

Religious Extremism in South Asia: Maintenance of Status Quo

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ABSTRACT

Fundamentalism is undermining the general public and mankind; by any methods it can't be upheld. Religion, the folklore which welcomes individuals to God, has been utilized to send individuals to God. From Church to Hinduism and to Islam; regardless of whether it is God-Given or human made arrangement of conviction, it has been utilized against its own main for the sake of virtue yet fundamentalist pattern. Religious fundamentalism is utilized to depict nearness of different religious, political, social and sociological schools of thought pointing complete utilization of religious basics. Every religion has at least one particular fundamentalist gathering thrive the goals to the roots: regardless of whether it is Islamic, Christian, Judaism, Hindu or Sikh religions. They have faith in their settled points, destinations and objectives as just genuine way and perfect and to accomplish that perfect they may apply tranquil or equipped measures. Yet their viewpoints are now converging into reign of terror, mistrust and evil performance on collaboration for economy.

KEYWORDS: Religious Extremism, South Asia, Conflict, War on Terror, Security

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INTRODUCTION

Encountering multiple conflicts, the South Asian region once aimed for economic bloc. Amid the ongoing longest war on terror, internal strife, communal & racial

violence and hegemonic strife initiates each state of the region confronts different constraints. South Asia is considered as a most prominent region for the imminent rise of new Asian led world order. Aiming high, but

facing challenges of population explosion and poverty, counting fifth part of world's population, the South Asians should work on building basis for cooperation. When the integration process in shape of EU started to bear fruits, economic integration was dreamt of in South Asia also. But translating this dream into reality is long way ahead as have to find their way out of their internal and bilateral conflicts. The present study aims to discuss the issue of extremism or loosely used term of religious fundamentalism with special reference to South Asia. Henceforth the term to be used is fundamentalism. Authors aimed to work with the premise that religious fundamentalism in South Asia has lessened chances of collaboration among the states and created inverse impacts. The genesis of the problem never lied in the regions but with the practicing fellows who deemed it necessary to impose their ideas. Many of the scholastic works on fundamentalism seeks its connection to the roots to American Protestantism. It tended the religious elements to take advantage and use fundamentalism as spur to control affairs of the state. The purpose is to find out historical development of religious fundamentalism, its role in regional and international politics, with special reference to South Asia.

There is sustained conflict over the origins of fundamentalism itself, yet the term originated from the West. There is the presence of Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist fundamentalism in South Asia long ago. Certain Islamic movements can be attributed as fundamentalist with stains of nationalism as well. Imam Shamil's movement in the 19th century against Russian control was an armed resistance. Basically it was motivated with religious aspirations.(Mazhary, 2019) Syed Mawdudi (d 1979), started his movement in Indian sub-continent for Muslim revivalism and Ijtihad. And later in 1942 established one of the influential religio-political party ie Jama'at-e-Islami in Pathankot, India.(Nasr, 1996)

Fundamentalism reflects the fanatic hope in contrast with the revolution in the global age. Specifically, it reflects a growing sense of grievance, resentment, displacement etc which ought to be addressed by the government itself(Derbyshire, 2019). Hindutva ideology or Hindu nationalism presents amalgam of religio-political ideals. This ideology asserts that to be Indian is to be Hindu and that India's huge Muslim population and other religious minorities are at best conditionally Indian. It is also argued that Indian state which is secular in its crux has failed to safeguard the Hindu interests in connection the ideology of secular constitution.(Chattopadhyay, 2019) Murdan says that

fundamentalism basically originated due to the modernity and secular ideals in the world. The perceived threat of secularism and modernity ushered the re-reading of religious dogmas. This also welcomed the formation of such interpretation leading to their new perception of solution i.e. political and social violence.(Ali, 1983)

1. Materials and Methods

In this study, qualitative research method is applied by collecting, researching, and analyzing secondary data sources (newspapers, books, articles, journals, government records, reports, statements of political leaders and government officials, etc.). The research work is analytical and descriptive and goes through the lens of different schools of thought. It is a current affair and newspapers, articles, reports, governmental records and statements of officials available on the internet have been considered for deduction of facts and reasons supporting this study.

