
UNIT 21 COMMUNALIST TRENDS

Structure

- 21.1 Introduction
- 21.2 Dependence on Colonialist Historiography
- 21.3 Basic Constituents of Communal View of Indian History
 - 21.3.1 Conception of Hindus and Muslims as Antagonistic Communities
 - 21.3.2 View of Muslims as Rulers in Medieval India
- 21.4 Differences between Nationalist and Communalist Historiography
- 21.5 Critique of Communalist Historiography
- 21.6 Summary
- 21.7 Exercises

21.1 INTRODUCTION

A communal interpretation of Indian history has formed the core of communal ideology as a major instrument for the spread of communal consciousness. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that the communal interpretation of history has been the main constituent of communal ideology in India. This has been particularly true of Hindu communalism. Muslim communalism too has used ‘history’, but it has depended more on religion and minority feeling, which have been used to create a fear psychosis. To create a similar fear psychosis, Hindu communalists have tried to use an appeal to the medieval period of Indian history.

In particular, history teaching in schools played an important role in the spread of communalism. Gandhiji, for example, pointed this out: ‘Communal harmony could not be permanently established in our country so long as highly distorted versions of history were being taught in her schools and colleges, through her textbooks.’ Similarly the ‘Foreword’ to the *Report of the Kanpur Riots Enquiry Committee*, appointed by the National Congress, pointed out in 1932 that the communal view of medieval history found in school and other history books ‘is playing a considerable part in estranging the two communities’ and that ‘an attempt to remove historical misconceptions is the first and the most indispensable step in the real solution of the Hindu-Muslim problem.’

The communal view of history has been, and is, spread through poetry, drama, historical novels, popular articles in newspapers and magazines, children’s magazines, pamphlets and public speeches. The historical veracity of such popularly disseminated view of history was virtually nil, but it passed as history in popular mind. We may also note that an integrated and conscious communal view of history at the level of research or scholarship was rarely found among Indian historians before 1947 mainly because of secular nationalist influence among the intelligentsia. Communal forces gained significant intellectual adherents in India and Pakistan only after 1947. However, communal approach to history was openly preached by communal political leaders and found reflection in school textbooks and popular writing, etc., as we have pointed out earlier. Moreover, although the proponents of the Hindu and Muslim communal views of history take up diametrically opposite and hostile positions, they adopt basically the same historiographic framework, premises and assumptions. Often the only difference in their approach is that the opposite religious community is treated as the villain.

21.2 DEPENDENCE ON COLONIALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

Unlike nationalist historians who countered colonial stereotypes, communal historians based themselves almost entirely on colonial historiography of medieval India and colonial era textbooks. Most of the generalisations made by Indian communal historians can be traced to the writings of British historians and administrators. Nor were British motives innocent. From the late 1820s, the British rulers clearly realised that India was too large to be ruled by force by the British and, therefore, they had to follow the policy of Divide and Rule. They sought to divide Indians on grounds of region, language and caste, but above all they took recourse to religious divide. Secondly, aware of their own foreign status, they wanted to show that Indians had always been ruled by foreigners. Muslim rule was foreign rule, therefore, there was nothing wrong about British being foreigners. The British had only replaced one foreign rule by another foreign rule, which was benevolent and humane compared with the previous despotic and inhuman rule. Thirdly, they tried to show that Muslim rulers had subjugated, oppressed and maltreated Hindus and that the British had virtually liberated them. Hindus were, therefore, better off under British rule and should, therefore, support and not oppose it. Fourthly, they asserted that Hindus and Muslims had always been divided and had fought each other and could, therefore, never live peacefully together unless a third party – the British were present as rulers. Thus, the leading British historian of medieval India, H.M. Elliot, wrote in 1849 in his original preface to his *History of India As Told by Its Own Historians* that of ‘the few glimpses we have, even among the short extracts in this single volume, of Hindus slain for disputing with Mohammedans, of general prohibitions against processions, worship, and ablutions, and of other intolerant measures of idols mutilated, of temples razed, of forcible conversions and marriages, of proscriptions and confiscations, of murders and massacres, and of the sensuality and drunkenness of the tyrants who enjoined them.’ He also frankly confessed his motive in publishing his history. It was to make ‘our native subjects more sensible of the immense advantages accruing to them under the mildness and equity of our rule’ and to make the emerging nationalist intellectuals – ‘the bombastic Babus’ as he called them – see the reality of pre-British India and thus stop their incipient critique of British colonialism. In this respect, it is important to keep in view that it was not M.A. Jinnah or V. D. Savarkar who first put forward in 1937 the two-nation theory that led to the partition of the country. Much before them the British writers had created the view that Indian nation meant Hindu nation, that rule by Turkish, Afghan and Mughal rulers was ‘foreign’ rule, while rule by Rajput Rajas or Maratha Sardars was Indian or Hindu rule. But how could Mughal rule be foreign? Because they were Muslim. Thus, to sum up, this aspect, communal interpretation of history, was a part of the British policy of ‘Divide and Rule’.

