Communalism: Introduction
Etymology of the Word

- Communal + ism
- Communal = of, by, or belonging to the people of a community; shared or participated in by the public (dictionary.com)
- Ism = a distinct doctrine or practice (dictionary.com)
- Communalism = loyalty and commitment to the interests of your own minority or ethnic group rather than to society as a whole
What is communalism?

A Story to Help Understand:

There are many aspects to our identity. You are a girl or a boy, all of you are young persons, you belong to a certain village, city district or state and speak certain languages. You are Indians but you are also world citizens. Income levels differ from family to family, hence all of us belong to some social class or the other.
Communalism

Most of us have a religion, and caste may play an important role in our lives. In other words, our identities have numerous features, they are complex. There are times, however, when people attach greater significance to certain chosen aspects of their identity such as religion. This in itself cannot be described as communal.
Communalism

Communalism refers to a politics that seeks to unify one community around a religious identity in hostile opposition to another community. It seeks to define this community identity as fundamental and fixed. It attempts to consolidate this identity and present it as natural - as if people were born into the identity, as if the identities do not evolve through history over time.
Communalism

In order to unify the community, communalism suppresses distinctions within the community and emphasizes the essential unity of the community against other communities. One could say communalism nurtures a politics of hatred for an identified “other”-- “Hindus” in the case of Muslim communalism, and “Muslims” in the case of Hindu communalism. This hatred feeds a politics of violence.
Communalism

Communalism, then, is a particular kind of politicization of religious identity, an ideology that seeks to promote conflict between religious communities. In the context of a multi-religious country, the phrase “religious nationalism” can come to acquire a similar meaning. In such a country, any attempt to see a religious community as a nation would mean sowing the seeds of antagonism against some other religion/s.

(http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/2087/17/17_conclusion%20.pdf)
Communalism and Religion

- Religious identity is generally inherited at birth, one given to a child by his parents and family, and then reinforced by the state, as for instance, through the mechanism of the census that demands that a person identity himself or herself as belonging to a single particular tradition or community, and now allowing for any other way of religiously identifying oneself. (Source: shared religious traditions in India)
Inevitably, the formation of religious and communal identities in this way is conducive to inter-communal competition and conflict, as each group seeks to identify itself in contradistinction to seemingly menacing “others.” Powerful elements within such groups carefully patrol their borders and regard overlapping communal or religious identities as threatening to weaken or sabotage the community, and hence is to be opposed.
Continued

• This is precisely what a range of Islamic and Hindu revivalist movements have been seeking to do in India in the last century and more.
Communalism in Real Life

- Consequences of Communalism

We are not complete without “u” and “I”
Spot the Difference

What is the difference between these two brides? Can you tell which religion is which? How?
Spot the Difference

What are the differences between these two drivers? How can you tell?
Spot the Difference

This is the first image that comes up when typing in “Muslim woman” on Google
Spot the Difference

This is the first image when typing in Hindu woman

What are your first thoughts when looking at these two images? Why do you think each of these comes up and how do they represent stereotypes?
Case Study: Anti-Gandhi Sentiments - ex. of Communalism

Nathuram Godse: arrested immediately after the assassination of Gandhi. A journalist was managed to see him in a cell of Tughlaq road police station and try to interview him, but he denied to answer any question and replied ‘For the present I only want to say that I am not at all sorry for what I have done, rest I will explain in court‘.  

Nathuram Godse's Final Speech

....By 1919, Gandhiji had become desperate in his endeavours to get the Muslims to trust him and went from one absurd promise to another... He backed the Khilafat movement in this country and was able to enlist the full support of the National Congress in that policy... very soon the Moplah Rebellion showed that the Muslims had not the slightest idea of national unity...
Speech Continued

There followed a huge slaughter of Hindus… The British Government, entirely unmoved by the rebellion, suppressed it in a few months and left to Gandhiji the joy of his Hindu-Muslim Unity… British Imperialism emerged stronger, the Muslims became more fanatical, and the consequences were visited on the Hindus…
Speech Continued

The accumulating provocation of 32 years, culminating in his last pro-Muslim fast, at last goaded me to the conclusion that the existence of Gandhiji should be brought to an end immediately… he developed a subjective mentality under which he alone was the final judge of what was right or wrong…
Either Congress had to surrender its will to him and play second fiddle to all his eccentricity, whimsicality… or it had to carry on without him… He was the master brain guiding the civil disobedience movement…
Speech Continued

The movement may succeed or fail; it may bring untold disasters and political reverses, but that could make no difference to the Mahatma's infallibility... These childish inanities and obscenities, coupled with a most severe austerity of life, ceaseless work and lofty character, made Gandhiji formidable and irresistible... In a position of such absolute irresponsibility, Gandhiji was guilty of blunder after blunder...
Gandhi is being referred to as the Father of the Nation. But if that is so, he had failed his paternal duty inasmuch as he has acted very treacherously to the nation by his consenting to the partitioning of it... The people of this country were eager and vehement in their opposition to Pakistan. But Gandhiji played false with the people...
Speech Continued

….I shall be totally ruined, and the only thing I could expect from the people would be nothing but hatred… if I were to kill Gandhiji. But at the same time, I felt that Indian politics in the absence of Gandhiji would surely be proved practical, able to retaliate, and be powerful with armed forces. No doubt, my own future would be totally ruined, but the nation would be saved from the inroads of Pakistan…
Final Speech