2. Nationalism and Islamic Fundamentalism – Indo-Pak Controversy

The torrential wave of difference of opinion between India Pakistan is not new. Both states got independence from British colonial power after great peaceful democratic struggle, but the Moto of peace was shattered and bloodshed spoiled the history. This bloodshed was not mandate of freedom but escalated due to the inner thought of the clergy pushing to achieve more by killing the opponents. Since then the rivalry exists.(Brass, 2011)

Since independence, after seventy-two years and multiple brinks of war, India and Pakistan have remained disconnected towards cooperation and mutual benefit. While the world is changing its ways and moving on with their aspirations to further their state's development India and Pakistan remain locked in their historical competitiveness. Both states are ignorant towards the real threat that intimidate the stability of these nations. The persisting disconnect between these two states, not only creates a security dilemma for India and Pakistan, but also threatens the regional stability and cooperation.

In India, we find some important religious minorities such as Muslims and Sikhs which have been able to preserve their identities whereas other religious minorities i.e. Jains, Buddhists and Christians having little interest in religious fundamentalism have stayed at

distant from the mainstream political scenario. The incidents in 1980s and 1990s show the nature of sectarian hostility between Hindus-Sikhs and Hindu-Muslim groups. Hindus survive as the dominant in every institution. Despite the fact that the Muslims constitute the largest minority of the country, they form one of the depressed segments of the Indian society. Nevertheless, they have displayed greater assertiveness as well as group awareness in recent years. The more educated and younger members in seeking to mobilize the community in order to both to preserve its identity and to acquire a greater share of the society's goods and services have joined the Muslims leaders.(Ashraf, 2017)

It was end of 19th century when the term Hindu nationalism was coined which encompassed the idea that civilization composes the nation and Hindus are a nation in themselves. Mathur states that in 1899, Lajpat Rai publicized an article in Hindustan review in which he stated that "Hindus are a nation in themselves, because they represent a civilization all their own."(Sharma, 2007) It denotes that there had been certain tissues of nationalism long ago the independence from British colonial power. There is a bit difference in the terminology coined by Lajpat Rai and the others about Hindu Nationalism. For others it is a concept of Hindutva which explains that there is only one nation having right of ruling and living called Hindu. Bhatt explains that Hindu nationalism has faced some problems too, for example he is of the view that its philosophy not been equal to the term of national identity of India or Indians.(Bhatt, 2001) He adds "While Hindutva movement is relatively recent lineage, both Hindu and Hindu Nationalist political and ideological formations have been far more influential since the nineteenth century...."(Bhatt, 2001)

In this way the latest or final emphasis has been given to the Hindu nationalism in complete terms. And the term Hindutva encompasses the ideals that a Hindu is an Indian and an Indian is always Hindu. This idea has been always described by the Hindu nationalist and fundamentalist organizations like Vishva Hindu Pareshad (VHP), Shiv Sena of Bal Thackeray and others. Sangh Parivar is held responsible for championing the cause and ideology of Hindutva. It is composed of Rashtriya Sewayamesvak Sangh aka RSS, Bharitya Janta Party aka BJP, Bajrang Dal and VHP. As stated the mass massacre of Sikhs in 1984, created a lot of panic in Indian politics which also raised view of Sikh fundamentalism. It was generally said to be result of killing of Indra Gandhi, yet there were other

sentiments involved.(Habib, 2017) The Times of India in its publication stated that, "India is ablaze with hate and anger. In city after city from one corner of the country to the other enraged mobs have gone and are going about systematically burning and looting Sikh properties and assaulting Sikhs without discrimination."

