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# UNIT 14 PATTERNS OF COMMUNAL POLITICS

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## 14.1 INTRODUCTION

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Following independence the political elite in India were faced with the task of entering the legislative bodies. They needed to mobilise people to get their political support. This need for political mobilisation motivated them to search for the issues in the society. These issues were of the two kind socio-economic and emotional. The former included the basic needs of employment, education and basic infrastructure. The latter included the issue of building India into a nation - state as well issues relating to the markers with which people identify by birth — religion, language, tribe or caste. The mobilisation on the basis of caste, religion, language, or the tribe has been taking place in India indifferent ways. Religion has been one of the most important forces of the communal mobilisation in India.

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## 14.2 WHAT IS COMMUNAL POLITICS?

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Communal politics is a South Asian expression for what is globally described as ethnic or sectarian politics. Such politics is based on a belief that religion forms the basis of a common identity; that members of a particular religious community have the same economic, political and social interests. In other words, communal politics works on the belief that each religious community is distinct from the other in its religious, cultural practices, lifestyles and value systems which become the basis of differences in socio-economic interests between these communities. In the absence of shared interests it is only distrust and suspicion that tends to define the relationship between different communities. Communal politics generates mutual distrust between religious communities. Communal politics generates mutual distrust between religious

communities. This feeling of distrust often leads to violence, which has a place of importance for communal politics, as it depends on the mutual suspicion and hatreds which fuelled violence in the first place. Communal violence thus, leads to communal polarisation of society and hence, helps in the expansion of communal politics.

Communal politics in this sense is primarily a form of politics, which mobilises a particular religious community for political power. It is the exploitation of religious differences for political gains. Communal politics may also take the form of highlighting the communitarian interests of a religious group without necessarily generating hatred towards any other community. What is important about communal politics is that it is not driven by any religious or spiritual issue, but by secular interests, which can range from bargaining for jobs, educational concessions, political patronage, separate representation or control over institutions of governance. Crucial for communal politics is a feeling of oneness within a religious community as also a sense of cultural difference between communities. Communal politics, whether for economic concessions or for political power heightens this sense of internal coherence, and the feeling of difference between communities. Over the long term, it reinforces the idea of an internally cemented monolithic community and is also revivalist in nature. It strengthens the hold of traditional customs and practices over its members. When this hold becomes very strong it curtails the freedom of the individual to think and act differently from the established status quo. Therefore, such artificial strengthening of community identity has deep anti-democratic consequences by denying individuals the freedom of thought and expression. Thus, all communal politics is inherently anti-liberal and anti-democratic.

Those individuals who think or speak differently from the established norms and traditions of the community are either pressurised to keep quiet and conform or they are expelled from the community as traitors. This is an inherent authoritarian streak which is shared by all forms of communal and ethnic/sectarian politics all over the world. Galileo was ex-communicated from the Church for having truthfully recounting the scientific discovery he made that Earth revolved around a stationary Sun since it was against the prevalent dogma. Similarly, Raja Rammohan Roy had to face the community's anger for condemning and opposing the prevalent practice among Hindus of burning widows alive. In the recent past we have seen social reformers like Asghar Ali Engineer and novelists like Taslima Nasreen facing death threats for holding opinions contrary to established religious practice. Eminent historian of ancient India, Romila Thapar and Magsaysay award winner, Sandeep Pandey have been the target of virulent attacks for opposing politics and ideology of Hindu communalism. In every country and at every moment of history communal/ethnic politics has victimised those who have dared to think differently.

Communal politics, as distinguished from communal violence (or communal riots), is a particular approach to politics which is practiced at a sustained level. Communal violence involves incidents of violence between two religious communities. It can be sporadic in nature and mainly forms a law and order issue to be handled on the spot for restoring peace and calm. Though communal politics does not need immediate police intervention, it has much more damaging implications over the long term. It breeds feelings of suspicion between religious communities and also raises the frequency of violence which in turn sustains communal politics.