One reason why the British writers and later Indian historians took such a communal view was their reliance on medieval chronicles for reconstruction of medieval history. Firstly, many of the writers of the chronicles and histories in medieval (as also, in fact, ancient society) were from the priestly classes who primarily constituted the educated at the time. Their religious outlook and interests seriously distorted and limited their writings. They often saw secular political events in religious terms. They tended to depict rulers and chiefs as Divine agents. Moreover, the priestly as well as other chroniclers lived on the patronage of the Kings, nobles, rajas and zamindars. Therefore, they tended to show religious virtue in their most selfish actions. Brutal wars, court intrigues, everyday politics and administrative policies were shown as religiously motivated. Their efforts to conquer others, or expand their domains, or to

fight for their own zamindaris and kingdoms were seen as acts of religious zeal, earning religious merits for them. Thus, for example, the administrative or political actions of Asoka, Chandra Gupta, the Sultans, the Mughals, the Maratha Chiefs, or the Rajput Rajas were often portrayed by contemporary writers in religious terms.

This is, of course, true, not only of India. It is equally true of the medieval historians of Europe. But European historians of the 19th and 20th centuries gradually discounted this religious bias for example in the study of the Crusades or of the medieval Popes and kings. Similarly, Portuguese and Spanish expansion in the 16th and 17th centuries was portrayed at the time as motivated by the desire to spread Christianity. Today, no European historian will accept this as the main factor in considering whether to praise or to criticize the Portuguese or the Spanish regimes.

Unfortunately, the colonial and some modern Indian historians incorporated the religious outlook of the ancient and medieval chroniclers in their own writings and thus contributed to a communal interpretation of Indian history. For example, till this day, the communal historians, whether Hindu or Muslim, go on portraying Mahmud Ghazni's invasions as religiously motivated and as throwing light on the character of Islam. Similarly, they portray the political struggle of medieval India, for example between Rana Pratap and Akbar or Shivaji and Aurangzeb as struggles based on or motivated by religion. Moreover, invariably the literary sources of the ancient and medieval periods deal primarily with the doings of the kings, princely courts and upper classes and not with the society as a whole. In the military and diplomatic affairs of the ruling groups religious considerations do appear important. When wars are waged and alliances are made, many factors are balanced and appealed to. Real issues are often kept disguised. Appeals are made to marriage ties, kinship, language, caste, region, as well as religion. But the main factor is consideration of interest, economic or political. It was very much the same in the past as today. Today, every nation clothes even the most marked of its aggressions with some decent motive. The difference is that a historian who accepts the official explanations of today would be laughed at by fellow historians. But many historians have accepted official explanations of the past rulers and of the official chroniclers.

It may also be pointed out that, just as in the case of colonial writing, contemporary communal politics were, and are, projected into the past and the happenings of the past so described and historical myths created as to serve contemporary communal politics. Thus both communalists, Hindu as well as Muslims, adopted, and continue to adopt, an interpretation of the past through which feelings of fear, insecurity and schism could be aroused among their contemporary followers. In this sense, if communal history produced and propagated communalism, in its turn communal politics gave, and gives, a fillip to communal history writing and propagation. Another way of saying the same thing is to stress that it was not **medieval history as lived by the medieval people** or the medieval historical processes that generated communalism, it was the communal interpretation of history that produced communalism as well as got produced by communalism – that is, this interpretation was itself communal ideology.

Lastly, it may be noted that because of being subjected to communal view of history from very childhood, elements of this view came to prevail even among many nationalists and other secular persons, who were unaware of their communal implications. For example, many talked of India having undergone a thousand years' of foreign rule or having suffered social and cultural decline during the medieval period or having been ruled by Muslims or Muslim rule. Similarly, elements and themes of the communal view of history are found in nationalist historical works.