In the same way Muslim Massacre in Gujarat also created stance for Muslims to think for their new role in Indian politics. On the same lines the Hindutva ideology states that every Indian is a Hindu whereas India's huge Muslim population and other religious minority groups are Indian as a condition. Vanaik adds that many proponents of Hindutva think that secular system of politics in India has discriminated against the majority Hindu population.(Savarkar, 2019) Similar thinking has gained prominence in current Indian politics. Delhi riots of 2020 is a direct attempt against Muslim minorities that ignited yet another stronger wave of fundamentalism in India. So if India needs to be great nation to repeat the history to save its essential nature of cultural and ideological foundations and this is a Hindu fundamentalism it would resort to any means necessary. Golwaker states that for glorification of Hindu culture the non-Hindus must respect it, give up anti-Hindu attitude by creation of love and devotion towards it, they must cease to be foreigners and completely subordinate to the Hindu nation.(Bardhan, 1992)

Since partition of Indian sub-continent there has been a great identity crisis for Indian Muslims, who face problems in daily life and the organized crimes graph against them is growing systematically. Iftikhar Hafeez Malik defines that Indian Muslims were targeted overnight by the Hindus. Mahatma Gandhi attempted to calm down the situation in order to create a balance but was targeted and killed. In the RSS-Mahasbha the partition was non-condonable crime while Indian Muslims were treated as the anti-state.(Dalrymple, 2015) Summing up the whole details one comes with the philosophical basis of Hindutva philosophy which has been designed with the two major instincts i.e. colonial experiences and the Muslim interest in the area.

It is strongly anti-secular in nature. For instance, when Hindu nationalist speaks of the India, they mean it to be a state for Hindus. In the same way Bal Thackeray (late), the leader of Shiv Sena stated in his famous speeches that Muslims should leave India as they have their own homeland Pakistan.(*Bombay's Militant Voice*, 2000) The other minorities including Sikhs and Christians have to abide by the political structure of the

country to view the whole scenario as an Indian. The secularists and others are too discriminated due to the fact that they are anti-nationalism and thus they are anti-Hindus. For example, LK Advani, the hardcore Hindu leader of BJP stated in harsh words that if someone attempts to indulge in anti-Hindu politics under the cover of secularism, BJP shall stand against it and never restrain from the sacrifice in this way. The philosophy against Muslims (as well as Sikhs and Christians) as aliens is named to be Hindu-Zionism. Hindutva philosophy has ever worked even we find it behind the cases of 1984, 1992 and others against Christians.¹

In some terms it is a doctrine which has a longstanding concern by promotion of Unity on the basis of to be Hindus rather than other motivations. Yet it has been concerned to the discrimination of religious minorities i.e. Muslim, Sikh, Christians and others. This doctrine has also touch of some experiences in post-Muslim or more notable Mohammedans and post-colonial period.(Baber, 2004) Hindu identity is a way of overcoming the certain faults or differences due to the regional diversity in India, by paying more and more emphasis on shared cultural heritage distinguishing the native Indians from non-Indians. It is also to be noted that not all Indians are Hindus or not every region of India has Hindu majority. There is and has been a long diversity in Hinduism itself.(Gould, 2004)

Emergence of religious political extremism is not an event in South Asia, but it too started in various regions at almost same times or as a result of British colonialism. And each movement though had different motives and way of working yet had same philosophy commonly attributed to Syed Maududi, Syed Qutub, Ahmed Dedat and Imam Khomeini. These forces emerged sometimes with the state support in Sudan, Nigeria, Egypt, Malaysia, Pakistan and Afghanistan keeping in view the Iranian Islamic revolution. Taking the case of Pakistan, which is part of research one looks that there is slow and sturdy implementation of Islamic rules in the constitution. Pakistan, a state and a unique homeland for the Muslims of Indian-subcontinent carved out on the world map is based on

¹The Babri Mosque Issue, Gujarat Massacres, Malegaon incidents and others are prominent in a sense that there have little or senseless enquiries which have not shown any prominent results. In the same manner there has been little progress in the issue of 1986 against Sikhs. *see* Setalvad (Teesta), *hindutva terror*, *Combat Communalism*, February 2009, Year 15, No 137, Cover Story

religion.(Fuller, 1991) From various points the Islamic elements did effort to impose Islamic rules and laws. Starting from the objective resolution which then became part of the constitution, the liberals are of the view that there had been long ago preparations for the liberal Islamic state as Jinnah wanted.

