



INTERNATIONAL LAW
JOURNAL

**WHITE BLACK
LEGAL LAW
JOURNAL
ISSN: 2581-
8503**

Peer - Reviewed & Refereed Journal

The Law Journal strives to provide a platform for discussion of International as well as National Developments in the Field of Law.

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ANALYSING THE ROLE OF MEDIA AND INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES FOR PREVENTING AND CURBING THE COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

The history of sectarian violence called communal violence in India- has been written up as a secondary story, entirely subsidiary to the main drama of India's struggle from its colonisers. It appeared as minor elements in this drama, associated usually with the machinations of the colonial ruling class. They were not histories of confused struggle and mutilated bodies, sacrifice and loss, of the tentative forging or new identities and loyalties or of new resolutions and new ambitions. Rather they tended to be accounts of the origins or causes of partition or the investigations of the political mistakes, which left the course of Indian history unaltered.

IN INDIA, communalism and communal violence have created huge problem since long. Communal violence or communal clashes are behavioural manifestation of communalism. Communal violence or anti-minority violence has been a recurring feature in the history of this country. The major form of communal violence in India has been seen with respect of the two communities, i.e., Hindus and Muslims. In India, communal violence has been witnessed because of religion, caste, language, regions, etc. Whatever may be the root cause, the result is always loss of life and property. In India, communalism is in the form of fascism. Communalism is mainly born out of misuse of religious sentiments of one's community. In India, the problem of communalism is of political origin largely. Communalism explodes in the shape of communal violence in almost all parts of the country. Today, communalism has become a menace to the unity of the Indian people as revealed in many states. Now it has become a nation-wide problem.

KEY WORDS: Communal Violence, Riots, Media Etc.

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INTRODUCTION

Violence creates spaces of fear and prohibits the free flow of individual will and exercise of agency. That is, it denies agency, thereby inhibiting formation of subjectivity expected to evolve in the context of the perceived national space. Fear, in other words, is highly spatialised. Perceptions of relative threat inform decisions on spatial behaviour. People do not merely exist fixed in a single location, instead they engage in a multitude of productive and consumptive activities as they go about their daily lives. This necessitates moving outside the boundaries of their own ethnically exclusive neighbourhood. They may also have to criss-cross the territory of the 'other.' In consequence, many individuals have to negotiate the spatial realities of violence and fear on a daily basis and develop appropriate coping strategies designed to offset potential danger. How do victims and survivors reconstruct their modes of living and being after such episodes of actual and symbolic violence?

When individuals and households have suffered the trauma of communal violence, sometimes more than once or in more than one generation, how does the process of recovery reshape the way in which they look at themselves? How does it reconfigure their place in their own community and their relations with others? How do they construct their identity under such conditions? How do they stress, re-stress, draw and re-draw their boundaries after such episodes? Is there a deliberate attempt -depending on contextual demands- to conceal or reveal those elements of their identity which are the targets of such hatred? How does the experience of violence reshape the organization of relations between neighbours, communities and state itself? How do religious minorities perceive themselves in relation to other Indians in a country which simultaneously promotes a constitutionally bounded secular discourse and a communal discourse which considers them as aliens? How do the memories of violence restructure the organisation of events or the use of space? Is there a difference in the way in which violence affects men and women and in the way in which their dress codes, norms of public and interactive behaviour and mobility gets re-fashioned?³

Thus by foregrounding the conceptual categories of subjectivity and nationstate, this thesis expose how subjectivities transit in the dynamics of power and powerlessness involved in the act of violence. This lays bare the myth of the nationstate and in due course brings out the

³ A.P. Maheshwari, *Communalism: Handed with a Difference* 12 (Ajanta Books International, New Delhi, 2000).

connection between large-scale events of political turmoil and the everyday life worlds. Violent attacks do not occur in a social vacuum but are conditioned by a web of social relations that stretch beyond the individual. An interrogation of normalised complacency shows how the commonplace, the everyday and the institutionalised normalcy end up as sites of betrayal and violation⁴.