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## 14.3 HOW AND WHEN DID COMMUNAL POLITICS ARISE IN INDIA?

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Communal politics arose in British India mainly as a bargaining medium for positions of economic privilege and social status under colonial rule. As such, the early communal politics was in the nature of competition for government patronage, jobs, educational concessions and political positions, and was not necessarily something that generated communal animosity. The politics of Syed Ahmad Khan and the Aligarh school can be placed in this category. This politics was more of an interest-oriented politics rather than one based strictly on ideology. Its prime concern was the upward socio-economic mobility of the Muslim community. For almost two decades it remained so before slipping into an ideological mould. The relations of both the Muslim and Hindu communal politics with the Indian National Congress remained tense. From the very beginning this politics tried to keep itself consciously away from the Congress-led nationalist movement, though often it was overwhelmed by circumstances and had to join the secular-liberal anti-colonial movement. While the primary objective of the Congress was complete independence from British rule, communal politics was more concerned with gaining immediate advantage within the colonial system with regard to jobs and power for its members.

It also happened that in the early 20th century anti-colonial mobilisation often occurred on religious issues and brought people into the nationalist struggle as religious communities. For example, the Akali agitations against the corrupt, British-supported Gurudwara managements between 1919 and 1926 brought the Sikh community into the nationalist struggle. This brave and relentless agitation against ruthless Mahants eventually led to a strong movement against British rule itself. The Khilafat agitation against the British in 1920-21 to restore the Caliphate in Turkey — once again a religious issue — drew this time the Muslims to the freedom struggle. These movements contributed to building a nationalist struggle against colonial rule, but also fortified a false sense of a homogeneous religious community disregarding the differences of class, region and lifestyle. Religious icons and symbols were also used to heighten anti-imperialist fervour. The popularisation of the Ganapati festival, the Shivaji festival, *rakhitying* was done to involve the Hindus in anti-colonial struggle in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. *Kali* worship was also popularised in Bengal as a part of the Swadeshi and Boycott movements after the partition of Bengal in 1905. The use of these Hindu festivals and symbols while serving the purpose of anti-colonial mobilisation also ended up alienating communities from each other.

The British, to weaken the nationalist movement, encouraged communal and separatist politics and tried to strengthen the impression that Congress was a Hindu organisation. This was in line with their policy of 'divide and rule'. The British government's support to separatist politics together with the indigenous elite's hankering for material privileges gave way in the 1930s to the idea that Hindus and Muslims constitute two separate and hostile nations. Differences among the communal elite about the nature of independent India and their political status in this future entity strengthened this two nation thesis. One of its very first proponents was V.D. Savarkar, the extremist nationalist who went on to become the president of the All India Hindu Mahasabha. This ideological community based nationalism became the foundation of the public activities of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the All India Muslim League. These outfits were never in the forefront of challenging colonial rule, on the other hand they ranged themselves against the Congress' ideology of an Indian nationalism which transcended religious affiliations. The British

encouraged these divisive and separatist views as they, along with the feudal elements, worked in the interests of colonial rule and against the integrative anti-colonial nationalism of the Indian National Congress.

The Congress was committed to Hindu-Muslim unity and building a strong front against the British. It also made attempts to build some kind of a socio-economic programme for an independent India. There existed within the Congress a strong Hindu right wing, but it remained marginal and was not able to dominate the all-encompassing, all-India character of the Congress. The fear of the 'Hindu' character of the Congress was exaggerated by the British government as well as by the Muslim League to strengthen communal separatism. Though the Congress was wedded to non-communal politics, there was no conceptual clarity within the party about what a secular state policy should be. The leadership was for a territorially and culturally united India, pledged religious freedom to its citizens and also agreed that there should not be a state religion. Freedom from colonial rule and the subsequent economic development were considered antidotes to communalism. There also seemed to be a subconscious belief that the notions of 'eternal' Hindu 'secularism' and 'tolerance' that had brought about a 'unity in diversity' in the past would once again generate harmony and brotherhood between communities. But, the Congress failed in formulating a clear theory of secularism grounded in the particularities of India. Was state functioning to be completely separate from religious affairs? What should be the stance of the state on religious mobilisations for political ends? Should there be a uniform law to govern civil relations or various communities can follow their own laws? How should the law reconcile individual freedoms with community norms? Considerable ambiguity remained on these and other questions not only in its political programmes but also in the Constitution which was adopted in 1950.

