Exploring the Causes of Religious Freedom Violations : Perspective South Asia

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[Abstract : Religious freedom is one of the fundamental human rights, and violation of this right leads to the rise of intolerance and religious extremism. This study explores the issues that lead to the violations of religious freedom in South Asia, especially in Bangladesh, from a critical perspective. There are several challenges in securing religious freedom in this region, among them lack of transparency, judicial failings, political use of religion, failure of governments and states, lack of liberty and human security, weak democracy, loopholes in the education system, fanaticism, and the lack of interfaith knowledge are some vital challenges. This research is a sincere effort to explore the causes of the weakness of South Asian states and governments in terms of ensuring religious freedom. The main objective of this study is to make the states, governments, and individuals in South Asia aware of their responsibilities and duties towards ensuring religious freedom. In this qualitative research, by analyzing the respondent's responses and views on this problem, necessary suggestions are put forward, intending to expose the fundamental catalysts of religious intolerance alongside the precautions and measures that can be taken to ensure religious freedom in South Asia.]

Keywords : Religion, South Asia, Religious Freedom Violations, Human Rights, Democracy, Security, Politics, Intolerance.

1. Introduction

South Asia is one of the multi-cultural and multi-religious regions in the world. It is an area of religious and political instability which contains limited civic amenities where religious freedom and minority rights have been under threat for decades. Religious freedom is one of the fundamental human rights, and violation of this right lead to the rise of intolerance and religious extremism. It is a sincere effort to identify the causes of the weakness of South Asian states and governments in terms of ensuring religious freedom. South Asia consists of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 promotes the modern concept of religious freedom where Article 18 declares :

> Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in

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> teaching, practice, worship, and observance (United Nations, 1948). Despite such an unambiguous declaration, the minority religious groups in South Asian countries are victims of persecution because of political unrest, extrajudicial killings, weak democracy, arbitrary arrest, and misunderstanding of secularism and pluralism.

India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal are the most vulnerable countries in South Asia regarding religious freedom. In the context of Bangladesh, prolonged military rule, political intolerance, and the rise of religious extremism have contributed to exacerbating the problem. Almost all the constitutions of South Asian countries guarantee fundamental human rights, including religious freedom, but we do not see their proper executions in these countries. This study explores the major causes of the increase in religious freedom violations. The paper tries to present the dual role of interfaith dialogue in resisting communal grievance and establishing religious freedom in South Asia. The voice of all communities in this region against violations of religious freedom is unique. Therefore, the countries in this region need to take unified actions regarding religious freedom violations and resolve the issue through debate and mutual communication.

2. Methodological Approach

This research has followed the qualitative method for describing, explaining, and analyzing collected data. It has used primary and secondary sources to collect relevant data and information regarding the research problem. Secondary data has been used in the research compared with primary data to make the findings more meaningful. The researcher would like to give a delicate look at why religious freedom is under threat in South Asia, and this problem needs a detailed explanation. This study has followed the discourse analysis of different related books and online-based research articles to attain cognitive knowledge about the issue.

The researcher arranged a semi-structured interview to collect the primary data. The central research question of this paper is why are religious freedom violations on the rise in South Asia? A Total of 7 eminent academics and human rights activists of distinct ideologies and from different religious backgrounds are interviewed regarding the issue who are experts in relevant fields. As the study is religiously sensitive, respondents provided their opinion on the condition of maintaining secrecy. The respondents' anonymity is maintained in the identification case, and pseudo names, e.g., A, B, C, D, E, have been used. One of the remarkable limitations is that only Bangladeshi respondents have participated in the semi-structured interview of this research. Due to the pandemic of Covid 19,

shortage of time, and financial support, it was not possible to take interviews with any respondents from other countries in South Asia.

3. Conceptual Framework

3.1 Religion

Religion has a powerful influence on human life. It is the most powerful organ in the socio-cultural context of a country. Religion and society have been closely related from the very beginning of human civilization, and religion plays an active role in the social control system. All the religions in the world teach a sense of social responsibility, mutual respect, and tolerance towards other people. Religion is associated with human beings' socio-economic, political, and cultural life. It holds man accountable to his conscience. According to some famous scholars, there are attempts to define religion, which are somewhat supportive, and on the other hand, they are contradictory to one another.