1.1 GENESIS OF COMMUNALISM

Communalism is a negative term, harmful to the healthy growth of people and the nation. It creates enmity, hatred, violence and revenge, which hamper the growth and development. It develops at the cost of human values adversely affecting the property of the community. It broke India into two parts leaving behind memories and incalculable wounds and loss of property. Communalism is generally seen in the context of acrimony and conflict between the two communities. In India, communalism has implied discord, tension and conflict between its prominent communities, i.e., Hindus, Muslims and Christians. It has resulted in violence, terror and discrimination against minority communities. It is the vital cause of Hindu- Muslim communal riots. The meaning of communalism can be understood in a more intrinsic sense if we compare it with the concept of nationalism, which underlies the principle of complete fusion of all the class, caste, religious/regional identities towards a super ordained goal of an integrated and synergic system, where all the sub- groups, sub-systems work in perfect coordination and cohesion and the net holistic outcome is positive despite various entropies of the individual identities. Since communalism is understood as implying hatred and enmity towards the other, it disturbs the peace, and it is also the cause of communal violence. It is, therefore, necessary to understand what communalism is. The word „communalism“ is derived from the word „communal“, which in itself has been derived from the word „commune“, and „community“. According to Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary the meaning of the word, „communal“ is

- i. “Of or relating to a community”;
- ii. “Participated in, shared, or used in common by members of a group or community”;
- and
- iii. “Of, relating to, or based on racial or cultural groups.”

⁴ R.N.P. Singh, Riots and Wrongs, Islam and Religious Riots: A Case Study 97-98 (India First Foundation, New Delhi, 2004).

The same dictionary defines the word „community“ as “a feeling of group solidarity.” The Random House Dictionary of English Language defines the term „community“ as a social group sharing common characteristics or interests and perceived or perceiving itself as distinct in some respect from the larger society within which it exists.” G.D. Mitchell, defines the term „community“ as originally the term „community“ denoted a collectivity of people who occupied a geographical area; people who were together engaged in economic and political activities and who essentially constituted a self- governing social unit with some common values and experiencing feelings of belonging to one another.” To be more specific term „community“ has been defined as “a concept used in sectarian, territorial and functional context about the persons who are in social interaction within a geographical area.”⁵

1.2 COMMUNAL TENSIONS AND COMMUNAL INCIDENTS

Tension is generally interpreted in the form of mutual animosities between the two communities. Tension is produced by political use of religion and generally develops in a particular area on some local issues, which plays a key role in causing communal violence. Communal tension arises out of frustration of one class against the other. All mutual relations between the communities are snapped, during the period, when and where communal tension prevails. An intense atmosphere is generated and often, actual violence takes place. Communal tension develops over a period with the interaction of psychological, historical and economic factors. The situation gets further crucial if there exists an entrepreneurial class of one community competing with the monopoly of the businesspersons of other community. The tension flowing through many stages of conflict comes to a flash point where rumour is enough to trigger off communal violence. A communal incident between two communities takes place mostly on petty matters, i.e., causing an accident on the road, use of loudspeakers, eve teasing, or similar instances often spark off the communal fire.

Such an incident creates disturbance in that particular locality and creates tensions among the residents of that locality, and though mostly localized, often spreads to other areas of the town. News of the communal tension spreads to other areas of the entire town or village where both groups are staying. If both the groups start assaulting persons and attacking the property of one against another, it may be termed as communal incident as distinguished from the communal tension. Presence of large population of the minority population in a town

⁵ Anamika Shrivastava, Communal Violence and Administration 25 (Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 1999).

intensifies political rivalry between the elites of the two communities who try to mobilize the voters by appealing to their respective communal identities. The Meerut riot of 1982 is an example on this point. Disputes also arise where a public place is encroached by a particular community and the administration remains indifferent to it⁶.

1.3 COMMUNAL VIOLENCE AND STATE MACHINERY

Communalism has also made serious inroads into the state machineries. Many officials openly compromise with supported communal forces and remain largely ineffective in the presence of operational realities. The increasing communalization of state machineries has been causing concern to all democratic minded citizens. The inactivity of state machinery in dealing with communal violence has been largely observed in the massacre of over 4,000 Muslims in Nellie (Assam) in February 1983; the massacre of more than 3,000 Sikhs after the assassination of Indira Gandhi on October 30, 1984; and brutal killing of more than 2,000 Muslims in Gujarat after the Godhra incident in 2002. Many officials of state machinery betray communal tendencies and encourage communal forces directly or indirectly. For examples, the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) in Moradabad (1980) and Meerut riots (1987) and the police in Bombay (now renamed Mumbai (1992-93) and Gujarat riots (2002), directly participated against the minorities. In other places, as in Punjab (after 1981), Delhi (1984) and in Bhagalpur riots (1989), they remained passive spectators of communal burning, looting and killings. The evolving political culture and „selective performance“ of government agencies has further aggravated the problem. If Chief Ministers (CM) and the Governors had shown strong resolve in throttling the genocide in Bhagalpur, Meerut, Ahmedabad, etc., it would certainly have had a strong impact on the psyche of the police force and the administrative agencies.