The concluding years of the British rule in India witnessed the most gruesome Hindu-Muslim riots. The 'Direct Action Day' called by the Muslim League in 1946 set off large scale violence in Calcutta that continued for several months. Town after town witnessed killing sprees. Violence in Bengal and Bihar spread to the Punjab and NWFP. This was a time when the non-separatist Muslim leadership was completely overshadowed and popular support began to shift to the Muslim League, a fact which goes on to show the importance of violence for communal politics. Partition of the sub-continent took a further toll upon Hindu-Muslim relations. Communal killings whose number touched one million—and the accompanying displacement inflicted deep wounds on the national psyche and formed the basis of communal politics in independent India.

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## **14.4 WHY DOES COMMUNAL POLITICS THRIVE?**

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It is easy for communal politics to thrive in a situation of uneven and retarded economic development. Uneven economic development and distribution, in terms of region as well as social groups, works to the advantage of communal politics. An economy which is marked by slow and haphazard growth, rising levels of unemployment, unmanageable levels of poverty, low literacy levels, falling health standards, etc., is prone to mobilisations based on community, religion, caste and sect. A society facing economic hardships—poverty, hunger and unemployment—is more likely to support community based politics.

Two reasons can be given to explain the differences of wealth. First the successive governments have failed to bring about a just distribution of resources and to provide minimum access to

education and health. Second, the religio-cultural reasons are responsible for the differences in wealth. Communal politics uses the second explanation and advances itself. It also constructs the exploitation of a community by another, or regions for the basis wordiness, rich in reality might not even exist. For instance, communal rhetoric like, “the economic and political appeasement of the other community is the cause of our poverty” and “the flourishing business of that community is at the cost of our well-being”, is commonly used to mobilise religious communities on political agendas. Thus, one finds that the underprivileged—the lower castes, tribals, the poor peasants and the labouring sections—get drawn into communal mobilisations, expecting an end to their economic miseries. It is the poor and underprivileged sections of society who often get drawn to communal violence. However, even the middle classes and privileged sections have been involved in violence in several cases. Communal interests promote communal strife to maintain their dominant position in politics and society.

Moreover, it is much easier for the ruling elite to mobilise people on narrow communal lines. Such mobilisations are short-cuts to power. Improving the economic status of the masses requires a will and commitment over long term. This commitment is something which can eventually pose a challenge to the dominant political and economic interests. The rate of economic development remains painfully slow, not least due to the massive corruption involving the political leadership. Often, the state resorts to cutting down on welfare schemes meant for the people. Resources are withdrawn from education and health sectors, employment generation schemes are frozen and workers retrenched from public sector undertakings to meet the fiscal crises of the state. Communal politics is of great utility in breaking any popular opposition to these policies. In such situations communal politics helps channelise the anger of the people away from the leadership responsible for their economic underdevelopment towards other communities.

Lastly, often communal riots have been instigated to eliminate a business rival and to take over coveted property. In an event of economic competition, traders and entrepreneurs of a particular community often use communal politics and violence to smother competition from business rivals of a different community.

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## **14.5 COMMUNAL POLITICS AND THE INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY**

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Communal politics to be able to operate smoothly, relies heavily upon the past. It is dependent upon a certain interpretation of history and its selective appropriation distortions, constructions, decontextualisation and selective picking and choosing form the baggage of communalisation of history, something indispensable for communal politics. As such an imagined past is created to serve communal needs. As such an imagined past is created to serve needs of communal politics. For instance, Hindu communalism operates with a view of history where certain eternally noble characteristics are attributed to Hindus, such as tolerance, respectful of other’s religious beliefs, spirituality, unmindful of material desires, etc. These attributes are said to be in full bloom during the ancient period of the history of India, a period interpreted as one of glory and prosperity for the Hindu nation (the ‘nation’ is also attributed an imagined antiquity). This ancient era is considered Hindu heritage which needs to be revived.

