

UPSC 2020

General Studies Mains – I & Essay Notes

Topic – Factors Leading to Communalism

The social issue of Communalism is a menace for the Indian society. It is important to track its evolution for the IAS Exam as questions have been asked on this topic in the past. You can read about [Communalism in India](#) in the linked article, so as to understand the basic communalism and later you can read this article to learn about the factors leading to communalism.

This article will provide you with the factors leading to communalism, being important for [IAS Exam](#) (GS-I Indian Society and Essay.)

What led to Communalism in India?

One must understand that the differences between Hindus and Muslims were actually not the reason for communalism because these differences were there during the medieval times itself. Hindus and Muslims were living with their own distinct identities, but they had a common, unifying culture. They learnt each others' traditions, customs, and evolved a common language, 'Urdu'. Even in the fields of music, painting, architecture, administration, dress, food, they learnt a lot from each other. The difference of faith alone wasn't a reason for conflict. The differences arose only during the colonial period (mainly post 1857), when many developments were seen and they were responsible for the rise and growth of communalism in modern India.

Communalism - Factors

There are several factors that led to the growth of communalism in India. Those factors revolve around two major factors and that are:

- Role of British
- Role of religious organisations

Factors leading to Communalism - Role of British

The divide and rule policy of the British sowed the seeds of separation between the Hindu and Muslim communities. This was because their unity had started to pose a threat to the existing position of the British in India. Tactically, they started:

- Neglecting Muslims and giving important jobs to upper caste Hindus. This antagonized the Muslims. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan started a movement to uplift the socio-economic, socio-religious, socio-educational conditions of Muslims, and he started supporting the British. But, in 1905, when the Indian National Congress (INC) became popular, the British adopted certain

policies involving Muslims to sabotage the INC movement. These included, granting separate electorates to Muslims (in 1909), etc.

- Modern Institutions were brought to India by the British like the Municipal Corporation, legislative assembly, etc. The idea of '1 man, 1 vote', and '1 value' resonated well with the Hindus, but did not resonate well with the minorities and in particular, the Muslims. In fact, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was among the first to reject this idea of '1 man, 1 vote'. He had a fear that this would make Muslims as subordinate to Hindus in every level of governance. He also opposed competitive exams for recruitment to Civil Services, Judiciary, etc. as Muslims at that time were far behind in English and modern education- which were the basis of the examination itself. This sparked the demand for separate electorates among a group of Muslims in assemblies and the union legislative council. But, the grant of separate electorates was bound to create separatism within and outside the community. Some of the leaders like Jinnah, succeeded in articulating amongst Muslims that in the system of 1 man, 1 vote, Muslims would be the loser.

Factors Leading to Communalism - Role of Religion Specific Organizations

Another factor for the rise of communalism in India was that in the 19th Century, several religious organizations were formed by the Hindu and Muslim communities whose goals were poles apart by now. For example:

- The Arya Samaj of the Hindus and
- Muslim leaders began Tanzim (organization) and Tablighi (propaganda / religious proselytisation) movement in N.India.

These were organizations that began to play communal politics. It is important to note that on the surface, their declared agenda was different, but deep within, their agenda and activities were contradictory to what they were claiming.

Issues like cow slaughter, Urdu-Hindi conflict, Dusshera and Muharram falling in the same month, clashes for procession, etc. often led to clashes. Petty issues were taken up and were used in such a manner which demonized the other community. The relationship between the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Muslim League worsened particularly after the Nehru committee report of 1920. Then, in 1937, the Muslim league started campaigning and convinced Muslims that Nehru and Gandhi are Hindu leaders. What further aggravated the situation was that Hindu groups like RSS and Hindu Mahasabha declared that India would be a Hindu nation, and that Muslims and other minorities would be 2nd class citizens. This created havoc among the religious minorities in India.

It is here that one must understand the difference between Majority Communalism and Minority Communalism. Consider a country where a particular religion, race, community, etc. dominates - even a small fraction of this group is enough to outnumber a much larger fraction of another social group, religion, race, etc within the same country. The holocaust in Nazi Germany where Jewish people were persecuted can be cited here. Thus Majority Communalism may lead to a Holocaust or Genocide whereas Minority Communalism leads to separatism.

Candidates can also read about the [stages of Communalism](#) in the linked article.