In the same wave when Islamic features had been getting more and more importance in Pakistan in the years of 1977-78, military coup exploited the situation in its favor. According to Nasr military decided to ride the tiger and exploit the waves of Islamic extremism, rather than suppressing it in view of Malaysian experience. In return military could get a long-standing support from Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) composed of rightist and Islamist parties.(Nasr, 2001)

This exploitation and agitation to the actions taken by the regime of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto gave rise to the Islamists in all over Pakistan. It was Islamic Revolution of Iran and Russian invasion of Afghanistan which proved to be fruitful for Islamists to prolong stay of military and fulfilling their dreams. Yet there had been strained relationship between PNA and the military, the former became annoyed to the junta rule and the later wanted to linger on the elections. Then Gen Zia Ul Haq decided to Islamize every institution of the country and even proclaimed to be Amir al Maumineen. Successive regimes of Muslim League, Pakistan Peoples Party and General Musharaf could not bring change in common fabric of far right groups.

Recent wave of religious extremist incidents started to occur in entirely different way. There are many cases which relate religious authority used or misused power by exploitation or otherwise. In many such cases one is interesting example of Malala Yousufzai a Swat origin school going girl and known activist was shot in her head but she survived and moved to United Kingdom for her treatment and now she is studying there as well as working for the right of female education.(Rehman, 2012) The other case is of Murder of Mashal Khan, Abdul Wali Khan University Journalism student murdered brutally by his class fellows apparently over the rift of religious ideals at University Campus. A mob murdered him by pistol shots, wood and iron bars, kicks as well as stones.(Hashim, 2020) Yet there are multiple stories which revealed that it was not religious motive but the interviews of Mashal Khan over issue of money embezzlement in University funds.

The nation was super structure or something mega group of people belonging to one race. The political

will and political activities of this same group was responsible to give birth of “nation-state.”(Dekker et al., 2003) The Westphalia Treaty in fact was reassertion of the same concept that state is logical unit of similar people and could operate well with having no or less “other” elements in form of individuals or groups not belonging to the same race.

The political organization of people living together is again a mystery but all we could deduce is based on religious traditions. The holy descriptions craved in the shape of pictures or alphabets on stones, woods, bones, and anything the scribe had access and mastery over writing on it. Through holy books of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and other religions we came to know the type of political systems that were at practice at that time. Those systems were not so much different from the rest of the world. The two systems were at work, one at cities and other for areas far from cities. The city was considered the real power arena while the far flung areas were considered as internal matter of lord of those lands as far as those lords are loyal to King and the crown.

Known history inform about a society that was highly divided by the class system. This system though very much non-democratic in modern terms, was exactly represent the only possible way of administration in such a wide land with so much diversity and having very few resources at the disposal of the rulers.(Natrajan, 2005) At that time religion was the only possible anchor to have a society keep in check that later turned into nations. Modern politics learned and modified the religious sentiments to its own needs.

The concept of nation in India could not be traced in the Western way. It did not belong to any other identity except the land. Anyone living in the land and sharing same culture, and culture with thousands of diversification, he belongs to the nation. In this sense we find a parallel in modern concept of state. It is in legal sense any one could acquire on his or her free will the citizenship of any part of globe, at least theoretically, and once such status granted, he or she gain the identity affiliated with that state.

Nationalism in South Asia constantly requires source and practice of motivation. The indoctrination about the affiliation one should poses with the land is necessary part of political propaganda. Without any such affiliation no formal political institute could exist in South Asian context. The extreme form of nationalism

as we observe in fascist agendas is impossible to develop in South Asia due to artificial affiliation of individuals with the land. The other natural affiliations of family, race and ideologies take over time and again the priority over love for land. Thus for practical reasons, and to operate in a reliable condition, the “nationalism” is made possible through a number of aligns and aggregation processes of other natural affiliations. This means more or less to ensure predictable and working political system, the sense of a central authority could not be achieved without investment of resources on other affiliations of individuals besides his or her love for land. And in these other affiliations, religion indeed play pivotal role.