Religion, through positive motivations, is involved in the psychological development of human beings. From this point of view, religion is a unique form of motivation and dimension of personality (Pargament, Magyar-Russell, & Murray-Swank, 2005). Furthermore, Professor E. B. Tylor has defined religion, as cited in Howerth (1903), as “the belief in spiritual beings” (p. 194). Besides, Robert Bellah and Clifford Geertz represent the functional definitions of religion. Robert Bellah defines religion as “A set of symbolic forms and acts which relate man to the ultimate condition of his existence” (Bellah, 1964, p. 358). Geertz has a more complex definition of religion :

> A system of symbols that acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (Geertz, 1973, p. 90).

It is more important to know what religion is than what religion is not. Every religion forbids doing anything harmful to others. Whatever evil deeds in the world happened in the name of religion, there was no religion, and there was unrighteousness. Tolerance, forgiveness, restraint of mind, purity, restraint of senses, wisdom, knowledge, truth, and anger are the ten signs of religion. So, there can be no envy, hatred, and slander where there is religion (Islam & Islam, 2017). One of the main functions of religion is to stimulate individuals to live an honest and moral life. Thus, the researcher of this current study considers religion as a set of beliefs and practices combining some rules, regulations, and prohibitions through which a man can lead a moral life.

3.2 Religious Freedom

Freedom of religion is considered one of the most talked-about human rights, and it

was first guaranteed by the first amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Religious freedom dignifies the right to choose a religion or no religion without any government interference and is permitted by the Constitution of a country or state. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 promotes the modern concept of religious freedom where it is stated in section 18 :

> Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance (United Nations, 1948).

October 27 of each year is observed as the "International Religious Freedom Day" worldwide. Religious freedom or religious liberty is a complex and factional idea (Sullivan, Hurd, Mahmood, & Danchin, 2015) that has more than meaning, and it denotes nothing less than the right to be who we are as humans. Individuals may disagree on various issues of other religions, but they should tolerate the views of others so that adherents of other faiths can tolerate them. In this context, religious freedom is not merely a moral or human right but one kind of reciprocal nonaggression contract (George, 2018). Freedom of expression is another human right that has a prior legitimacy over freedom of religion because, without freedom of expression, freedom of religion would not be possible. Therefore, religious freedom denotes that an individual or group can believe, worship, practice, and witness as they wish and want without any oppression.

Religious freedom allows us to think, express, and act upon what we deeply believe and grows respect for other religions that we do not acknowledge. It avoids criticizing statements, policies, and activities of different religious groups. Religious freedom stimulates a theological and political awareness of the need to accept the 'other' (Grieboski, 2011). Thus, where freedom of religion and belief is secured by the governments, stimulated by religious followers and institutions, and esteemed by the citizens, religious-based conflicts, oppression, and terrorism will not occur. In this sense, freedom of religion is medicine to terrorism, especially religion-based terrorism, and conversely, religious freedom violations promulgate violent extremism in human behavior.

3.3 Extremism and Religious Intolerance

Religious intolerance is now a national problem in South Asian countries. Intolerance does not mean a particular type of discrimination or religious freedom violations, and it prescribes human attitudes that prompt such type violations. "Intolerance refers to conduct manifesting hatred or prejudice based on religion or belief as well as to a state of mind, underlies descriptions of various human rights violations" (Sullivan, 1988, p. 505). Consequently, the tendency of intolerance breeds extremism. The idea of extremism is as old as the history of human civilization. It is not limited to any particular ideology or belief, but individuals,

groups, and states can resort to extremism when their cherished desires are not implemented. During the last few years, terrorist activities have increased violently. It is not the case in South Asia, but terrorism and religious extremism have become global problems, and millions of innocent people have lost their lives due to these heinous practices.

From the Taliban in Afghanistan to the Buddhist extremists in Sri Lanka and on the other hand to ISIS, the entire South Asian region is facing one of the most diverse and dangerous scenarios of extremist ideologies and terrorist groups. The Taliban and Islamist insurgent groups in Afghanistan are trying to become active in Russia, China, Iran and Central Asian countries. In the wake of political violence in South Asia, ISIS mobilizes its operatives to destabilize the region. Violent activities of Pakistan's military and Indian security forces over the Kashmir issue have further threatened the security system in this region. In the meantime, the increase of Hindu nationalism and the Hindutva notion in politics has further fueled the ethnic divisions in India, whereas Buddhist and other radical troupes continue to strengthen the violent situation in Sri Lanka (U.S. Institute of Peace, 2017).

