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Q20

'Communalism arises either due to power struggle or relative deprivation.' Argue by giving suitable illustrations.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2018 · GS I · 15 marks · Social Empowerment, Communalism and Secularism
Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism and secularism.

Core demand of the question

- Argue that communalism arises from power struggle or from relative deprivation
- Use Indian illustrations for both, and show how they often join

Revision summary

Communalism politicises religious identity as a block; it is not the same as ordinary faith.

Power struggle uses separate electorates, riots around elections, and shrine campaigns to win the state.

Relative deprivation uses job, housing, and honour gaps, as Sachar data and majority 'appeasement' myths both show.

Partition, 1984, Babri 1992, and later state riots illustrate the mix.

Organisation plus grievance, not theology alone, produces communalism.

Introduction

Communalism is the political use of religious identity as a solid block against another community. It does not spring from faith as such. It grows when elites fight for office and when groups feel they have less than a neighbour they can name as the other.

Body**Communalism as power struggle**

- Colonial 'divide and rule', separate electorates from 1909, and the later Pakistan demand turned religion into a bargaining chip for state power, not only into piety.
- Partition riots of 1946-47, including the Calcutta killings, showed how party and League-Congress rivalry could set neighbourhoods on fire when the prize was a new map.
- Post-Independence, riots have often clustered around elections, rath yatras, and disputes over a shrine or a procession route, because polarisation can convert a vote bank.
- The Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi campaign, peaking in 1992, was a struggle over national symbolism and party space as much as over a plot of land in Ayodhya.
- Control of police, municipal contracts, and university or Waqf boards can make a local strongman light a communal fuse to keep a ward.

Communalism as relative deprivation

- Relative deprivation is the feeling that one's group is falling behind another in jobs, housing, honour, or state favour, even if absolute income is rising.

- Deindustrialisation of some Muslim artisan towns, ghettoisation after riots, and the **Sachar Committee (2006)** findings on education and credit fed a story of Muslim lag that communal entrepreneurs on all sides could use.
- Among Hindus, myths of 'appeasement' and competition for scarce government jobs or old-city shops have been used to claim that the majority is deprived in its own land.
- Refugee memory after Partition, and later migrations, created groups who measured loss against a neighbour's gain.
- Economic shocks-downsizing of mills, youth unemployment-do not automatically cause riots, but they supply anger that can be aimed at a religious other when a leader offers that script.

How the two join, with illustrations

- Gujarat 2002 and Muzaffarnagar 2013 mixed electoral and street power with rumours about dignity, girls, and livelihood in mixed rural-urban belts.
- Anti-Sikh violence in 1984 after Indira **Gandhi's** assassination was a state-linked power crime, not a poverty riot, yet it also fed long relative fear in a minority.
- Cow, festival, and loudspeaker disputes are small honour contests that become communal when parties and rumours scale them up.
- Thus power struggle supplies organisation, weapons, and impunity; relative deprivation supplies the crowd's sense of grievance. Either can start; both usually finish the episode.

Limits and way forward

- Not every poor or jobless person is communal; ideology and impunity matter.
- Equal policing, mixed housing, and honest data on jobs undercut both the elite game and the deprivation myth.
- Sachar-style inclusion and a secular, firm state are the policy reply; matching hate with hate is not.

Flow diagram

Elite power struggle -> Communal mobilisation
 Relative deprivation jobs honour -> Communal mobilisation
 Communal mobilisation -> Riot polarised vote ghetto
 Riot polarised vote ghetto -> Elite power struggle
 Riot polarised vote ghetto -> Relative deprivation jobs honour

Conclusion

Communalism in India has risen from fights for state and street power, and from groups who feel relatively deprived beside a religious neighbour. Illustrations from Partition, Ayodhya, 1984, Gujarat, and ghetto economics show the two causes braided together. Faith is the language; power and grievance are the engine.

Facts & figures

Separate electorates, 1909

Colonial reform that institutionalised religion as a political constituency and fed later communal bargaining.

Partition, 1946-47

Mass violence tied to the struggle over state power and the fear of becoming a permanent minority.

Babri Masjid, 6 December 1992

Demolition that turned a long shrine dispute into a national communal rupture and party realignment.

Sachar Committee, 2006

Official enquiry into the social, economic, and educational status of Muslims, often cited in deprivation debates.

1984 anti-Sikh violence

Organised killings after Indira Gandhi's assassination, an illustration of state-linked communal power crime.

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