21.3 BASIC CONSTITUENTS OF COMMUNAL VIEW OF INDIAN HISTORY

In the following account, we will discuss some of the important aspects of the communalist interpretation of Indian history.

21.3.1 Conception of Hindus and Muslims as Antagonistic Communities

In communal view, India's medieval history was one long story of Hindu-Muslim conflict. Hindus and Muslims were permanently divided into hostile camps whose mutual relations were bitter, distrustful, antagonistic and hostile. There existed distinct and separate Hindu and Muslim cultures. Because of their belonging to different religions, Hindus and Muslims formed distinct and exclusive and mutually hostile cultural and political communities. Thus, for example, R.C. Mazumdar wrote in 1957 that medieval India remained 'permanently divided into two powerful units, each with marked individuality of its own, which did not prove amenable to a fusion or even any close permanent coordination.' Similarly, Ishtiaq Ahmad Qureshi wrote in the 1950s that 'at all times the Muslims of the sub-continent were resolute in refusing to be assimilated to the local population and made conscious efforts to maintain their distinctive character.'

This view found a more virulent form in the hands of the communal political leaders. Thus, in his presidential address at the Lahore session of the Muslim League in March 1940, M.A. Jinnah said: 'The history of the last 12 hundred years had failed to achieve unity and had witnessed, during the ages, India always divided into Hindu India and Muslim India.' V.D. Savarkar wrote in 1923 in his *Hindutva* that 'the day when Mohammad Gazani crossed the Indus... that day the conflict of life and death began' which 'ended shall we say with Abdali. In this conflict, all Hindus, belonging to different sects, regions and castes, suffered as Hindus and triumphed as Hindus.' This struggle between Hindus and Muslims was then carried over to the 19th and 20th centuries. This view was to form the basis of the communal view that Hindus and Muslims have always lived in mutual antagonism. M.S. Golwalkar, for example, condemned the nationalists for spreading the view by which Hindus 'began to class ourselves with our old invaders and foes under the outlandish name – Indian.' And he added: 'That is the real danger of the day, our self-forgetfulness, our believing our old and bitter enemies to be our friends.' The Muslim communalists readily accepted and propagated this view and based their two-nation theory on it.

As a corollary of this view, the communal historians denied or underplayed any other social tension or conflict in medieval society. For example, any caste or class tensions were ignored and other political conflicts such as between Rajput and Maratha chieftains or between Afghans and Turks were underplayed. The Hindu communalists described the rule by medieval Muslim rulers as foreign rule because they were Muslim. Muslims were, thus, not seen as integral parts of Indian society. Instead they were seen as permanent foreigners in India. This was because they practised Islam. In other words, any Indian, as soon as he changed his religion from Hinduism, became, because of that act, a foreigner in the land. Because Islam had been founded outside India, it was a foreign religion and anyone who practised it became a foreigner.

The communalists bracketed rule by Muslim rulers and British rule as foreign. As was pointed out earlier, they talked of 'a thousand years of slavery.' Golwalkar, for example, repeatedly referred to Muslims as foreigners who treated India not as a home but as a *sarai*. He also warned Muslims and Christians: 'There are only two courses open to the foreign elements, either to merge themselves in the national race and adopt its culture,

or to live at the sweet will of the national race.’ The view that Muslim were permanent foreigners in India was accepted by the Muslim communalists, though in an altered form. In their hands, the ‘foreigner’ view took the form of emphasising the complete separateness of Muslims from Hindus. The Muslims, they said, could not be Indians in the same way as Hindus. M.A. Jinnah, for example, asserted in 1941 that ‘a Muslim when he converted, granted that he was converted more than a thousand years ago,... belongs to a different order, not only religious but social, and he has lived in that distinctly separate and antagonistic social order, religiously, socially and culturally. It is now more than a thousand years that the bulk of the Muslims have lived in a different world, in a different society, in a different philosophy and a different faith.’ Similarly, Nawab of Mamdot, a Muslim League leader, said in 1941 that ‘Pakistan had existed in India for nearly twelve centuries.’

The theory of ‘historical antagonism’ led both Hindus and Muslim communalists to claim that Hindus and Muslims formed two different nations. The Muslim communalists demanded after 1937 that, since the ‘two nations’ could not live together, Muslims should be given a separate state – Pakistan – after independence. The Hindu communalists, on the other hand, argued after 1937 for the creation of a Hindu state in which Muslims would live in a subordinate position.

