



International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Journal homepage: www.ijrpr.com ISSN 2582-7421

COMMUNALISM IN THE WRITINGS OF SOCIALIST LEADERS

DR. AMANULLAH

CENTER OF ADVANCED STUDY DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY, ALIGARH, UP, INDIA

EMAIL: Amanullah.history@gmail.com

MOB. NO. - +91964655283

ABSTRACT

Communalism in India is often characterized by tensions and conflicts arising from religious or ethnic divisions, particularly between Hindu and Muslim communities. Historically, it emerged during British colonial rule as a divide-and-rule strategy, pitting communities against one another to weaken nationalist movements. This divisive policy has left a lasting impact, with communalism being manipulated by various political forces for electoral gain even after independence. Communal violence and polarized politics have occasionally disrupted India's secular and democratic fabric, threatening social harmony and national unity. In response to communalism, socialist leaders in India have consistently advocated for secularism, economic equality, and social justice, opposing divisive ideologies. Leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Ram Manohar Lohia, and Jayaprakash Narayan championed socialism not only as an economic framework but also as a means to create a more inclusive and egalitarian society. Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, promoted a vision of India as a secular, democratic, and pluralistic state, emphasizing scientific progress and socialism as counterweights to communalism. Lohia was similarly committed to bridging caste and communal divides, advocating for social justice through economic policies and grassroots mobilization. Jayaprakash Narayan's movement in the 1970s also pushed for secularism, democratic rights, and an end to communal violence. Through these leaders' efforts, socialism in India came to represent a rejection of communalism, encouraging national unity and social cohesion. Their vision has influenced successive generations, inspiring efforts to foster a secular and inclusive India despite challenges posed by communal divides.

KEY WORDS – COMMUNALISM, COMMUNAL AWARD, PAKISTAN, RSS, JANSANGH, GANDHI, JAYAPRAKSH, LOHIA.

Introduction:

Communalism is basically a political ideology. It puts the interest of the community above the individual rights. In a broader sense, communalism means a strong obsession with one's community. It turns to a negative meaning when people started to promote the interest of one's community over other communities. It used as political propaganda to create differences and tensions among communities, based on religion, culture and ethnic identity, which led to increase hatred and violence.

Along with the evolution of nationalism, communalism also had appeared in society. However, there can be no doubt that the British played an essential part in heightening the communal consciousness and giving a credence to many stereotyped notions about various communities. It emphasised the conflicts and divisions in medieval society to underscore the unifying and centralising the British rule. It countered the Indian National Congress's claims to represent all classes and communities of India.¹

After the Mutiny of 1857, the British government singled out the Muslim community for deliberate repression.² Subsequently, the policy was replaced by one of appeasement of Muslims. These policies success was made possible by the uneven development of the various communities in multiple regions. Except in the United Provinces, where Muslims were relatively in better placed in the professions and government service, Muslims were economically and educationally a backward community in the other provinces.³ They formed an insignificant portion of the rudimentary Indian bourgeoisie, far removed from the Empire-Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras' commercial and industrial centres.

The steady and deplorable growth of communalism in India had reached a divisive stage in its unhealthy progress by the early 1930s. The Congress's left wing was convinced that the growing communalism was both cause and effect of the failure to concrete a mass movement for independence. In its capacity, socialists realised the three aspects of communalism, political, sociological, and irrational. These were active in India for

¹ See more about communalism, Gyanendra Panday, *Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1990; Kanchanmoy Majumadar, *Saffron versus Green: Communal Politics in the C.P. and Berar, 1919-1947*, Manohar, Delhi, 2003; Akhilesh Kumar, *Communal Riots in India: Study of Social and Economic Aspects*, Commonwealth Publishers, Delhi, 1991; Salil Mishra, *A Narrative of Communal Politics: Uttar Pradesh 1937-39*, Sage Publication, Delhi, 2001; M.J. Akbar, *Riots After Riot: Report on Caste and Communal Violence in India*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1988; KD Jhari, "Nationalism versus Communalism in Hindi Literature", in KK Gangadharan, *National Consciousness : Growth and Development in India*, Kalakar Prakashan, New Delhi, 1972.

² WC Smith, *Modern Islam in India*, Manohar Publications, Delhi, 1979, pp. 77-79.

³ See more in Chapter 1, Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India 1885-1930*, Manohar, Delhi, 1991.

the last one hundred fifty years.⁴ The Colonial government played a very decisive role in Hindu-Muslim communalism. Its special character widened the gulf between the two communities, Hindus and Muslims.⁵

J.P. complained that Congress had a primarily 'middle-class'⁶ outlook and that bourgeois ideals, ambition, and desires dominated it. Thus, a mentality had arisen that cared more for sets in the legislature than for creating genuine mass movement. Jayaprakash insisted that the communal problem was primarily economic in origin and had championed the Muslim Peasantry's Congress grievances, and it would have been checked the growth in Muslim communalism.⁷ He reminded the socialists that there was much in common between them and members of Congress, and they should always be ready to join hands with the latter for the opposition to the forces of communalism.⁸ At that time, Nehru was increasingly disturbed by the failure of the Gandhian techniques to limit the growth of communalism, and he was increasingly attracted to socialism as a solution. It was broadly in agreement with the objectives of the socialist group.