Religious extremist trends as we observe today in Hinduism practiced societies like in India, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka is masterful use of both the elements of nationalism and religious philosophies. As in case of Ahmedabad Carnage 2002, famously called as “Gujarat Pogrom” the Hindu extremist while busy in torture, rapes, and all kind of violence were reported to bring along yellow ribbons, scarf and yellow dresses: the religious color of Hinduism. Indeed, they were motivated on the lines of religion and nationalism.

Today we find that in India and anywhere else the Hindu extremist ideology is not the manifestation of any religious anxiety, but a political abuse of individual affiliations. Even in the case of the Nepal Defense Army (NDA), a Hindu extremist group wish to oust all non-Hindus from Nepal, the close observation into their demands and methods show that the leadership as well as the so called activist is not doing all this fuss to satisfy any religious command or wishes.(Kaur, 2005) To sum, the Hinduism is religion of culture and lack any genuine appeal for extremist practices. The present trends of extremist Hindu politics of BJP or the actions of NDA is not result of any frustration of some devoted religious fanatics but a planned, and worldly agenda of gaining power and prestige in this world.

To summarize the anatomy of Muslim religious extremism in South Asia we find that it is result of frustration of genuine religious zealots, and supported by the masses for their own anger over no social justice, incompetence and corruption of the ruling class, poverty and support of the non-democratic rulers by the West. All this anger formed an ideal potential for global destruction and the resources allocation for this inhuman agenda by Al- Qaeda, and later other non-state

and state actors turned this potential into practice and reality.(Rashid, 2002)

The most tragic, horrific and perhaps the dangerous aspect of all this religious violence in India is the role of government and state. It seems that state and government try to avoid any big response against political or economic elites. In the case of BJP even the second leadership managed to save against any legal proceedings. The lively media and civil society tried its best to point out all such scandals but the unwritten agreement among politicians is evident by all such proceedings. If one to one case be discussed for minority cases in India, it would be difficult as in case of Pakistan. Recent wave against Muslims is in the name of Love Jihad, which denotes that Muslims were marrying Hindu girls due to planned jihadi terminology to end Hinduism. One of the prominent case is murder of Muhammad Afrazul killed in Rajasthan.(Saberin, 2017)

Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are two examples of same phenomenon of intolerance to minority. The warning of the army chief of Sri Lanka that: Minorities may live in Sri Lanka they “cannot make any unnecessary demands.”(*Sri Lanka's North I*, 2012) The use of word “may” and conditionality for their own citizens in this statement show the real attitude and images of ruling elites in South Asia. The brutal firing by heavy arms negating any respect for “safe zones” in Sri Lanka was not mere violation by Tamils but government also retaliated the same and in same manner. Some hundreds of such violation could be traced in Bangladesh at the well documented website of Human Rights Congress for Bangladesh Minorities (HRCBM).(*Bangladesh - Human Rights Congress for Bangladesh Minorities (HRCBM)*, 2016) In a report of the Minority Rights Group International, the persecution of religious minorities featured prominently within the political development of Bangladesh. On 1st January 2004, local Bangladesh National Party officials set 20 houses belonging to the Hindu community on fire.(*Minority Rights Group Internation*, 2020) The same report also speak about a survey and its results: “A survey conducted by researchers including those from the Jahangir Nagar University’s Department of Anthropology was released in May 2008, documenting extensive land loss by indigenous and minority peoples in ten north-western districts.” (*Minority Rights Group Internation*, 2020)

