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Q4(a)

Critically examine the concept of communalism and its relevance for multi-religious and multiethnic polity of India

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · Anthropology GS 2 · 20 marks · Ethno-archaeology in India

1.3 Ethno-archaeology in India: The concept of ethno-archaeology; Survivals and Parallels among the hunting, foraging, fishing, pastoral and peasant communities including arts and crafts producing communities.

Core demand of the question

- Critically examine the concept of communalism and its relevance for multi-religious and multiethnic polity of India
- Keep the answer to a 20-mark length of about 250 words

Revision summary

Communalism politicises religion as a bloc against others.

It is modern, fed by census and electorates, not a timeless Indian essence.

Srinivas's jati world is flatter in communal talk than in the village.

It threatens a multi-religious polity by capturing the common roll.

It also hides tribe and language inside a two-faith story.

Introduction

Communalism is the political use of religious identity as a bloc that claims the state. In a multi-religious and multiethnic India it is both a colonial inheritance and a living electoral language.

Body

The concept

- Colonial census and **separate electorates** taught Indians to count as Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, or Christian publics.
- **Bipan Chandra** and many historians treated communalism as modern politics, not ancient faith war.
- **Anthropology adds M. N. Srinivas's jati and** Louis Dumont's **hierarchy**: everyday life is ranked and mixed; communalism flattens it into two or three armies.

Relevance for the polity

- A multi-religious republic needs **Articles 25-30** and a common roll. Communalism tries to make the roll a religious census.
- Multiethnic reality includes language, tribe, and region. Communal frames hide **Fifth and Sixth Schedule** questions and linguistic minorities inside a Hindu-Muslim plot.
- Riots, personal-law fights, and conversion panics are the operational face. They punish mixed towns and mixed marriages.

Critique

- The concept can itself become too Hindu-Muslim, ignoring caste blocs and tribal faiths.
- Not every festival or shrine dispute is communalism. The test is whether religion is organised to capture the state against others.
- **N. K. Bose's** civilisational unity and **Nehru's** civic nation are the counter-concepts: diversity housed by law, not by a single sacred majority.

Flow diagram

Communalism -> Religious blocs
Jati tribe language -> Plural polity
Communalism -> Riot electoral veto

Conclusion

Communalism remains relevant because it still converts faith into a vote and a veto. A multiethnic polity survives by keeping jati, language, and tribe visible, and by refusing a two-community state.

Facts & figures

Separate electorates

Colonial device that trained religious communities as political corporations.

Articles 25-30

Constitutional religious freedom and minority-institution rights.

M. N. Srinivas

Showed Indian society as caste and village, not as two religious nations.

N. K. Bose

Stressed civilisational unity that can house many sects without a communal state.

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