The violation of institutional neutrality is quite apparent at not only the level of the Central Government but also State Government, municipal, district and sub-division levels. Discrimination is perpetrated and religious hatred is practiced not only by various religious communities against each other but also by the state through its agencies. Almost all religious communities have experienced discrimination in various forms from certain sections of the Hindu majority. The Report of the „Special Rapporteur of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief

⁶ George A. Hillary, „Definition of Community: Areas of Agreement“, 20 Rural Sociology 118 (June 1955); see also K.D. Gangarade, Community Organisation in India 1 (Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, 1971).

(1981)⁷ confirms it. The inactivity of state dealing with communal violence has played a major role in the spread of communal riots in the country. The state machinery has been growing lax in their treatment of communal riots. The states alone possess the instruments in successfully counter the communal violence⁷.

1.4 COMMUNAL VIOLENCE: ROLE OF MEDIA

IN DEMOCRATIC societies, when there is a wide heterogeneity among the citizens this often results in conflicts and violence, sometimes leading to largescale communal violence and loss of life and properties. India has also had a long history of communal violence among the various communities. In this situation, media occasionally plays a harmful role in fomenting communal violence. We find many biases in media reporting. Since communalism is rapidly increasing, threatening our pluralist society, media is also affected by this virus. In Independent India, it is obvious that the media has also been deeply implicated in the production of communal violence. It has been found that certain types of media elements have highlighted minority communities particularly Muslims on communal lines. Besides the political class and related segments of Indian society for promoting communal violence time and again whether it is Hindu v. Muslim, Sikh or Christian; the media has also been charged with manifesting communal frenzy along with politics, among the various communities. Once communal violence breaks out the media plays an important role and often it is responsible to sustain the communal riot for a longer period, as was in the case of Gujarat riots in 2002. The media is the main source of information regarding the occurrence of communal violence. People are influenced by what they read and what they see on screen. In the context of communal violence, media has a strong pull on mass awareness. Instruments of media play very important roles for communal propaganda and persuasion-messages. News papers in India are most directly and repeatedly implicated in the entire process of aggravating communal violence. This chapter explores ways in which media is responsible in fomenting communal violence and up to what extent it is propagating communal hatred and communal enmity among the communities of India (especially between Hindus and Muslims) which are causing communal conflicts as well as communal violence.⁸

⁷ Jitendra Narayan, *Communal Riots in India: A Case Study of an Indian State* 5 (Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1992).=

⁸ Ashish Banerjee, "Comparative Curfew: Changing Dimensions of Communal Politics in India" in Veena Das (ed.), *Mirror of Violence: Communities Riots and Survivors in South Asia* 65 (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1990).

(a) **Role of the Print Media**

The print media includes press and the word „press“ technically denotes the newspapers, pamphlets, magazines, etc. The press in our country was a pillar of national strength and aspirations until the early 1930s. It kept itself largely away from the virus of communalism or religious fanaticism. Now much of this seems to be washed out. The media, especially the press play important role in fomenting the communal violence at all stages including:

- i. the planning and rehearsal;
- ii. the instigation of riotous activity; and
- iii. the interpretation phase. In Independent India, the regional press has played a crucial role in the projection of Hindu-Muslim communal violence.

This was however not so during the freedom struggle, but its attitude changed after independence. After the partition, the language newspapers adopted an anti-Muslim bias in reporting communal violence. On the other hand, the English press still occupies the preeminent position; its approach to communal problems is much more sedate and so-bar than that of the language press. The press generally reflects the prevailing moods of its readers. The press does not attempt to investigate and ascertain the actual problems of the minority communities; on the contrary it has been revealed that misplaced stereotypes and baseless myths about them are freely propagated. During communal riots, the press generally lifts news from unreliable sources and publishes rumours and gossips. It can be said that, by and large the press in India, never played the role of cementing the gulf between the Hindu-Muslim communities even in cultural, social and literacy fields. In recent years, a section of press has not hesitated to take sides of one community in matters of religious or caste conflicts and during the last few decades, the language press in the North and even some of the largely circulated English newspapers became almost a tool in the hands of various communal organizations. In fact some papers, in conspiracy with communal forces, launched a determined attack on secularism and democracy and whipped up a communal frenzy in the country and also launched a battle to undermine citizen's faith in our Constitution and in democratic values. These papers incite passions, hatred and deep rooted jealousies of one community against another. As a result, the minds of people are poisoned and prejudiced and hatred is retained permanently. The language newspapers play important role in disseminating raw prejudices against Muslims and also publish provocative materials against them. We also see gross discrimination when it came to penalizing people for inciting communal feelings. The Marathi daily Saamna has been regularly publishing inflammatory material. It is unfortunate that during the period of communal violence, some sections of our so-called „National Press“ have also aggravated the

tense situation by publishing irresponsible reports.