21.3.2 View of Muslims as Rulers in Medieval India

One of the basic constituents of communal ideology was the view that in medieval India Muslims constituted the ruling class and the Hindus were the ruled, the dominated or ‘the subject race.’ Thus, **all** Muslims, including the overwhelming majority among them of rural and urban poor, the peasants and artisans and the lowly administrative employees and soldiers were portrayed as rulers, and all Hindus, including the rajas, chiefs, nobles, zamindars and higher officials as the ruled. Thus, addressing Lahore students in 1941, M.A. Jinnah said: ‘Our demand is not from Hindus because Hindus never took the whole of India. It was the Muslims who took India and ruled for 700 years. It was the British who took India from the Mussalmans.’ The Hindu communalists too readily accepted that Hindus were ‘slaves’ under ‘Muslim rule’. For example, in 1937, V.D. Savarkar described the rule of Muslim rulers as a ‘veritable death-warrant to the Hindu nation.’

As a corollary of this view, it was then argued that the 19th and 20th century Muslims had the ‘happy’ and ‘proud’ ever present memory of having been the ruling class, while Hindus had the ‘sad’ and ‘humiliating’ memory of having been the ‘subject race’. Another corollary was the notion that politics and political power in India had always been based on religion and religious differences and that too of and among the rulers; thus, the character of the Indian state was determined by religion and that too of the rulers. Furthermore, the basic objective of the medieval state was the propagation and glorification of Islam, and that this was so because of the inherent character of a state whose rulers were Muslims. As the Report of the *Kanpur Riots Enquiry Committee* pointed out that the communalists regarded the Muslims rulers ‘as zealous crusaders whose dominant motive was the spread of Islam and whose method for achieving this object was the destruction of temples and forcible conversions... The Muslim writers deplore the want of true religious feeling in Muslim kings in permitting idolatry to persist in their dominion and the unbelievers to prosper, while the Hindu writers bewail the weakness of the religious sentiment in Hindu rulers and their want of patriotism in not combining effectively against a foreigner in defence of their religion and their country.’

For the same reason, the autonomous states ruled by Hindu rajas and chiefs, such as the Maratha empire and the states ruled by Maratha chieftains, Rajput rajas and Jat zamindars were declared to be Hindu states whose rulers were the defenders of the Hindu religion. At the same time, the communalists branded those rulers who did not conform to the communal stereotypes as ‘bad’ Hindus or ‘bad’ Muslims who were some sort of ‘traitors’

to their faith and their communities. Real or fictitious incidents were narrated to prove this point. As pointed out earlier, such incidents could be often dug up from the writings of the medieval chroniclers, court poets, etc., who earned their livelihood by justifying, on religious grounds, the deeds or misdeeds of their patrons.

Communalists also adopted a purely religion-based definition of cultures and that too based solely on the religions of the upper classes. Hence, since Hinduism and Islam were by definition different, there could be, and was, no common cultural ground or even mutual interaction between the two. The Hindu communalists also readily adopted and propagated the colonial view that Muslim rulers, and therefore Muslims, had tyrannised Hindus during the medieval period. They depicted the history of the medieval Indian society as one long tale of murder, rapine and oppression, hostility to Hinduism and Hindus and the forcible spread of Islam through temple destruction and forcible conversion by the Muslim rulers and their officials.. The examples of this view were, as in other aspects, found in non-academic writing. M.S. Golwalkar, for example, in his booklet *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, published in 1939, usually referred to Muslims as ‘murderous hoards’, ‘murderous bands’, ‘despoilers’, ‘the enemy’, ‘forces of destruction,’ ‘old invaders and foes’, and ‘our old enemies’. The ‘Muslim tyranny’ was moreover portrayed as being a result not of the character of the rulers or the ruling classes but of the basic character of Islamic religion itself. Indra Prakash, a Hindu Mahasabha leader, for example, wrote in *Where We Differ* in 1942 :

‘The Muslim religion exalts and heroworships an assassin. This religion encourages its followers to kill men of other religions. According to the tenets of Islam the killing of a Kafir or a man belonging to the fold of any other religion raises the murderer or assassin in the estimation of his fellow-men or community; nay, it makes him a *shahid* and facilitates his transport to heaven.’