4. Findings

The research article has reached its findings mainly through the analysis of the interviews of selected respondents. The respondents have given their views regarding the problem through the open-ended questions from their analytical perspectives. The researcher will present here several causes for the increase of religious freedom violations in South Asia.

4.1 Loopholes in Constitutional references to Religious Freedom

The constitutions of Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan have similar declarations on the "practice, profess and propagation" of religion. The Constitution of Nepal also mentions in almost the same language- the "practice, preservation and profess" of religions (Constitution of Nepal, 2015). The constitutions of Nepal and Sri Lanka have limited the scope of religious freedom to some extent by referring only to worship, observance, practices, and teaching of religion to mean religious freedom. The Constitution of Afghanistan shows a narrower view of religious freedom than Sri Lanka and Nepal by limiting religious freedom to "worship and exercise religious ceremonies" (The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2004). Bhutan is the only exceptional state in South Asia in this regard; which Constitution guarantees the elements of religious freedom and refers to the term "Freedom of religion" (Khan & Rahman, 2011).

The Constitutions of all the countries in South Asia except the Maldives and Afghanistan have guaranteed religious freedom for minorities. The status of the Constitution of Maldives is most alarming among all the countries in South Asia. In the Maldives, the constitutional provisions, like the absence of religious freedom

and the non-recognition of non-Muslims to become citizens of the country, jeopardize even the religious freedom of the Muslims in the state. It is declared that "Islam is the state religion of Maldives. Islam shall be one of the foundations of all the laws of the Maldives. No law contrary to any tenet of Islam shall be enacted in the Maldives" (Maldives's Constitution of 2008, 2014, p. 11). However, the Constitution of any country in this region does not fully maintain international standards in terms of religious freedom.

4.2 The weakness of the Government and State

The Weakness of South Asian states and governments is the prime reason behind the rise of human rights violations. Despite the constitutional guarantees, religious freedom does not exist in almost all countries of South Asia. The group politics, the ideological division within political parties, lack of consent on domestic issues, the uncompromising manner by political parties, failure in providing stable governments, suppression of parliamentary values, institutional decay, lack of initiatives in resisting religious intolerance, compromises within the bureaucracy and bureaucratic dependence of the governments have seriously questioned the legitimacy of the governments in this region. All these issues indicate a crisis of governability in South Asian countries. Surprisingly, the governments of these countries have not yet come out of the colonial mentality (E, 2020; Parvez, 2019). In the case of Bangladesh, referring to the attack on the Hindu community in Nasirnagar and the arson and grab of property in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, respondent 'E' claimed, 'it was not possible for the people involved in these incidents to be out of the judgment without the patronage of the government party. In most cases, members of the ruling class attack minorities primarily to seize their property, he added.

Corruption is a common factor in South Asia. Government officials and police are prone to corruption in most cases and fail to conduct impartial investigations. They do not have transparent methods for holding individuals and a group of people accountable to the state law. Such a notion of government proves the deficiency of legal protection for the citizens. The current situation of rampant corruption in Bangladesh is profoundly rooted in its current history and in the political manner of the military governments and military-backed civil government, which overlooked the involvement of the general people (Rahman, 2018). In India, the members of higher castes suppress the *Dalits* (untouchables) by associating them with new forms of politics. State and local government in India often does not share the commitment of central leaders to positive action and some state bureaucracies, notably the police, are racist or discriminatory (Braithwaite & D'Costa, 2018).

4.3 Negative Role of Political Parties

The political use of religion is more dangerous than religious-based politics in

promoting racial intolerance. These two forms have been common in almost all South Asian countries since the arrival of the Aryans in the Indian Subcontinent. The Aryans used religion for political means, and their seed has grown into like a Banyan tree. That is why Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India are all suffering due to the political uses of religion (Islam & Huda, 2016). Every political party in South Asia wants to stay in power by using religion. No post-independence South Asian country has been able to mitigate the dilemma between religion and politics (Nasir, 2004). Since 1975, every political party in Bangladesh has been patronizing different religious-based political parties for their own interests. When the government supports some groups for its own political game, it impedes ensuring religious freedom. Moreover, when religion is used to gain power, freedom of religion gets hampered (E, 2020).