(b) Role of the Electronic Media

Electronic media as a tool of mass media is fully exploited to highlight such aspects of life between the communities which divide them on communal lines. The impact of the electronic media is more powerful and enduring than any other means of conveying the message of communal harmony. One medium, in particular Television (TV) emerges as most crucial in fomenting communal atmosphere in the country. Since the late 80s, many charges have been made that other forms of media were politically biased or promoted communal tension. However, such charges were against Doordarshan (DD) precisely, because it was under centralized national control. Numerous instances could be presented of the ways in which electronic media have constructed images that have been or could have appropriated for communal ends; some of these images are consciously constructed to promote communal strife between the communities. In Ahmedabad riots (1969), rumours played an important role in worsening the situation. But no attempts were made by the radio to counter the rumours. The radio simply repeated: "Don't believe in rumours" advice and broadcasted various appeals of political leaders. But no authoritative news was given to counter the rumours. It was found that „the running thread behind almost All India Radio (AIR)/DD programmes concerning Punjab after the army action was an attempt to appeal to Hindu communal views, reaction, opinions prejudices and attitudes. It may be argued that this is a part of a still bigger design now too obvious to use AIR and DD to encourage, strengthen and consolidate Hindu revivalism. The slogan "Khoon Ka Badla Khoon" which was headline in Sandesh's front page after Godhra incident, shouted by a mob mourning the death of Indira Gandhi in Delhi in 1984, and was broadcasted by DD.³⁶ DD has been severally criticized for several items of misreporting of communal rioting during riots of 1990-91.⁹

1.5 MEDIA AND ITS RESPONSIBILITY

The four pillars, which sustain the edifice of parliamentary democratic system, are the legislature, the executive, the judiciary and the media known as the „Fourth Estate“. The media is one of the institutions which have to play a more decisive role and contribute much more to make the nation really secular and democratic and help in national integration. Media plays

⁹ V.N. Rai, *Combating Communal Conflict: Perception of Police Neutrality During Hindu-Muslim Riots in India* 17 (Manas Publications, New Delhi, 2008)

most important role in strengthening democratic values and democracy itself. But it seems except for few papers and journals, media has been communalized. The seeds of hatred are sown in tender minds through historical and media distortion. The media can play a major role in moderating and calming down public feeling and in reducing the gap between fact and perception. The media plays significant role in reporting events in democratic society like India. In fact, the media not only disseminate information but also help in shaping public opinion. The media has a role to play in information and educating the people during and after the communal violence. The media is undoubtedly a powerful organ that can do much to unite the people and the nation, make the citizens to respect the Constitution and all the institutions created under it, enlighten the people on the programmes and policies of the various political parties, show which can help to make the nation strong and powerful, which ones will bring the various sections of people together and which ones may divide them, create animosities, antagonize the people and lead to communal tension/violence.

One of the objectives of media is to understand popular feelings and give expression to it; another is to arouse among the people certain desirable sentiments and attitudes and the third is fearlessly to explore popular defects and most important objective of the media is to educate public in right perspectives on problems of national and international importance and thereby build enlightened public opinion. It is true that one of the functions of the press is to inform the public of all that is happening in the country. But the press must also know that it is an „institution“ in a democracy whose primary duty should be and has to be to uphold the Constitution and all the institutions it has brought into being, and ensure integrity of the nation. It is not its function to help communal organizations/parties or groups whose purpose is to create dissensions, divisions in our society, to show seeds of hatred and discord among its various sections of the people and to turn the country into communal atmosphere. Press has to be socially responsible and has to reflect the aspirations of the people. Press has to abide by the laid down professional code of conduct to promote responsible journalism.

The press should ventilate the legitimate grievances of the people, faithfully report events that would make the government and the police wiser and enable them to bring timely assistance to the distressed segments of the country. The press has to reorient itself for a constructive and educative role. There is need of complete code for a politically free, socially responsible and economically non-monopolistic media press. The media has the responsibility to bring to light the undesirable acts of the communal forces and police and make public aware, so that they

might react suitably to bring about desired changes. Through judicial pronouncements and international covenants to which India is a signatory, this includes the citizen's right to inform and be informed. The right to know is a precious democratic right and it is through this means that the citizen is ensured participation, transparency and accountability. The Indian media is privileged to enjoy a wide measure of freedom by this way; it must exercise this freedom with responsibility in matters relating to public order, decency, and morality, defamation and incitement to an offence¹⁰.

