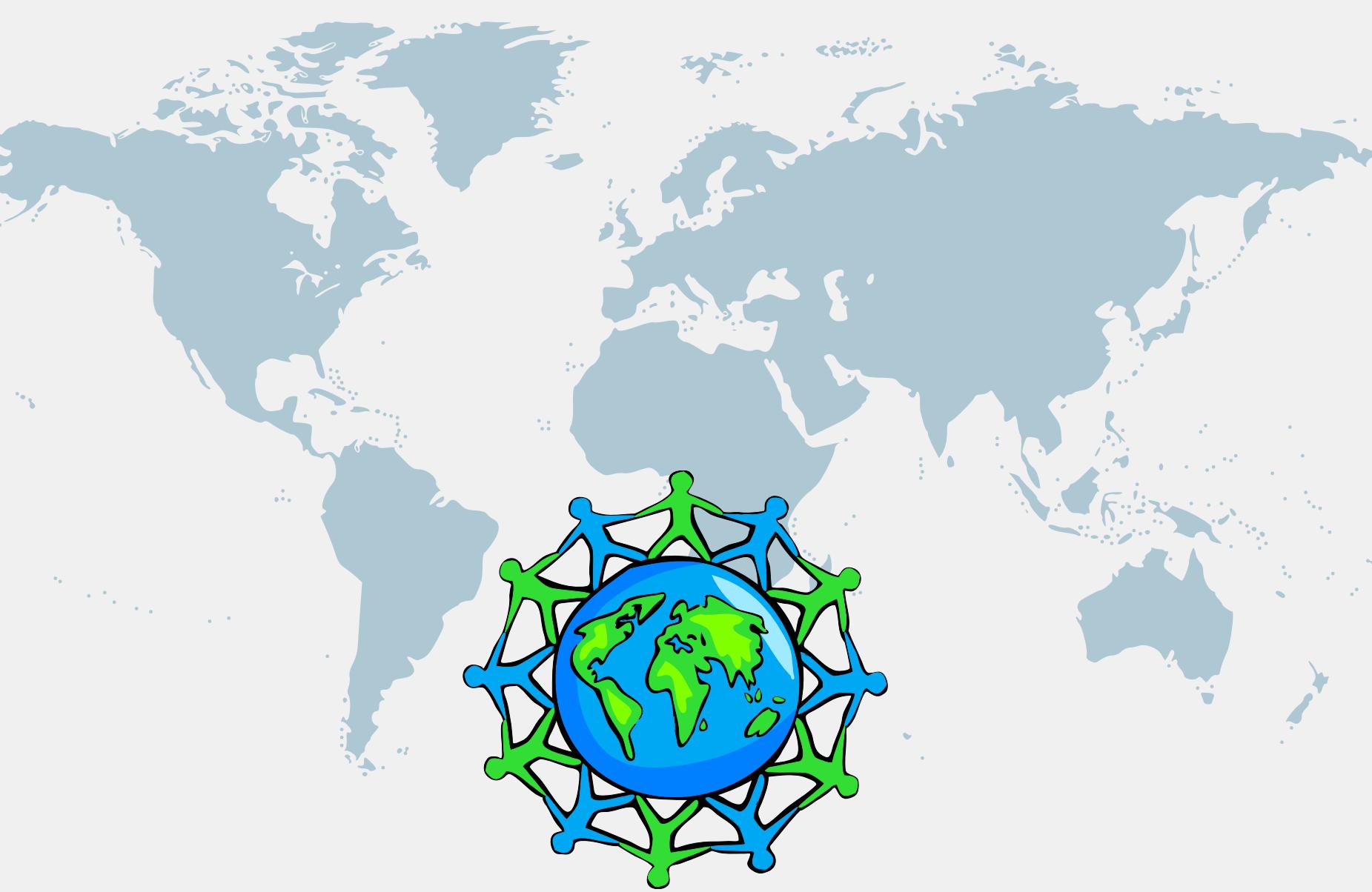




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MODEL UNITED NATIONS



BACKGROUND GUIDE



The misuse of freedom of speech with special emphasis on politicalization of religion in India in the context of ongoing communal tensions and the threat of terrorism.