The wide prevalence of the theory of ‘Muslim tyranny’ and its roots in Islam is very well brought out in the following two passages from the Report of the Kanpur Riots Enquiry Committee:

‘These stories of idol-breaking and forcible conversions give colour to the view generally canvassed in our histories which represents the whole movement as if it was a continued religious war between Hinduism and Islam extending over eight centuries. Even those writers who seem to understand its political nature by their general treatment of the subject, invariably leave upon the mind the same impression.

‘Of the many wrong impressions prevailing at present one which is the most fruitful source of bitterness and ill-will is the impression that Islam is inherently bigoted and intolerant. . . . The theory that Islam has spread by the sword has been canvassed so widely and so persistently that for the average Indian mind this proposition has become almost an axiom. . . . (It) gives its edge to the Hindu-Muslim problem. . . .’

Similarly, a note regarding the Punjab University examination question paper said:

‘Those who have examined university papers in history will know how Muslim rulers and administrators are depicted as blood-sucking vampires and fiends of cruelty. The general impression which they give is that the Muslim rulers came to India simply to destroy the Hindus and their culture and to convert the people to Islam at the point of the sword.’

Muslim communalists reacted to these views by defending the record of the medieval Muslim rulers and chieftains, including that of a ruler like Aurangzeb, including his

religious bigotry, imposition of Jaziya and the destruction of temples. Many of them hailed Aurangzeb as the builder of *Dar-al-Islam* in India. On the other hand, they condemned Akbar for weakening Islam. To counter the theory of 'Islamic destruction' in India, they stressed the beneficial impact of 'egalitarian' Islam on the Hindu society, "ridden with superstition, caste, untouchability, and inequality."

Above all, the Hindu communal view of Indian history relied on the myth that Indian society and culture-Indian civilisation-which had reached great, ideal heights in the ancient period fell into decay and decline during the medieval period as a result of "Muslim intrusion and domination." Consequently, to prove its great height, the ancient period was viewed totally uncritically and was treated as sacrosanct; no critical evaluation of any of its aspects was to be tolerated. Even its most negative features were denied or defended. Moreover, Indian culture was identified with ancient culture, which was, in turn, identified with Hinduism in its Sanskritic and Brahmanical form. Thus, it was the Gupta Age which was declared to be India's Golden Age. Also 'greatness' of a civilisation was often defined by military conquests, strong monarchies, and the size of the empires. Furthermore, antiquity or 'ancientness' of a civilisation was seen as one sign of its greatness. Consequently, the communalists proclaimed Aryan civilisation to be the oldest in the world. Sometimes, to prove this, they dated back the Vedic period by several centuries, sometimes by thousands of years.

A basic component of the 'rise and fall' view of Indian history was the declaration that the culture and civilisation of India underwent a 'terrible fall' during the medieval period. Most of the social, cultural and economic ills of Indian society – indeed all of its backwardness – were ascribed to the medieval period, 'Muslim rule' and the impact of Islam. The entire medieval period was characterized as a dark age. Another Hindu communal theme was that of the 'Hindu revival' in the late 17th and early 18th century. The Maratha revolt under Shivaji, the establishment of Maratha empire under the Peshwas, the rebellions by several Rajput rajas against Aurangzeb and the struggle of Sikh gurus, against Mughal domination were described as 'Hindu revolts' against Muslim 'domination' and Hindu struggle to regain Hindu 'honour' and 'glory'. The communalists described the rebellions, revolts and struggles for territory and political power by petty zamindars, rajas and Maratha chieftains as Hindu struggle and the states they founded as Hindu Kingdoms. This entire approach was summed up by V.D. Savarkar in 1923 when he described the 18th century Maratha struggle as "the Great Movement of National Liberation" and wrote:

'In this prolonged furious conflict our people became intensely conscious of ourselves as Hindus and were welded into a nation to an extent unknown in our history... Sanatanists, Satnamis, Sikhs, Aryas, Anaryas, Marathas and Madrasis, Brahmins and Panchmas - all suffered as Hindus and triumphed as Hindus... The enemies hated us as Hindus and the whole family of peoples and races, of sects and creeds that flourished from Atak to Cuttack was suddenly individualized into a single Being.'