Political violence is hardly a new phenomenon. There is a tendency to condemn the opposition parties and their activists among the political parties. The number of political extremists in South Asia is no less than that of religious extremists (Chaney & Sahoo, 2020; Datta, 2005). Political extremists address the followers of other parties as radicalized or atheistic or in many other vulgar languages that directly hart the religious sentiment of others. Political instability is one of the main obstacles to ensuring religious freedom in South Asia. In the absence of a stable government, terrorism and extremism rise at an alarming rate. International terrorist groups find fertile soil to create a new hub of terrorism where religious freedom can rarely survive. Political instability gives birth to frustrations, especially among the youths. It provokes them to involve in terrorist activities by misinterpreting the religious texts and brainwashing process. Government should maintain a peaceful and stable political atmosphere to secure religious freedom. At the same time, the government should remain alert against national and foreign conspiracies which can destroy the foundation of freedom of religion (F, 2020).

4.4 Problem of State Religion and Legislative Policies

The issue of the insertion of state religion sometimes exploits communal harmony. The constitutions of all South Asian countries except India and Nepal have given special status to the religious faiths of the majority. The researcher does not consider the declaration of a state religion by the state as an obstacle to the establishment of religious freedom unless it destroys the freedom of minorities. However, the two respondents disagreed on the issue of the state religion. Individuals should have religious faiths, but states should not have any religious demonstrations. When the state holds a particular religion as the state religion, the other religious groups are bound to feel and experience inferiority, which is opposite to the notion of freedom of religion (C, 2020). The respondent also suggests that the government of Bangladesh should ban Islam as the state religion and re-establish the Constitution of 1972 to avoid any religious-based politics and

violence.

The provisions in the constitutions of Nepal, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka centering on religious freedom do not ensure the right to propagate religion. Furthermore, the anti-proselytizing clause in the Constitution of Nepal narrows the scope of freedom of religion. Although Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan recognize the right to preach religious dogmas, the issue has been controversial for decades in these countries. 'Essential practices doctrine' is another area of concern that minimizes religious freedom. The followers of particular faith have the right to observe all the festivals of their religion, whether those are essential or not. Regrettably, some South Asian countries have imposed restrictions on the observation of religious festivals, which is contrary to the establishment of religious freedom. Indian jurisdiction developed the "essential practices doctrine" in 1954, through which the state recognizes only the obligatory practices of religion. The courts of Pakistan and Sri Lanka later followed this policy (Khan & Rahman, 2011).

When the war between India and Pakistan broke out in 1965, the government of Pakistan enacted the "Enemy Property Act" (EPA) to seize and use the property of non-Muslims living in Pakistan who supported India during the war and who left Pakistan for India. After the independence of Bangladesh, to use these properties, a law was retained under the name "Vested Property Act (VPA) 1974" (Kukreja, 2015). In 2001, a new law called the "Vested Properties Return Act" was enacted to give back properties to minorities, especially Hindus, but the government is struggling to implement the law effectively (Ahmed, 2016).

Moreover, anti-conversion laws in South Asia certainly narrow the scope of religious freedom. The research has already mentioned that the right to propagate religion is absent in the articles centering on freedom of religion; in the constitutions of Nepal, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. The anti-proselytizing clause in the Constitution of Nepal is not compatible with international standards of religious freedom (Nasir, 2004). Although Bangladesh, India and Pakistan recognize the right to preach religion, the issue in this region has been in debate for decades.

The lack of the rule of law and the relaxation in the implementation of constitutional jurisprudence by the state produce anger and grievances in minority communities. In the wake of the recent conflicts in different parts of Bangladesh, including Brahmanbaria, the minority communities claim that the planned attacks and torture are not being stopped due to the lack of fair trial and punishment for such occurrences. Thus, the main reason behind the violation of human rights and religious freedom is the lack of the rule of law, not a state religion (H, 2019).

4.5 Lack of Security

South Asia is a religiously and politically tension-torn region. Countries in this part are afflicted with a high rate of domestic and regional insecurities. India and

Pakistan fought two wars over Kashmir in 20 years, one in 1947 and the other in 1965. There is also dissatisfaction between the two countries on various issues. The security of other countries in South Asia largely depends on these two large countries. Some of the policies of India seem dubious and repressive to its neighbors because they only consider India's sole interests. The security of citizens in this zone is also under threat. Some countries have enacted different security laws to protect individuals, states, and religions, which ultimately curtails citizens' liberties (A, 2020). The authorities of South Asian states generally use police forces to suppress any big protest against governments (Rashid, 2005).