The cycle of violence on religious minority begins with proclamation of some act of insult to majority religion and soon the mob take revenge by minority of a crime still waiting for logical and rational investigation. Even the small countries of South Asia grappling with their economic existence and having little diversity in their social fiber are not good at tolerance record towards religious minorities and even the sects of same religion being divided in lower class. As for Nepal a report reveals that: “There is a profoundly established perception that the roots behind social evils and conflicts in Nepal stem from the social exclusion of Dalits and other indigenous communities. 68 per cent of the Dalits continue to live below the poverty line. Their exclusion from political power can be gauged from the fact the Nepal Parliament has not had an even a single Dalit representative over the past two decades.”(*Could Peace Beget Rights for Nepal's Dalits?*, 2006)

Another media piece from Nepal by Sudeshna Sarkar and posted on the web on Jun 17, 2009 - 10:53:58 AM talks about the organized cleansing effort against Christian minorities in Nepal. According to report: “a shadowy organization called the Nepal Defense Army (NDA) claimed responsibility for the explosion and warned the nearly 400,000-strong Christian community to leave Nepal within a month or face the consequences....Headed by Ram Prasad Mainali, a 38-year-old from the Morang district in the same region, the pro-Hindu group bombed two mosques in the district, killing two people at prayer; attacked a Protestant church; and broke into the house of a Salesian priest, Father John Prakash, who ran the Don Bosco school in the town of Sirsiyain southern Nepal, shooting him dead.”(Parajuli, 2011) Mayhems and discrimination against minorities is still very viable in Nepal. Under 2017 Nepal’s legislation of criminalization of religious conversion has ramped up atrocities against Christians and Muslims. Amidst 2020 Pandemic Nepal’s government is hell-bent towards the denial of fundamental rights to religious minorities.(*COVID-19 Dalits with Disabilities Pushed Furthest Behind in Nepal*, 2020)

Other form of religious extremist trend is initiation by any zealot religious group to impose its ideology with the help of gun instead of communications. Such groups do not restrict their operation of ideological imposition to minorities but also extend this to other sects of same religion. Such groups prove more dangerous when manage to get foreign aid, or backing from influential groups within state. “Sipah E Sahaba” of Pakistan

started as a group yearning for systemic balance hurt by Shia sect dominance in only one district Jhang. Yet after able to get resources from Middle Eastern countries its operations not only spread in whole Pakistan but they played instrumental role in trans-border acts of terrorism in Afghanistan.²

3. NATURE AND SCOPE IN THE REGIONAL POLITICS

Bangladesh, once East -Pakistan separated as independent country with the armed help of Indian Army, come into being in December 1971. Since then Bangladesh foreign policy revolve around the objectives to fight against its poverty, damages cause by frequent natural disasters and to meet the challenges of regional realities. Within regions India is the nearest neighbor that helped the state at phase of its creation. But the bilateral relations hardly could be termed as warm. The main reason behind this situation is the well-developed two party system in Bangladesh politics and one, Awami League since always, is in favor of India. Thus observers have to record up and downs in the bilateral relations directly related with the fact that Awami League is in power or not. Besides border disputes also make the relations at jerks. Bangladesh shares 2400-kilometer-long porous border with India. This is constant source of complain for India as New Delhi consider it dangerous in terms of human transaction that result in extra burden on economy. The latest fear of India after 9/11 is that this porous border may be utilized by terrorists.

However, it is not only India that has complains about the border. Bangladesh wishes to re-open diplomatic dialogue and avoids political controversy over a number of villages and areas that according to Dhaka is part of Bangladesh and is now annexed to India due to poor demarcation. Another area of contention is over the use of Ganges water. A number of commissions and diplomatic efforts in this regard proved to be futile, and issue need a diplomatic solution before its conversion to political debate. However, despite all those mutual complaints, the volume of trade between the two is ample proof to terms the relations healthy and forwarding.

²It has been often stated by various sources that Iraqi Ex-President Saddam Hussein too helped Pakistani anti-Shia groups. It was aimed to fight a proxy war against Iran which supported Pakistani Shias.

After India the nearest friend of Bangladesh is Bhutan, the first country that recognized Bangladesh. Nepal and Bhutan look at Bangladesh as good alternate for sea route where they can avoid India and China. Thus Bangladesh had good trade and economy based relations with both.