The entry of the Muslims is said to have spoilt this period of calm, prosperity and creativity. With the entry of Muslims India is said to have embarked on the second phase of its history, the

medieval period, an era of darkness. This was an era, so it is propagated, of Muslim fanaticism and destruction, — the Muslims were driven by the sole religious aim of conversions and destruction of the places of worship of the Hindus. In this history, Muslims are unflinchingly attached the traits of fanaticism, iconoclasts, marauders and murderers.

Conversely, for the Muslim communalists, it is the medieval era which needs to be looked up to. It was a period when Muslim power was at the helm — a glorious time of Muslim rule. This marking of historical periods on the basis of religion of the rulers is in itself ahistorical putting in doubt this entire exercise. It is a history, which does not even remotely resemble the complex currents and cross-currents that make up the historical process. This periodisation of history — Hindu, Muslim and British — is borrowed from James Mill's, *History of British India*. Besides, officially endorsing the Hindu-Muslim antagonism, this British periodisation created monoliths out of religious communities giving them an internal unity which never existed. In turn, this interpretation gave grist to the mills of communal politics.

This interpretation also helped building communal *stereotypes*. For the Hindu communalists, Hindus are innately tolerant and the Muslims are fanatics. For the Muslim communalists, Hindus are seen as scheming and shrewd exploiters of innocent poor Muslims. For one, Hinduism is a philosophically rich, tolerant and peace-loving religion, while for the other, it is an idolatrous, obscurantist collection of mumbo-jumbo. Communal politics always reduces the other community into a set of stereotypes and caricatures which obliterate all social complexities and historical variations within that community.

An oft-repeated instance of Muslim 'fanaticism' is destruction of places of worship. What is conveniently forgotten is that the destruction of places of worship was not always due to religious fanaticism and it was not only the rulers of the Muslim faith who indulged in such activity. Often, political and socio-economic factors were responsible for the destruction of places of worship and also their conversions into rival shrines. This was not only peculiar to India, but occurred in other societies as well. Such destructions were assertions of political power and also ways of replenishing dry treasuries. Also, various religious orders clashed with each other for state patronage or economic gain resulting in destruction of sacred shrines. Historian, Romila Thapar, tells us of an 11th century king Harsa, plundered and confiscated temples to replenish his treasury. She points out the antagonism between Saivas and Jainas in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh which in many instances became violent resulted in the destruction of Jaina temples or their forcible conversion into Saivite shrines. She also tells us of many cases of violence between Sannyasi orders and the Vairagis in the latter part of the Mughal rule. These instances highlight some significant points.

**First**, that religious faith may be the identifiable basis of the group, but factors such as political influence and economic advantage became the prime reasons of conflict and destruction.

**Second**, sectarian strife leading to plunder and destruction of each other's places of worship for wealth or political patronage was not unusual occurrences in the pre-modern era.

**Third**, there was no such formation as an undifferentiated religious community. Differences of ritualistic and social practices marked one sect from the other. Also distinct were identities of region, occupation and caste.

Communal politics thus breaks up history into simplified phases which besides giving a distorted picture of the past is also communal in nature. Moreover, religious prejudice rather than an

objective view of history forms the basis of historic explanation. Here, religion and religious conflict are given a centrality and their role exaggerated to such an extent that even simple rivalries over secular issues are given a religious interpretation.