The desire for clear ideas and objectives in the freedom struggle undoubtedly helped the spread of communalism. The masses saw no clear connection between their day-to-day sufferings and the fought for Swaraj. They fought well enough at times by instinct, but that was a feeble weapon that could be easily blunted or even turned aside for another purpose. There was no reason behind it, and in periods of reaction, it was not difficult for the communalists to pay upon this feeling and exploit it in the name of religion.⁹

The objective to limit communalism led many to look to socialism as a panacea. Therefore, the socialists urged the necessity for working out universally acceptable ideals and goals that would appeal to Muslims and Hindu alike and prevent the virus of communalism from further poisoning Indian political life. The first and foremost step for the problem's solution, they suggested, was eliminating British rule. Then, after the freedom, all the issues would also resolve automatically. But the very weakness of the Congress Socialist Party was that it attracted a group of disgruntled elements, which were not bound to socialist ideology, such as Sampurnanand. William Gould shows in his article that how Sampurnanand was strongly involved in the Hindu Militancy and communal politics.¹⁰

But in 1967, the Socialists did not hesitate to join the communal Jan Sangh first in seat adjustment in elections and form non-Congress governments in several states in north India. In 1974-7, Jayaprakash Narayan permitted the RSS, Jansangh, and Jamat-i-Islami to become the backbone of his movement of 'Total Revolution' against Indira Gandhi. In 1977, the Jansangha became a part of the Janta Party.¹¹

An attitude of Socialists on demand of Pakistan

Unlike the CPI, Socialists were also not in favour of the demand of Pakistan. They maintained that both Hindus and Muslims shared a common heritage: the fusion of Dravidian, Aryan, and Indo-Muslim civilisations. They repudiated the 'Two Nation Theory,' which was being put forward by the Muslim League. The Socialists said that religion alone could not accept as the sole basis for creating a new state. They were against the formation of two states that would not solve the Hindu-Muslim problem.

In his capacity, J.P. believed that Mohammad Ali Jinnah was not sincere in negotiating with Mahatma Gandhi or other leaders. In his Prison Diary, J.P. wrote that if we accepted Pakistan, the result would be critical.¹² J.P. was in favour of full provincial autonomy for Muslim majority provinces with residuary powers and minimum central powers. When the talks became fruitless, then J.P. called Mohammad Ali Jinnah of a quarrelsome self-seeker. J.P. was also very critical towards Chakravarti Rajagopalachari's Proposal (1944).

The main bulletin of socialists, *Janta* condemned the Cabinet Mission in such a way, "Pakistan is primarily an economic problem. Capitalism allied to imperialism has provoked the demand for Pakistan. If the socialist party program had been given due consideration, Indian politics would have been different today."¹³

Gandhi took religious and even sentimental factors for the problem of communalism. On the other hand, J.P. and other socialist leaders analysed the whole issue from a Marxian scientific and secular perspective. To Socialists leaders, communalism was created by a third party, the British. Once they were removed, then the issue of communalism was resolved automatically. From the beginning, the socialists believed that the root of communal conflict laid in the economic backwardness of both Muslim and Hindu communities. They believed that an identity of the financial interest could form a basis for lasting unity between the two communities.

On June 3, a meeting of CWC was organized to discuss the Mountbatten Plan. Many prominent socialist leaders were cordially invited to that meeting, such as J.P., Lohia, A. Patwardhan. Socialist leaders were ambiguously against the Mountbatten Plan and partition. On the other hand, the Congress leaders were united for the acceptance of the partition of India.¹⁴ The National Executive met (8-10, June 1947) to consider the matter. The NEC expressed that,

⁴ Ashoka Mehta and Achyut Patwardhan, *The Communal Triangle in India*, Kitaabistaan, Allahabad, 1942, p. 8

⁵ Ashoka Mehta and Achyut Patwardhan, *The Communal Triangle in India*, Kitaabistaan, Allahabad, 1942, p. 22

⁶ BB Mishra, *The Indian Middle Class: Their growth in Modern Times*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1961.

⁷ Jayaprakash Narayan, *Towards Struggle*, Padma Publication, Bombay, 1946, pp. 111-114.

⁸ Bimal Prasad (ed.), *A Revolutionary's Quest Selected Writings of Jayaprakash Narayan*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1980, p. XXXI.

⁹ Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography*, London, 1949, pp. 137-38

¹⁰ William Gould, "Congress Radicals and the Hindu Militancy: Sampurnanand and Purushottam Das Tandon in the Politics of the United Provinces, 1930-1947" *Modern Asian Studies*, pp. 619-55; also see, Gyanendra Panday, *Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh: A Study in Imperfect Mobilization*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1978.