Violations of the right to human security by the security forces of Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan are common. Indian security forces have records of arbitrary arrests and detentions, extrajudicial killings, persecution, ill-treatment with detainees, and attacks on religious minorities. Security forces in Pakistan continue to attack the Ahmadiya community. Pakistan's ordinary citizens are also under surveillance by state organizations and security forces (Paul, 2010). Similarly, the law enforcement agencies' heavy and excessive use of force in Bangladesh has led to extrajudicial killings and illegal detentions (G, 2020).

4.6 Misconceptions about Secularism

Secularism generally refers to the separation of state and religion as a system of governance. Secularism can be of two types - perspectival secularism and state secularism. The first one is dangerous not only for religion but also for liberal democracy and civil society (Liew & Siam-Heng, 2010). The perspectival secularism is an outlook that tends to present itself as an alternative to religions. This monolithic idea fuels communal conflict. It rejects all the issues linked with religious doctrines, but state secularism is relatively a liberal view that does not attempt to exclude religion. The conflict between 'secularism' and 'religious extremism' has fueled racial tensions in South Asia. The most common question, in this case, is whether secularism is against religion or not? Secularism is not fundamentally against religion. It encourages citizens to respect all religions and ensure the practice of diverse religious faiths free of discrimination and persecution. Secularism needs to be understood in terms of the diversity of beliefs and values that can be embraced by citizens regardless of religion or caste (Kuru, 2007). The two main principles of secularism are the equal status of citizens as human beings and the protection of freedom of religion and conscience (Maclure & Taylor, 2011).

The notion of secularism in Bangladesh is recognizing religion rather than rejecting religion, which is called the assumption of 'multi-theocracy' (Maniruzzaman, 1990). Dr. Kamal Hossain, the chief author of the Constitution of Bangladesh, said in an interview that misuse of religion in the politics of United Pakistan compelled the newly independent Bangladesh to resort to secularism in the Constitution, which was aimed not at the rejection of religions but the elimination of

communalism and abuse of religions in the political realm (Islam & Islam, 2018). Therefore, the concept of secularism should be distinguished from secularization. Secularization prescribes the historical and social process of rationalization, social differentiation, and the decline of religious conviction (Berg-Sorensen, 2013). True secularism allows followers of every religion to practice their religions peacefully. However, in the current system of governance in South Asia, the system of secularization has become more violent. Despite being a minority in the Western World, Muslims enjoy their religious freedom, whereas, in South Asia, even the majority have also been deprived of their fundamental rights, while the countries have tended to become a "uniquely secular" society (Islam M. S., 2011).

4.7 Weak Democracy

Democracy refers to a system of government in a nation-state where every citizen has an equal right to vote in policy-making or in electing representatives of the general people. Aristotle is considered the father of the concept of democracy. The word 'democracy' is derived from the Greek terms *'demos'* and *'kratos'*, meaning the rule by or sovereignty of the people (Flanagan, Gallay, Gill, Gallay, & Nti, 2005). The basic theme of this concept of democracy is that legitimate citizens elect the representatives of a country to run the country for a fixed period. Though the term 'democracy' is usually applied to a politically sovereign state, it can be applied to any other organization, e.g., university, political, social, or economic organization. However, the citizens of South Asia have recently witnessed the dramatic rise of authoritarian forms of politics where democracy is lagging. As a result, restrictions on civil liberties, especially freedom of speech, and growing intolerance and threats against minorities have become prime concerns for the citizens of South Asia (Respondent B). Four issues are essential for the proper practice of democracy: malty party competition, the rule of law, democratic participation, and different representation systems (Saiya, 2015) that are almost absent in most countries of South Asia.

Religious terrorism seems to be more dangerous than non-religious terrorism. Countries with liberal democracies usually are to handle a non-religious form of terrorism. On the other hand, authoritative countries often experience religious terrorism (Upreti, 2011). It is noticeable that non-religious forms of terrorism are easy to handle through different methods like policing and intelligence. Democracy, state, government, and terrorism are influenced by each other. When democracy is weak, the government becomes authoritarian. In a state, the lack of freedom of expression reduces the spirit of democracy. The study examines that the fragile democracy of South Asian countries aggravates political and religious turmoil and thus fosters terrorism.