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## **14.6 COMMUNAL POLITICS AND COMMUNAL VIOLENCE TODAY**

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Over the years, as the economic hardships have grown, the politics of the country has turned increasingly towards communal issues for political mobilisation. Most often this has resulted in communal violence. Violence is important for communal politics for it leads to communalisation of society and results in a polarisation, which brings votes and political power. Therefore, communal riots are not sudden outbursts of religious conflicts. As one moves from the 1960s to the first few years of the present century (21<sup>st</sup> century), one witnesses that increasingly communal riots have been carefully planned and systematically engineered. Material reasons and electoral compulsions form the basis of this politics.

Communal politics openly resorts to communal mobilisation for political ends. There is also a politics which opportunistically resorts to communal mobilisation for short term electoral gains. In the first category are groups like the VHP, the Shiv Sena, the Muslim League, the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, etc. In the second are parties like the Congress-I, the Trinamool Congress, the Telegu Desam, the Samata Party, etc. The political programmes of the first group are openly based upon mobilisation of religious communities. The second group has opportunistically used communal themes or have not taken a categorical stand against communal issues because that would have meant a weakening or loss of power for them. For instance, the Congress pandered to Hindu communalism when passed orders to open Babri mosque to Hindu for prayers. The Congress also tried to please the Muslim communal interests when around the same time (1986) it overturned the Supreme Court Judgement on the Shah Bano case, which had ordered maintenance to be paid to the divorced Shah Bano by her husband. During the Gujarat communal violence in 2002, parties like the Telugu Desam, Samata Party, Janata Dal and DMK confined themselves to verbal criticisms and did not use their parliamentary leverage to force the Government's hand on the issue as it may have led to their losing power.

It can be argued that the politics around the Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi dispute has been the prime contributor to the growing intolerance and violence in India over the past decade or more. The primary contention of those responsible for the destruction of the Babri mosque and who are mobilising for construction of a Ram temple is that India is a Hindu nation and therefore Hindu community's, rights take precedence over everything else. This is clearly the two-nation theory at work and this politics openly advocates the formation of a Hindu nation-state in India. The politics of Ramjanmabhoomi has been a prime contributor to the electoral fortunes of the BJP. The Lok Sabha strength of the BJP went up from 2 seats in the 1984 election to 88 seats, in the 1989 elections and in the 1991 elections to 120 seats. It is this dependence of the BJP on the Ramjanmabhoomi movement which prevents it from dealing firmly with communal violence and politics despite being in power.

The loss of life in communal riots has gone up steadily over the years. It is reported that between 1950 and 1960 the number of lives lost in communal riots was 316. This number (over a

decade) is very small compared to the death toll in each incident of communal violence from the late 1960s. In 1969 riots in Ranchi-Hatia the number of people killed was 184 and in the Ahmedabad riots the same year, the death toll was 512. In the Bhiwandi-Jalgaon (1970) riots the number was 121 deaths. In the Bhagalpur violence from October 22, 1989 to January 15, 1990 the number of those killed was 960. What also should be added here is that in communal violence in independent India more Muslims have been killed and displaced. In the Ranchi-Hatia riots out of the 184 killed, 164 were Muslims; in Ahmedabad (1969) out of 512 deaths, 413 were Muslims. In Bhiwandi-Jalgaon out of 121 deaths, 101 were Muslims. In Bhagalpur, out of 960 killed, nearly 890 were Muslims.

About 900 people were killed in the 1992-93 Bombay (Mumbai) riots of which at least 575 were Muslims. In the Null Bazar market of Mumbai, 512 shops were set ablaze after being looted. Of these 90 belonged to the Hindus and rest to the Muslims. Behind Gol Deval there were a few Muslim shops and all of them were looted and gutted. The Justice B.N. Srikrishna Commission that was set up to probe the violence found that the Shiv Sena fomented and organised communal riots in Mumbai that led to the death of innocent Muslims and destruction of their property.

During the Gujarat violence (2002), Muslims and their property were systematically targeted. In four days—28th February to 3rd March 2003—600 Muslims had been killed, though Amnesty International puts the number as 2000. More than 2 lakh Muslims were displaced, their homes looted and burnt. The number of Hindus who were displaced was 10,000.