Sri Lanka is somewhat friend of equal status to Bangladesh. Both enjoy their special relationship in areas of security, culture, and trade. Maldives is not only a peace loving Muslim state that match with the foreign policy preferences of Bangladesh but also promising in terms of provision of jobs to unskilled and semi-skilled labor of Bangladesh. Relations with Pakistan naturally at start were just sore and maintained to complete the needs of both states. But now the bilateral relations are very much surprising in many areas including security, trade and culture. The visit of Pervaiz Musharraf to Bangladesh in 2002 provided new beginning. Yet there are number of issues that cause deadlock in these relations and one of them is indeed Biharis. Now numbered in 540,000, individuals had migrated from Bihar province after the partition of India in 1947, and now they wish to migrate to Pakistan since 1971. A number of complex social and political issues involved dissuade both states to accept them as their citizens.

Bhutan is a small princely state that due to some unexplained historic factor remained outside of integration process of such islands in motherland Indian subcontinent. It entered in a treaty with United Kingdom in 1910 so that it's foreign and defense policy be "guided" by UK. After independence of India it wasted no time in recognition of India as independent state and after one year entered in to the "treaty of friendship" that besides giving some economic incentives again bounded the Bhutan in its foreign relations. This time India has to "guide" its foreign and defense relations. These relations further get closer when China annexed Tibet in 1950. India having 605 km shared border with Bhutan give it due importance for its "Himalayan frontier" security policy. This arrangement went well until Bhutan gained the real taste of international relations in a world based on nation state system. Thus today while Bhutan established relations with more than twenty nations, it has membership in 45 international organizations.

Though still its 90 percent trade depends on India, Bhutan demanded revision in the Treaty of Friendship for more independence in its decision about security

and economy. The demand materialized in the shape of 2007 treaty that is far more liberal than the previous one. Despite issue of conflict in interests, these bilateral relations also get sore by border ill demarcation. The zones between Sarpang and Geylegphug are the source of dispute. Moreover, the eastern frontier of Bhutan with the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh is also ill demarcated and is cause of heated dispute.

Yet the Bhutan relations with India are far from the political disputes, and there is long way ahead for Bhutan to attain full independence in its foreign relations and economic decision. Second most important country within regions in terms of Bhutan foreign relations, is indeed Nepal. With Nepal the relations could be stated as love-hate relationship. Despite having so strong cultural bonds, and being in same geo-political reality of operating between China and India, the two countries fail to be friendly. The main contention is the issue of more than 107, 000 alleged Bhutanese refugees of Nepalese origin. (*Bhutan's Forgotten People*, 2014) Those refugees live in camps provided by UN and supported by USA and other western countries. Though those camps are located in southeastern Nepal both states are unwilling to extend its citizenship to those refugees. The issue is so many times reached to its logical conclusion of resettling those refugees with the help of US, Denmark, Norway, New Zealand, and Netherlands. Still the three parties fail to reach mutually agreed settlement.

Other mentionable foreign relations of Bhutan include Bangladesh. Since its creation in 1971 Bhutan welcomed it as alternate opportunity to reach the sea without touching India or China. In this Nepal and Bhutan have same primary interest in retaining relations with Bangladesh. Bhutan has nominal relations with Sri Lanka, Maldives and follow Indian guideline to maintain relations with Pakistan. Another reason that worsened the India's relations within region was its taking sides with separatist and imitational movements in neighbor states. India's patronage of Tamils in Sri Lanka, Bengali Separatists in Pakistan is case in point. All this sore nature of relations further freeze after the event of 9/11. India's suspicion that Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal are training and state sponsoring terrorist act in India make it impossible for any state concern to push the relations towards positive.