4.8 Defective Education System

Education itself is a human right, and it again makes one person aware of the rights of others. The education system in South Asia is also responsible for rising intolerance in this region. These countries do not provide inter-religious education to students at any stage of primary, secondary, or higher secondary education. In educational institutions, students only study their religion. Therefore, boys and girls do not have proper respect for other religions and followers belonging to other faiths. In the case of Bangladesh, no Government Education Board regulates Qawmi Madrasas and their curriculum. Many students of Qawmi Madrasa consider the study of English, Bengali, and the religions of others as anti-Islamic. Qawmi Madrasas in Bangladesh and many other Madrasas in the South Asian region that follow the Deoband ideology of India propagate highly conservative ideologies (D, 2020).

4.9 Fanaticism and the Lack of Interfaith Knowledge

Fanaticism is one of the biggest problems in today's world. It exists in every sector of politics, religion, and individual ideals. A fanatic is a person who considers that his ideas and point of view are unquestionable and beyond any doubt, especially for religious or political causes. Fanatics perceive that they have to act or infer anything in their own way. Most of them seek to resist their views and the absolute rightness of their cause at all costs. When they fail to perceive alternatives to such obdurate intolerance of religious or political beliefs, they can resort to violence regardless of the consequences (Whittaker, 2002). Fanaticism is the motivation for terrorism. It encompasses ideological dogmas about a compulsion to bring back the political method to a system suggested by religious norms through violence (Arena & Arrigo, 2005). Religious fanaticism is the extreme view of personal religious beliefs that provokes the adherents of diverse religions not to accept and tolerate the differences and others' liberal thoughts. It is the monolithic view that causes the rise of fanaticism and extremism.

Individuals cannot impose any restriction on any particular faith. It is noticeable that followers of different religions are often reluctant to learn about the religions of others. As a result, not even one percent of religious followers have an idea about the faith of others. This tendency gives rise to misconceptions in individuals about the religion of others. To prevent religious-based intolerance, one should understand the meaning of pluralism and the unity among different religious traditions.

4.10 Rohingya Crisis and the Failure of International Organizations

Another dimension of the internal and regional security problems of South Asian countries is illegal immigration. The United Nations and SAARC both have systematic failures to control the rise of religious intolerance in South Asia. The

Rohingya crisis, exploited by international and regional extremist groups, is a vital challenge facing Bangladesh and India. The Rohingya community in Myanmar has been enduring persecution for a long time, but international organizations and communities have not done much to alleviate the suffering of the Rohingya community. In this regard, the representatives and organizations assigned in Myanmar have failed to provide early warning. Besides, the controversial role of SAARC and some Asian countries in Rohingya repatriation has further threatened Bangladesh. Besides this, the NRC (National Register of Citizens) issue in Assam has become a controversial issue in South Asia. About 4 million people, including the Muslim minority, are at risk of losing their Indian citizenship (Parveen, 2018). Citizenship is a common problem in both the Rohingya crisis and the Assam NRC, behind which millions of people have been displaced from their homes and become stateless.

The security situation in South Asian countries is closely related to each other. Top terrorist groups are involved in at least some common issues with other countries, for example, drug trafficking, arms business, and sheltering each other in times of crisis. SAARC does not play an active role in promoting meaningful dialogue among South Asian political leaders, and it often remains passive in creating institutional and informal communication at the state level. It is impossible to control violence and religious-based intolerance in South Asia without the proper political commitments and wholehearted initiatives of SAARC (C, 2020).

5. Conclusion

Intolerance and religious extremism have become a threat to the people of all spheres in South Asia. The problem of religious freedom in South Asia is intertwined with complex social, political, and educational issues. It is regrettable that due to the lack of proper enforcement of the law, extrajudicial arrests, arbitrary killings, disappearances, and violations of human rights and religious freedom have pushed the citizens of this region into extreme insecurity. South Asian people are fighting for the uniform dream of establishing a peaceful society. It is impossible to reduce religious freedom violations without the concentrated efforts of all the countries of South Asia. The execution of the rule of law and the constitutional provisions regarding freedom of religion can resist religious-based conflicts. Inter-religious education and the development of the education system are needed to make individuals religiously tolerant. Mutual understanding among South Asian citizens is comparatively less than that of the people of other parts of the world. That is why it is the great responsibility of the states and governments to increase dialogue and open discussion among the people to enhance interfaith and inter-cultural understanding. This study suggests that effective interfaith dialogue can ensure peaceful coexistence among the followers of different faith-based communities in South Asia. Along with governments and mass media, people of

these countries should be aware of the misuse of religions and the spreading of rumors in the name of religions.

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