

**13. Communal consciousness arose as a result of socio-political and economic transformation of colonial India. Examine.**

**Approach:**

- Briefly define communal consciousness in Indian context.
- Then highlight how it has socio-economic and political roots.
- Discuss the contribution of colonialism in this.

**Answer:**

Communalism is the belief that people who follow same religion have similar political, economic, social and cultural interests and these interests are divergent from interests of the followers of other religion.

Rise of communal consciousness in India was a modern phenomenon when the politics of popular participation and mobilization emerged, especially after 1857. This consciousness arose as a result of the transformation of the Indian society under colonialism and the need to struggle against it.

**Roots in colonial socio-political transformation**

- **Policy of divide and rule** which manifested itself in partition of Bengal in 1905, feature of separate electorate under Government of India Act, 1909, communal award in 1932 etc. Communal press & persons and agitations were shown extraordinary tolerance to ensure that emergence of a common united feeling of nationalism becomes difficult.
- **Rise of revivalism in religions:** The reform movements arose as a result of introduction of modern education in India. However, it also led to revivalist movements as well in both Hindu and Muslim Communities. For e.g. The Wahabis crusade against all non-Muslims and aim to establish Dar-ul-Islam was as odious to Hindus as Dayanand's aim of Shuddhi was unpalatable to Muslims.

**Roots in colonial Character of Indian economy**

- Communalism was the by-product of the under-development of Indian economy under colonial rule. Economic stagnation due to absence of modern industrial development and under-growth of social sector like health and education created huge unemployment. Especially educated middle and lower middle class were affected. This created a fertile ground for division and antagonism within Indian society.
- In pursuit of the government jobs, middle class also used communal card to enhance their capacity to compete. This gave a certain aura of validity to communal politics.
- As the agricultural growth became stagnant, the rural youth flocked town to get government jobs and professions. This widened the social base of communalism, covering rural upper strata of peasants and landlords.

However, communal consciousness was not just the product of colonial rule. They could not have used it unless they found some fractures within the society. In fact, nationalist themselves introduced strong Hindu religious element in their propagandas such as Tilak's propagation of the Shivaji and Ganapati festivals, Aurobindo Ghose's semi-mystical concept of India as mother and nationalism as a religion etc. People like Syed Ahmed Khan, who despite of having scientific and rational approach, projected Indian Muslims as a separate community having interest different from others.

Associations such as Muslims League and Hindu Mahasabha were established to look after the interests of particular communities. Religion was also used to mobilize masses after 1937.

Thus, communalism in India arose as a result of socio-political and economic transformation of colonial India, but was also a product of divisions within the Indian society.