AUGUST, 2025





Committee: Lok Sabha

Agenda: Discussion on the misuse of freedom of speech with special emphasis on politicalization of religion in India in the context of ongoing communal tensions and the threat of terrorism

Under the Constitution of India, freedom of speech and expression is enshrined in Article 19(1)(a), which grants every citizen the right to express their views and ideas through any medium such as words (spoken or written), images, signs, performances, or digital platforms. This includes the right not to speak or remain silent. This is the basic fundamental right which is deserved by every citizen on Indian soil. To avoid the misuse of such an act, the Indian government has introduced specific limitations. Where the freedom is not absolute.

Article 19(2) empowers Parliament to impose reasonable restrictions through law or:

1. Sovereignty and integrity of India
2. Security of the State
3. Friendly relations with foreign States
4. Public order
5. Decency or morality
6. Contempt of court
7. Defamation
8. Incitement to an offence

History of the use of Freedom of speech pre-independence:

Key events-

1780: Hicky's Bengal Gazette, India's first printed newspaper, launched by James Augustus Hicky, vocally criticized Governor-General Warren Hastings. The colonial regime confiscated the press's types, revoked mailing privileges, fined and imprisoned Hicky, silencing dissent swiftly.

Vernacular Press Act & Intense Regulation (1878-1910)

- 1878: Viceroy Lord Lytton enacted the Vernacular Press Act, targeting non-English press. Magistrates could order bonds, seize printing presses, and ban publications, with no scope for appeal. English-language newspapers were exempt, exacerbating linguistic inequity and press suppression
- Early 1880s: Under Viceroy Lord Ripon, the Act was repealed (1881), but its after-effects—such as self-censorship among vernacular journalists—persisted and fuelled nationalist alignment
- 1908-1910: In response to nationalist publications like Kesari, Jugantar, and Bande Mataram, colonial authorities passed:
- Indian Press Act, 1910
- These acts empowered censorship, required security deposits, permitted seizure of property, and enabled prosecution for widely defined "seditious" content. Over a thousand publications were targeted under them.



COMMUNAL TENSIONS:

Hate speech causes mass communal tensions, especially in a diverse country like India hate speech against a community has led to mass riots and differences among different religious groups in India.

The Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid case has showcased the mass destruction and riots caused due to different religious and political reasons mentioned below:

December 6, 1992, the Babri Masjid, a 16th century mosque located in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, was demolished by a large group of individuals. This event followed years of political and religious debate over the site, with some claiming it was the birthplace of the Hindu deity Lord Ram. The demolition led to widespread communal riots across India, resulting in significant loss of life and property.

In the lead-up to the demolition, various speeches and media reports played a role in mobilizing public sentiment. These communications often emphasized religious identity and historical narratives, influencing public perception and actions. The impact of such speech underscores the power of communication in shaping societal events.

The demolition triggered a series of communal riots in several cities, including Mumbai, Surat, Ahmedabad, Kanpur, Delhi, and Bhopal, leading to over 2,000 deaths, predominantly among Muslims. The violence highlighted the deep-seated communal tensions and the challenges of maintaining social harmony in a diverse society.

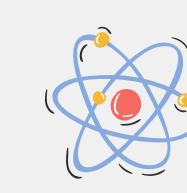
POLITICALIZATION OF RELIGION IN INDIA:

India, since its independence in 1947, has been constitutionally defined as a secular republic. The Constitution enshrines the principle of separation between religion and state, ensuring that the state does not favor any religion. This secular framework aims to accommodate the country's vast religious diversity, including Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, and others, fostering an environment where all religions can coexist peacefully.