1.6 ROLE OF INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES

When the communal atmosphere is tense, because of the anti-social elements, and if they are likely to exploit the situation, identification and preventive actions against them should be applied. This can be done through the IA. The IA as well as police must remain extra vigilant on occasions which are likely to generate communal tension. Often, it is heard after communal violence that the IA did not gather their intelligence properly and hence proper action could not be taken in time. The IA also complains that they had provided the appropriate information that trouble is likely to break out and information was passed on to the appropriate authorities but no action was taken in time. For instance, in case of Bhagalpur riots of 1989, the IA had played their role properly. However, the administration did not act promptly on the information. In Sitamarhi riots (1992) also, the administration was found to be negligent. Same happened in Bhiwandi riots of 1970¹¹.

The Report of Madon Commission (1970) had also justified it. On contrary, the Report of Srikrishna Commission on Mumbai riots (1992-93) has cited that IA did not give information on time about the possible damage to Babri Masjid. The Commission further stated that police intelligence machinery could not trace the communally inciting material, both from the Hindus and the Muslims. The demolition of Babri Masjid appeared to have caught the state administration and police machinery totally cold. The intelligence inputs obtained by the State Government through its IA neither indicated nor led to the review that there could be damage to, or demolition of the Babri Masjid. It is also true that like the administrators, policemen and others, the intelligence people also have their own perceptions about the communities. These perceptions are often hostile and such perceptions affect the intelligence gathering hence,

¹⁰ Pradeep Mandhav, *Communalism in India: A Paradigm Shift to Indian Politics* 4 (Authors Press, Delhi, 2000).

¹¹ V.V. Singh, *Communal Violence* 79 (Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 1993).

proper intelligence is not forthcoming on such occasions. Generally, Muslims are often seen as aggressors, the intelligence people feel that it is Muslim who are preparing for the communal violence. Their defensive preparations are seen as aggressive preparations and the majority community's aggressive preparations are seen as defensive ones. The intelligence officers need to be given proper re-orientation training to make intelligence gathering a more reliable operation. Effective action should be taken in advance after intelligence information against potential perpetrators of communal violence is gathered.¹²

CONCLUSION

The media sharpens the division of people on the basis of religion and keeps communal problem alive. The publications of media weaken the authority of the government and a sense of illegitimacy of governing social and administrative institutions is injected in the minds of the public. Finally, the communal violence turns into „we-them“ relation. The communal violence in remote areas that remains unreported has no adverse reaction, unlike communal violence reported from nearby locality with multiplier effects due to massive publicity of the media. Both the print and the electronic media have created over time a vertically and closely linked system of cultural, social and political communications. In modern society, media plays an important role not only in matters related to communal violence, but in moulding the character, attitude and behaviour pattern of the readers and viewers. Media can act as a form of social control. It can reduce the role of religion, caste, language and regionalism in Indian society. Their aim should always be to strengthen the unity and integrity of the nation, expose grievances of the oppressed, and strive for getting justice to those who deserve it.

Communalism is the negation of secularism and democracy. It is largely a political phenomenon. Its genesis is in politics, not in religion. While it is the product of a particular social situation, to overcome that situation it has to be opposed and eradicated, otherwise the situation cannot be transformed. The problem of communalism is a long-term problem, which requires intense and complex struggle on the political front and in the front of ideas. Thus, secularism is an effective antidote to communalism. Communalism as an ideology is the ultimate source of communal violence. Though it is important to combat communal organizations and communal politics, it is equally vital to counter communal ideology.

¹² Supra note 6 at 15; see also Anirban Kashyap, *Communalism and Constitution* 226 (Lancers Books, New Delhi, 1988).

Communalism cannot be defeated without taking up the caste issue, without working to unite the oppressed castes and the Muslims at the political and social level against the system of caste- class oppression of which they are the common victims. All communalisms whether majority or minority must be opposed simultaneously. Communal violence is the consequence of the prior spread of communal thinking. It is a challenge to India's secularism, composite culture and unity in diversity and it poses a threat to the unity and integrity of our country. National integration is the basis for India's survival. If communalism and communal ideology remains active communal violence can be incited whenever needed. Thus, the penetration of communalism and communal ideology has to be checked and eliminated. We must try to reduce the frequency and intensity of communalism and communal violence¹³.

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¹³ A.A. Engineer, "To Preserve Democracy and Unity Reject Communal Politics", The Indian Express, October 19, 1989.