¹¹ Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee and Aditya Mukherjee, *India Since Independence*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2014, p. 607

¹² JP wrote, "In fact knowing Mr. Jinnah and the League, in case we accept Pakistan, I fear we shall have both division and slavery."

Jayaprakash Narayan, *Inside Lahore Fort*, Socialist Book Center, Madras, 1959, p. 59

¹³ *Janta*, 24 March, 1946

¹⁴ Rammanohar Lohia, *Guilty man of India's Partition*, Kitabistaan, Allahabad, 1960, pp. 9-10

“.....the proposed division of the country is not yet a fact nor will it have been finally accomplished with the formally established dominions. In the belief that the ulcers once created are difficult to destroy. Therefore the search for possibilities to avoid partition must continue, and no effort should be spared to undo the mischief.....”¹⁵

The AICC organised a meeting in Delhi (14-15 June) to consider the working committee's decision, which was taken on June 3. In this meeting, the Socialists were neutral. Rammanohar Lohia was insisted to members that they must accept the responsibility. Here the socialists lacked the courage to oppose the prominent leaders of the Congress. If socialists had taken a strong and determined step, the working committee did not accept the Mountbatten Plan. Lohia urged that the AICC would be punctiliously justified in opposing the resolution of the working committee. However, Socialist leaders were not in favour of the partition plan.¹⁶ The resolution of the CWC was passed by a majority of 29 to 157.¹⁷ Later, Lohia regretted that the Socialists were busy only to spread the idea that the partition was wrong. But they did not do any solid work on the ground.¹⁸

Socialists and the Communal Award (1932)

The Socialists were opposed to raising the issue of the Communal Award. According to them, if the objectives of independence and socialism were achieved, then the communal problem would resolve automatically.¹⁹ Socialists were in full agreement with Madan Mohan Malaviya²⁰ (1861-1946) that the communal Award would give to the country,

“.....not a government by the people, for the people and of the people, but a government of one community over another. In Punjab, it will be a Government by the Muslims of Hindus, and in the United Provinces, it will be a Government by the Hindus of Muslims....it will be a tyranny of one community over another, and it is this despotism which the communal Award seeks to install.”²¹

The socialists, therefore, held that the Communal problems could not be solved by the recognition of rights belonging to the religious groups. The CSP resolved at its first conference in 1934 to liquidate the problem through the struggle for the emancipation of the masses.²² On the Communal Award, Congress's attitude was ambivalent; in the Bombay Session (1934), they neither accepted nor rejected the Award.²³ The socialists insisted upon taking a definite attitude in this regard by rejecting the Communal Award. The socialist stand being defeated, Yusuf Meherally announced that they would remain neutral on the Communal Award voting. It gave a chance to Vallabhshai Patel to ridicule the socialist attitude as a vote-catching device.²⁴

In India, communalism and socialism have significantly shaped political dynamics and social movements. While communalism often exploits religious divisions, leading to sectarian violence and political instability, socialist leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, JP and Lohia emphasized social equality, secularism, and economic justice. They envisioned a united India, free from exploitation and based on shared prosperity. Socialist principles have continually inspired policies aimed at reducing economic inequality and fostering unity across diverse communities. However, the challenges posed by communalism remain persistent, requiring ongoing efforts to build a more inclusive and equitable society in line with socialist ideals.

¹⁵ The closing paragraph of the NEC's resolution betrayed a sense of defeatism, it said, “The Socialist party must also record its own failure and that of the wider revolutionary movement in working out an alternate and positive policy.”

Janta, 15 June, 1947

¹⁶ *Indian Annual Register*, 1947, vol. 1, pp. 132-133

¹⁷ Indian National Congress Report of the General Secretaries (November, 1948) Jaipur, 1948, p. 18.

¹⁸ Rammanohar Lohia, *Guilty Men of India's Partiton*, Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1960, pp. 10-11.

¹⁹ To quote Narendra Deva, “If India developed strength to achieve independence, she would have strength enough to reject the Award and evolve amicable settlement between the communities. In that case, of course, communal leaders would lose the hold on the masses.” H.N. Mitra (ed.), *IAR*, vol. 2, 1934, Gian Publishing New Delhi, 1990, p. 252.

²⁰ See more about Malaviya, B. J. Akkad, *Malaviyaji- A Brief Life Sketch of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya*, Vora & Co. Publishers Pvt. Ltd, Bombay, 1948; S. R. Bakshi, *Madan Mohan Malaviya: the man and his ideology*, Anmol Publications, New Delhi, 1991.

²¹ Ashok Mehta and Achyut Patwardhan, *The Communal Triangle in India*, Allahabad, 1942, pp. 157-158

²² *Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. II, p. 297

²³ *Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. II, p. 251.

²⁴ *Indian Annual Register*, 1936, Vol. I, pp. 283-284

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