Muslim communalists created their own Golden Age. But feeling that it was not so easy to glorify India's medieval past and unwilling to praise the 'Hindu', i.e., ancient period, they harkened back to the 'Golden Age of Islam' or to Arabic and Turkish achievements of the middle ages. Thus the heroic myths, the great figures and cultural achievements they appealed to belonged to medieval West Asian history. They thus tended to put greater emphasis on their 'Muslimness' than their Indianness. The Muslim communalists also developed their own version of 'the decline and fall' of the Muslims. While Hindus were going up during British rule, they said, Muslims were 'falling' and getting 'ruined' not as a part of the Indian people but as a community because they had lost their political power. Their social condition, it was said, was becoming pitiable; their culture, religion and economic interests were threatened with ruin. They were increasingly becoming weak and helpless.

This theme of ‘Muslim melancholy’, as Altaf Hussain Hali put it, was picked up and used politically in support of the demand for Pakistan by Muslim League leaders. One of the League’s major ideologues, Z.A. Suleri, wrote in the 1940s that Muslims were facing the danger of being ‘drowned’ or ‘blotted out’. By the end of the 19th century, ‘the century – long prosperity and patronage of the new power had made the Hindus solid, strong, educated....on the other hand, while the century-long suppression had thrown the Muslims into the very mire of misery.’

21.4 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NATIONALIST AND COMMUNALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

The professional nationalist historians and many early nationalists contributed unconsciously to communal historiography. They looked for heroes to inspire the Indian people and found them in those medieval figures who had fought against oppression and in defence of their own states and territories. This was because, on the one hand, they wanted to express their nationalism and, on the other, academics and early nationalists did not want to antagonize the British rulers who frowned upon any effort to treat as heroes those who had fought against the British. For example, the British immediately put a ban on any favourable writing on Siraj-ud-daulah, Tipu Sultan, Tantia Tope or Rani of Jhansi. I have, in another place, described this as ‘vicarious’ nationalism. Unfortunately, the communalists used this vicarious nationalism to propagate their view of Indian history. Instead of treating Rana Pratap, or Shivaji, or Guru Gobind Singh as fighters against oppression and for defence of their people or territory or as local patriots, they were declared to be national heroes because they fought against ‘foreigners’. But how were the Mughals Foreigners? The latter could not be described as foreigners by no other definition except that they were Muslims. It is also important to note that the nationalists not only declared Rana Pratap, Shivaji, and Guru Gobind Singh as national heroes but also Asoka, Akbar, Tipu Sultan, Rani of Jhansi and all others, Hindu or Muslim, who had fought against the British in 1857. Later, Khudi Ram Bose, Lokamanya Tilak, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Bose, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Bhagat Singh and Chandra Shekhar Azad became heroes of the nationalists.

There was another aspect in which nationalists differed from the communalists in their treatment of the past. They too made a positive appraisal of ancient Indian society, polity, economy and culture. But they also presented a positive picture of the medieval period, while making a critique of the negative features of both ancient and medieval periods. The nationalist glorification of the past was part of the effort to bolster national self-confidence and pride, especially in the face of the colonial ideological effort to undermine them and create a psychology of inferiority and dependence. The Hindu communalists praised or idealised the ancient period in order to contrast it with the fall and decline during the medieval period and thus create anti-Muslim feelings. The nationalists went to the past looking for positive features in order to prove India’s fitness for modern parliamentary democracy, modern civic and political rights, popular representation through elections and self-government. Nationalist historians like K.P. Jayaswal, P.N. Banerjee, B.K. Sarkar, U.N. Ghosal, D.R. Bhandarkar and even the early R.C. Mazumdar emphasized the democratic, constitutional, non-despotic and even republican, non-religious and secular, and rational elements of the ancient Indian polity and social life. Thus, in nationalist hands, the glorification of ancient Indian society was a weapon in the anti-imperialist struggle. Despite its unscientific features and the potential for mischief in a multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-caste country, it had a certain historically progressive content. Moreover, the nationalists readily adopted and accepted scientific criteria for the evaluation and the further

development of their views. The communalists, on the other hand, used the ancient past to create and consolidate communal feelings. They also held up for praise some of the most negative features of ancient Indian society and polity. They would also not tolerate the scientific treatment or criticism of any of its aspects.

The communalists tended to underplay the role of colonialism and put greater emphasis on the adversarial relationship with the other religious community. They were, in general, critical of the actual national movement and its secularism. While the Hindu communalists declared it to be pro-Muslim, or at least indulging in 'Muslim appeasement', the Muslim communalists accused it of being anti-Muslim or at least of being Hindu controlled and therefore of being an instrument of Hindu domination. The Hindu communalists were in particular critical of the Moderate nationalists of late 19th century who had initiated the economic critique of colonialism and laid the basis of modern secularism. The only major critique of colonialism that both communalists made was that it had introduced modernity or modern thought based on rationality and science and scientific outlook.