The role of the police in communal violence needs to be taken into account also. From every major incident of communal violence in the country, what has almost invariably emerged is the partisan role of the police. The communalised character of the police has been more than evident. The police through its partisanship has helped communal politics and in fact has played the role of an oppressive bureaucracy in the service of the ruling class well. The police rather than playing a mediatory role and swiftly putting an end to arson, loot and murder has either been a moot spectator to violence or has itself become participant in it. Moreover, this silence or participation has almost always been anti-minority. In Bhiwandi 1970, Firozabad in 1972, Aligarh in 1978, Meerut in 1982 there was not a single Hindu victim of police bullets while the number of Muslims dying of police bullets respectively was 9, 6, 7 and 6. The police is reported to have joined the mobs and looted Muslim homes in the Jamshedpur communal violence in 1979. The Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) opened fire on 40,000 Muslims while they were at Id prayers in Moradabad in August 1980. A pig had wandered into the *namaz* that led to a small altercation and the police went berserk and began firing at the *namazis*. Meerut witnessed a cold-blooded massacre of innocent Muslims by the PAC following riots of May 1987. More than two dozen Muslims were picked up from the Hashimpura locality and massacred. The bodies were dumped in the Hindon canal. Some bodies were found floating in the canal near Maliana village. This ignited passions and Meerut was again on fire. The months of May, June and July 1987 saw some tragic rioting in Meerut. During the Bhagalpur riots 1989, the police silently watched the murder of 116 Muslims who were buried in a field and cauliflower was grown on it.

During the 1992-93 Mumbai riots, police used excessive force against and systematically refused to register their complaints against Hindu mobsters. The same was the story in Gujarat in 2002. The Muslims not only had to face the Hindu mobsters, many a times led by local VHP-Bajrang



Dal supporters, but also the police. In Gujarat in 2002, the police did all that it was not expected to do and did not act where it should have taken action. The police directed the mobsters to Muslim homes, was a mute spectator to their killings, fired at Muslims, took part in looting their property, and did not register complaints of affected Muslims against their attackers. On February 28, 40 men shot dead near the Bapunagar police station were all Muslims, shot on the head and chest, while trying to defend themselves from a 3000 strong mob.

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## **14.7 PATTERNS OF PRESENT DAY COMMUNAL POLITICS**

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These happenings reveal some significant facts about communal politics after the emergence of Hindutva as a major ideological force on the political scene. One, communalism has acquired an openness, a legitimacy and mass reach comparable to, and surpassing, what the Muslim League achieved in British India. Communal politics in the early decades of Independent India needed a screen from behind which it operated. It was a tacit kind of politics, which was shy of coming out in the open. Now this shyness has been replaced by openness attributable to the legitimacy that it has acquired. This legitimacy flows from a culturally majoritarian understanding of Indian politics, that is, an understanding which believes that since India has a religious majority of Hindus, Hindu politics is the most natural representation of the interests and aspiration of the entire population. Therefore, according to this understanding, Hindu politics should be acceptable to all because it is an articulation of the interests of the greatest number and this is what democracy is all about. The reach of Hindu communalism has spread, which is partly attributable to the first point discussed above, that is, the majoritarian religio-cultural understanding of democracy, and partly, to the State's increased identification of itself with Hindu right wing politics. The State has also distanced itself much more from the promises it made to the impoverished mass of the Indian population.

Two, present day communal politics, in its Hindu communal form, challenges the very foundations of democracy in India. It calls for the formation of a Hindu state and challenges the basic principles of equal citizenship, secularism, religious tolerance and religious freedoms — the foundations of a plural Indian polity. Rather than governance by a political majority which is open to democratic contestation, it is oriented to religious majoritarianism as the basis of political rule. This was not case earlier. Earlier communalism became a vehicle for economic or political influence, but never posed a threat to democracy. Hindutva has brought about this fundamental change in communalism post-late 1980s.

