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Siddiqui, Kalim

Institutional Communalism

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EDITORIAL

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PHONES: (022) 2887 3038/41

FAX: (022) 2887 3038

epwrf@epwrf.in

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**Institutional Communalism**

I have read with considerable interest Pritam Singh's article "Institutional Communalism in India" (EPW, 11 July 2015). On this important issue I would like to quote Singh: "Hindu bias in the working of the police and judiciary in the way evidence regarding the massacre of the Sikhs in 1984 in Delhi was collected (or not collected) and interpreted ... transcends a specific political party's control of state power at any point of time." It remains an ugly fact that the security forces in the northern states always sided with the Hindu communalists during riots. For example, during the Hindu-Muslim riots in Meerut in 1987 and also in Bhagalpur in 1989, police collusion with the Hindu extremists was observed, but no action was taken due to lack of evidence or lack of will to prosecute the criminals.

The purpose of this article is to highlight the issue of "institutional communalism" in India. This is particularly a very timely article because it extensively discusses the communalism and discrimination problems in modern India, where justice is constantly denied to minority communities not only during riots, but also by the judiciary. For example, the way Teesta Setalvad is being hounded because of her fight for justice for the victims of the 2002 Gujarat riots. The recent CBI raid at her residence is clear misuse of power to intimidate and harass her. In order to build an equal society, there is need to respect justice and equal rights, and see to it that it is not only being delivered, but that the whole process is transparent.

Another very important point the article focuses on is the question of equating minority communalism with majority communalism. Singh argues that "By equating two unequals, the discourse of equating majority and minority communalism ends up further reinforcing the power of majority communalism and, thus, sharpening unequal power relations... Therefore, even if it is recognised that minority communalism also poses dangers, the discourse that equates majority and minority communalism remains dangerously flawed because of the denial by this discourse of institutional power that is vested with majority communalism."

I agree with the above arguments that the difference between majority and minority communalism is very important

to understand in terms of existing power relations. Majority communalism is more dangerous because they have more resources to perpetuate a dominant situation in this battle between unequals. Minority communalism is quite different from majority communalism. It is largely scattered and region-specific. It is often based on grievance and resentment against injustice and violence faced at the hands of the police and government. Muslim communal parties, like the Indian Union Muslim League in Kerala or Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen in Hyderabad, outside their constituencies, have increasingly taken to a vocal defence of secularism and extend their support in favour of secular candidates. On the other hand, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), with its monolithic ideology, was set up in 1925 on the basis of prejudice and hate against minorities, particularly Muslims.

Finally, it seems that for majority communalism, right from its inception, its goal has been political power, but sought through multiple strategies by combining electoral politics with a totally different outlook on history, religion and culture, often based on myth rather than any scientific evidence, and organising society on the basis of religion rather than classes. The RSS is basically committed to this extremist right-wing Hindutva ideology, which is rigid, sectarian and hostile to minorities, especially Muslims and Christians.

**Dr. Kalim Siddiqui**

University of Huddersfield

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