The communalists also defined nationalism not in economic or political terms, as the national movement did, but in cultural terms or as cultural nationalism based on Hindu or Muslim culture. Consequently, they traced modern nationalism to Bankim Chandra or Swami Dayanand or Sayed Ahmed Khan rather than to early national leaders, such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Justice Ranade and Surendranath Banerjea.

21.5 CRITIQUE OF COMMUNALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

The communal view of history is virtually dissolved if history is studied in its wider sense. For example, economic history reveals class interests, class solidarity, and class antagonisms which cut across religious frontiers. A Hindu peasant had much more in common with a Muslim peasant than he had with a Hindu zamindar or moneylender. A Muslim weaver of Agra had far more in common with a Hindu weaver than with a Muslim noble or king. In other words, division of society between those who produced economic surplus and those who appropriate it would form multi-religious groups on both sides of the economic line.

Social and economic history reveals that basically there was no Muslim rule under the Sultans or Mughals. All the Muslims did not form the ruling class, nor all the Hindus the ruled classes. The Muslim masses were as poor and as oppressed as the Hindu masses. Moreover, both of them were looked down upon as low creatures by the rulers, nobles, chiefs, and zamindars, whether Hindu or Muslim. Social history would show that if Hindus were divided by caste, among Muslims the Sharif Muslims behaved as a superior caste over the Ajlaf or lower class Muslims. History of administration would reveal continuity in the administrative structures of the Mughals and Marathas, and so on. It would show how wrong it is to talk of Hindu or Muslim character of ancient or medieval states. Social and cultural history would bring out the forces of cultural cooperation and integration and the evolution of a composite culture in medieval India as also in ancient India. They would also show that in medieval as also modern times an upper class Muslim had far more in common culturally with an upper class Hindu than he had with a lower class Muslim. Or that a Punjabi Hindu stood closer culturally to a Punjabi Muslim than to a Bengali Hindu. Social and cultural history would also reveal social divisions and diversities other than those based on religion. For example, those based on sect or caste. There was the fierce struggle between the Right-hand castes and the Left-hand castes in 18th century South India. Would one be justified in describing this conflict in terms of a two-nation theory? Even a careful study of political history would bring out that the politics of Indian states, as politics the world over, were moved mainly by considerations of economic and political interests and not by considerations of religion.

Then, as today, rulers as well as rebels, used religious appeal as an outer colouring to disguise the hard facts of material interests and ambitions.

Moreover, political events and movements should be placed in their basic social and economic setting. We should ask such questions as who decides, who dominates, who benefits from a political system? How does a system operate? Why are one set of policies followed and not others? One should, for example, compare Aurangzeb's and Shivaji's policies towards the peasants or merchants and bankers. Or what political, social and economic relationships did the state systems of ancient or medieval India support? How were economic gains, social prestige, and political power distributed among different social classes and groups in ancient or medieval period or, say, in Rana Pratap's state. To what extent did the Turks or later Mughal rulers disturb the existing patterns of political, social, and economic power? Even such a simple demographic fact as that the population of the Rajputs in Rajputana was only 6.4% in 1901 reveals many things. Similarly, social analysis of modern political movements would show that the social base of the Hindu and Muslim communalists was the same. Also they shared a common, basically pro-imperialist political approach.

21.6 SUMMARY

To sum up, a scientific study of history would clearly show not only that communal approach to history is factually and analytically wrong, but also that this communal approach was and is the product of unscientific politics and was generated by the foreign rulers and later used by the communalists for their own political purposes. It is based on certain stereotypes which were created about the Indians by the colonialist historians and commentators. It divided the Indian history along religious lines, the ancient period supposedly belonging to the Hindus whereas the medieval period to be considered as property of the Muslims. The communalist historians and politicians – both Hindus and Muslims – accepted this interpretation of Indian past and filled it with more stereotypes portraying the two antagonistic communities facing each other for centuries. Such a view of history was responsible for creating social tension and disharmony among the Indian people.

21.7 EXERCISES

- 1) Discuss the important features of communalist historiography.
- 2) What are the differences between nationalist and communalist historiography?
- 3) Discuss the relationship between communalist and colonialist views of history.