….I do say that my shots were fired at the person whose policy and action had brought rack and ruin and destruction to millions of Hindus…There was no legal machinery by which such an offender could be brought to book, and for this reason I fired those fatal shots…
Final Speech

....I do not desire any mercy to be shown to me... I did fire shots at Gandhiji in open daylight. I did not make any attempt to run away; in fact I never entertained any idea of running away. I did not try to shoot myself...for, it was my ardent desire to give vent to my thoughts in an open Court.
Final Speech

My confidence about the moral side of my action has not been shaken even by the criticism levelled of against it on all sides. I have no doubt, honest writers of history will weigh my act and find the true value thereof some day in future. “

Source: http://www.dukhsukh.com/2008/10/nathuram-godse%E2%80%99s-speech-at-trialhis-principle-of-peace-was-bogus-gopal-godse/
Questions

• How do you feel about his speech?
• Do you think his reasons were justified?
• Was he rational?
Communal Forces in India

The communal forces in India are deeply aware that communalism is essentially an ideology, a particular way of looking at society. Hence it is in the ideological sphere that they have focused their efforts. What better place to start than the tender formative minds of young children. Communal forces have tried to poison the minds of young children with hatred and distrust about other communities.

Source for following slides: http://www.sacw.net/India_History/DelHistorians.pdf
Communal Forces

For many years now, the RSS, for example, has through its Saraswati Shishu Mandirs and Vidya Bharati primary and secondary schools, and through its Shakhas undertaken this project.
Impact of Communal Forces on Education

They have, for example, in books published by Saraswati Shishu Mandirs and Vidya Bharati primary and secondary schools, and through its Shakhas undertaken this project. They have, for example, in books published by Saraswati Shishu Mandir Prakashan for classes four and five, portrayed all communities other than the Hindus as foreigners in India, wrongly described the medieval period as the Muslim period and, following the footsteps of the British, portrayed the period as one of great oppression and decline.
Education

These books, in the name of instilling patriotism and valor among Indians, spread falsehoods, treat mythological religious figures like actual historical figures and make absurd claims such as that the Qutab Minar was build by Samudragupta. They claim that Ashoka’s advocating of Ahimsa (non-violence) spread “cowardice” and that the struggle for India’s freedom became a “religious war” against Muslims, and so on.
Outcome

Quite understandably, the National Steering Committee on Textbook Evaluation (consisting of a large number of experts from all over the country) appointed by the NCERT itself, a few years ago, came to the conclusion that “the main purpose which these books would serve is to gradually transform the young children into...bigoted morons in the garb of instilling in them patriotism.”
Modifying History

While the RSS/Hindu communal effort to spread a communal interpretation of history has been around for many years, the new and more dangerous trend is the attempt to use government institutions and state power to attack scientific and secular history and historians and promote an obscurantist, backward looking communal historiography.
Modifying History

In 1977, when the Hindu communal forces first came to share power in the Indian government (the Jana Sangh one of the former incarnations of the BJP had merged with the Janata Party) an attempt was made to ban school textbooks written for the NCERT by some of the finest historians of that generation.
Modifying History

- The attempt failed not only because the NCERT itself resisted such a move but also a countrywide protest movement developed on the issue.
Why Youth?

Why are the communalists concentrating on school education and school books? Many ask the question: What structured communalism can be taught to young children? In fact, there may be no overt communalism in new BJP-sponsored textbooks for indoctrination of children into full-fledged and overt communalists. It would not yet be possible in our basically secular and democratic society.
Communal ideology or belief system is in reality a spectrum consisting of elements, a range of varied but related ideas and notions. Some of these elements, ideas or nations do not yet constitute fully developed communalism, but they can develop to occupy the communal space under proper conditions or in crisis situations.
Continued

- Therefore, the school system is the perfect place to introduce these ideas and inculcate them in a systematic manner into developing minds.
The Muslim League: Initially floated in Dhaka in 1906, the Muslim League was quickly taken over by the U.P.-based Muslim elite. The party began to make demands for autonomy for the Muslim-majority areas of the subcontinent and/or Pakistan in the 1940s.

http://www.iasexams.com/NCERT-Books/NCERTBooksforClass12/FreedownloadClass12IndianHistory3NCERTBook/Class12_IndianHistory3_Unit14_NCERT_TextBook_EnglishEdition.pdf
The Muslim League Flag
Hindu Mahasabha: Founded in 1915, the Hindu Mahasabha was a Hindu party that remained confined to North India. It aimed to unite Hindu society by encouraging the Hindus to transcend the divisions of caste and sect. It sought to define Hindu identity in opposition to Muslim identity.

http://www.scribd.com/doc/78139173/Understanding-Partition
Hindu Mahasabha Flag
Non-Communal Party

Unionist Party: A political party representing the interests of landholders - Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh - in the Punjab, The party was particularly powerful during the period 1923-47. Ex. of communalism

http://storyofpakistan.com/the-unionist-party/
Questions

• Do you think religiously charged political parties can ever be a good thing?
• Do you see positive hope for the future or do you think communalist ideas are being passed on with as much intensity generation to generation?
• How have you seen communalism practiced in your life?