Three, in independent India, minority communal politics has not been able to survive the onslaught of Hindu politics. Earlier, minority and majority communal politics used to breed on each other to consolidate their spheres of influence and also, the Muslim League had considerable political clout. But, in independent India, Muslim politics, as an ideological force, has been pushed to an insignificant fringe. In recent years, Muslim politics has become less communal and more communitarian, in the sense that it is concerned more with rights of Muslims as equal citizens and is speaking against discrimination in the public sphere. Questions of citizenship have come to occupy Muslim politics more than issues of communal contestation. In this role, it is moving towards secular political agendas. However, a small element of minority communalism has moved towards fundamentalist outfits and terrorist groups. So, Muslim communalism has two forms

today. One, a widespread and more communitarian form that defends the rights of the Muslims as equal citizens of India, and two, an extremist form, which is on the fringes, that takes recourse to terrorist activities.

Four, Muslim communal politics (in its communitarian form) is regionally specific. There are scattered pockets of its influence that do not have any connection with each other. For example, the politics of MIM in Hyderabad, of the Muslim League in Kerala, of some leaders in Uttar Pradesh, etc., is regionally localised with little possibility of collaboration. Each represents the interests of Muslims in their specific regional context. An organisational unity of the kind present in Hindu communalism is absent here.

Five, Hindu communalism is ideologically much stronger than Muslim communalism, and this strength comes from its ability to identify with Indian nationalism. Hindu communalism's trait to conveniently slip into claims of Indian nationalism is something which Muslim communalism can never achieve, rather it, like all other minority nationalisms, is always in danger of being branded separatist and anti-national. Hindu communalism's ideological expression is revealed in Hindutva which has a geographic uniformity and unity. In other words, there is no ideological difference between Hindu communalism in say, Uttar Pradesh or Karnataka or Gujarat. Its intensity might differ but ideologically it is the same everywhere. It is on questions of identity rather than interests that this ideological edifice has been built marked with a sharp sectarian and authoritarian outlook.

Six, Hindu communal politics has got an added force from the way world politics itself has moved. The identification of Islam with global terrorism at the hands of the neo-imperialist forces after the 11th September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre towers in New York has come as a big political and ideological support to the Hindu communal forces. This has led them to intensify their politics of hate against the Muslims in India for a further political expansion. The activities of extremist groups like Al Qaida at the international level, and of the Mumbai underworld at the national level has made matters convenient for Hindutva forces in India to identify Muslims as anti-national and terrorists.

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## **14.8 SUMMARY**

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The use of religion or religious identity for socio-economic benefits or political power is called communal politics. This politics thrives in a situation of religio-cultural plurality on the one hand and uneven and retarded economic development on the other. Both these conditions are present in India.

While communal violence is sporadic and ends up as a problem to be tackled on the spot, communal politics is a long term phenomenon that is based on a monolithic understanding of a religious community and exaggerates the differences between different religious communities. These differences lead to communalisation of society, which strengthens communal politics.

Communal politics in colonial India was a way of competing for government jobs and political positions. It acquired a much more serious face as a bulwark against the Congress led national movement. It was in colonial India that the two-nation theory was propounded. Communal politics was also a part of the 'divide and rule' policy of the British colonialists.

Communal politics interprets the past in a selective and distorted manner to be able to extend its area of influence. It resorts to certain communal stereotypes also for its advantage.

Over the years, politics has been increasingly resorting to communal mobilisations. Most often this has resulted in gruesome communal violence. In Indian politics today, Hindutva has acquired a centrality. Majority politics or Hindu politics has pushed minority politics to the margins. Minority politics has gradually moved towards communitarian issues in independent India. After 11th September 2001, Hindu communal politics has got a considerable political and ideological push.

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## **14.9 EXERCISES**

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- 1) What is communal politics? Discuss the relationship between communal politics and economic development.
- 2) What kind of interpretation of history does communal politics rely on?
- 3) What are the patterns of communal politics in India today?
- 4) Spell out the necessity of communal violence for communal politics?