Religion has historically been a significant aspect of Indian society and culture. In the political arena, religious identity can influence voter behaviour and party strategies. Political parties may reference religious symbols, festivals, or leaders to resonate with specific communities. This approach is often termed "religious mobilization" and can manifest in various forms, such as organizing religious events or aligning with religious leaders.

A Pew Research Centre survey indicates that a majority of Indians believe politicians should have some influence in religious matters, reflecting the intertwining of religion and politics in public perception.

The intertwining of religion and politics can sometimes lead to perceptions of bias or favouritism, raising concerns about the balance between religious identity and secular governance. This politicization can exacerbate communal tensions, especially when religious sentiments are mobilized to serve political objectives.



RISE OF TERRORISM:

ROOT CAUSES-

- **Socio-Economic Disparities:** Economic inequality and marginalization, particularly in rural and tribal areas, foster a sense of injustice and resentment, making individuals more susceptible to extremist ideologies.
- **Political Alienation:** In regions affected by insurgency, such as Jammu and Kashmir and the northeastern states, many people feel excluded from the political process, leading to feelings of disenfranchisement and support for extremist groups.
- **Cross-Border Terrorism:** India faces persistent threats from cross-border terrorism, with militant groups infiltrating through Kashmir and other border areas, often backed by neighbouring countries.

2025 Pahalgam Attack: On April 22, 2025, five armed terrorists carried out a mass shooting in Basiran Valley, Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, resulting in 26 civilian deaths. The Resistance Front (TRF), an offshoot of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), initially claimed responsibility but later withdrew its statement. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has linked TRF to various terrorist activities, including online recruitment and coordination cells.

India has implemented several measures to combat terrorism:

- **Enhanced Security Infrastructure:** Upgrading surveillance systems and increasing the presence of security forces in vulnerable areas.
- **Digital Monitoring:** Strengthening cyber capabilities to track and counter online radicalization and extremist content.
- **International Collaboration:** Cooperating with global partners to share intelligence and resources in the fight against terrorism.
- **Community Engagement:** Promoting interfaith dialogue and community development to address the root causes of radicalization.

Censorship:

- In response to these challenges, the Indian government has implemented laws like the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and sedition laws to curb activities that threaten national security. While these laws aim to prevent terrorism and maintain public order, they have been criticized for their broad application and potential to infringe upon freedom of speech. The UAPA, for instance, has been criticized for its low conviction rate and the prolonged detention of individuals without trial.
- Censorship, when misused, can suppress legitimate dissent and critical discourse, weaken democratic institutions and eroding public trust. The criminalization of peaceful expression can deter individuals from speaking out on issues of public interest, thereby stifling the democratic process.



Priority Title & Focus	Why It Matters
1. Online speech and communal conflict	Data-driven link between discourse and violence
2. Digital hatred, real violence	Legal-regulatory tension and counter-narrative strategies
3. Insights Into Incitement & Fear Speech in WhatsApp Groups	Understand modern mechanisms of online hate
4. The Production of Hindu–Muslim Violence	Historical and sociological depth
5. RSIS report & Liberation article	Policy perspective, narrative dynamics, state duties

Questions that delegates must be able to answer in the defence of their party:

- Where should we draw the line between free speech and hate speech?
- Is curbing religiously offensive speech a threat to democratic rights or a protection of social harmony?
- Do current Indian laws (like IPC Section 295A, UAPA, IT Rules 2021) protect or suppress freedom of expression?
- How can we balance the protection of religious sentiments with the right to dissent or criticize religion?
- How are political parties in India using religion to influence public opinion and elections?
- What role does political rhetoric play in fueling religious polarization?
- Are there examples of state machinery being biased or silent in the face of religious hate speech?
- How does religious symbolism in political campaigns affect secularism in India?
- How does marginalization due to communal hatred lead to radicalization among youth?
- Are extremist groups exploiting communal divisions to recruit vulnerable individuals?
- What are the security implications of unchecked hate speech on national integrity and law enforcement?
- How does India's counter-terrorism strategy address radicalization born from domestic communalism?