten to death by a mob on the suspicion of storing and consuming *beef*, which again was just a suspicion. However, the trial for the case has begun after 5 years in 2020 giving the family a hope to get justice.⁵

ANTI-CONVERSION LAW

It has been approximately seven months since the passing of the Anti-Conversion law. The law punishes unlawful conversions in the state under the ambit of force, fraud, misrepresentation and fake promise of marriage. The law is indeed a good initiative but is it rendering justice to the people or costing innocent lives and in some cases ceasing the lives to be in the process of seeing the world?

In a report, it has been shown that since the passing of the law, around 49 FIRs have been filed against 128 people who have been held in the law. Half of these cases have been filed on false accusations. In a recent event, three men named, Abrar, Maisur and Irshad, in the Bareilly district of UP have been charged under the allegation of forceful religious conversion of a 24 year old married woman which later scrutinised by the police authority as fake. The love jihad

⁵ Aishwarya S. Iyer, *Dadri Lynching Trial Begins: How Akhlaq Kin Waited for Five Years*, the quint (Mar. 26, 2021), <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.thequint.com/amp/story/news/india/dadri-lynching-five-years-mohammad-akhlaq>.

cases have shown a spike in the state after the entry of the Anti-Conversion law, largely attacking Muslim masses.⁶

WAY FORWARD

To fade the evil of communalism, there is one and only solution to the problem, that is *to purify the corrupt minds of masses with rationality and logic*. Nothing other than this can prove fruitful for the curtailment of this menace. The onus of rationality is on our shoulders, we have the freedom and we have the right to choose the correct path, to deviate ourselves towards the light of truthfulness and justice. We have to liberate ourselves from theological fundamentalism and try to seek the ideals of common brotherhood.

CONCLUSION

After corroborating these vehement forces present in the areas of Uttar Pradesh, one can simply diagnose the issue of Communalism being mushrooming in the minds as well as in the behaviour of the masses. As per the report of NCRB, the country had witnessed approximately 58,880 rioting cases in the year 2017 alone. The report further evidenced that on an average, India had 161 riots with 247 victims every day in the year 2017. By the given facts, we can say that the issue of communal riots is penetrating deep into the land of India. Everyone is familiar with these horrendous incidents taking place every then and while in the streets, sometimes in Muzaffarnagar while sometimes in Shamli. The incidents directly allude to the mixing of one party or person but still no one is in the position to defend the wronged or even render justice to the deceased wronged. However, one question becomes pertinent here, that is, *whether it is the institutionalized tactic of the government ?* Well, the answer is lucid with an obscure curtain.

⁶ HT Correspondent, *3 men framed in false love jihad' case: Cops*, H.T. (Jan. 4, 2021), https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/3-men-framed-in-false-love-jihad-case-cops/story-gBADOEGjox4MqJeUo7OaHK_amp.html.