Maldives relations with India are based on its security concerns. These relations not only provide a good

counter balance against Sri Lanka but also ensure security against any terrorist act as "Operation Cactus" proved it well. After this bucketful episode of security operation, the relation between Maldives and India increased in volumes by many fold. The border disputes almost settled with India in 1976, yet the territorial dispute over the southern Indian colony islands of the Minicoy Island of Lakshadweep time and again heard in public debate. The island is populated with overwhelmed majority of Muslims by religion thus at times the debate gets the color of religious concerns. Especially Pakistan support Maldives position over the island, but Male does not wish to play this issue as major political debate. At present Maldives benefited by the boost of Indian economy and for future to come Maldives wish to strengthen these bilateral relations to ensure its security and extra finances.

Within region, Maldives relations with Pakistan and Bangladesh are just extension of its efforts to balance of power and balance of terror. Relations with Pakistan, with its special emphasis on Islam, means a counter balance to India in case of any tuff time from India. Relations with Bangladesh are again counter balance to Sri Lanka and India both. Thus it is worth noting that Maldives relations within region is strictly based on realist principals while with rest of the world it pursues with rigor the ideals of peace, human dignity and mutual cooperation for development.

Nepal recognized India as it got freedom in 1947. This was very much natural due to geography as well as economic and security interests. This result in 1950 in Treaty of Friendship that term the trade, security and all other areas of interest of both countries as one. Though this treaty for last half of the century ensure the economic wellbeing of the Nepal but all the time proved a blockade in pursuing independent foreign policy. (*Nepal Always Had an Anti-India Undercurrent. So, Why the Fuss Now?*, 2020) The revision and drastic changes in the treaty not only demanded time and again but also remained one of the popular theme in election manifestos of the political parties and speeches of the politicians. The treaty does revise on the demand of Nepal government many times but still it is felt in Nepal that this is not the Treaty of mere Friendship but is protocol of limitations.

Besides common culture, economic interests there are some no-compromised areas where Nepal chooses to go publicly angry against India. This includes border disputes and religious sensitivities. Nepal openly protested against India's 1975 annexation of Sikkim by

Nepal, as it was historically, politically and geographically the integral part of the Greater Nepal. (P & e, 2020) A similar step by Indian government yet again has fraught India-Nepal relations in 2020 when both nations went into a bout with their revised maps. (Xavier, 2020)

On the other hand, India's basic complain and suspicion that make this bilateral relation plagued is about terrorism. Since cold war era India suspect that land of Nepal is being used with official consent against India for acts of terrorism. This is somewhat sustained suspicion and time and again is voiced in bilateral meetings.

Nepal's relations with Pakistan are mere reflection of Nepal's efforts to counter balance the Indian more-than-required influence and control. In case of Pakistan, Nepal sided all along Indian foreign policy and established formal diplomatic relations as late as 1963, and at the time when counter balance activity was high in Nepal. Again, in the proclamation of Independence by Bangladesh against Pakistan, Nepal was one of the first countries to recognize that claim. The decision was not only result of dependence on India but also a strong wish to have an alternate country to mitigate the same dependence. Pakistan's relations with Nepal are mainly in the areas of security and economy. (Shah, 2018)

Within region, Pakistan is considered as true counter balance against Indian state hegemony. This role Pakistan is endowed with by the first day of its independence and both countries go to actual war for three times.³ Number of border disputes also prevents any chance of good relations and among them the oldest and world famous dispute is over the Kashmir. In South Asia, India Pakistan rivalry is mainly responsible for arms race, nuclear politics, and non-democratic political system in Pakistan. Both nations choose to go nuclear and spent billions of dollars on military and security purchase each year despite their bleak social conditions and financial status with wide spread poverty. In Pakistan the Kashmir issue and Indian threat from day one did result in kudos of military and having no previous tradition of democracy, this monopoly of power to military in Pakistan seriously damaged the democracy and nation building agenda. Thus the

³There have been three times attacks by India against Pakistan, first in 1948, second in 1965, third in 1971 in which East-Pakistan was separated. There is always discussion of fourth or the Kargil War, but it was some type of Border/Security basis war, not a direct attack on the country.

bilateral relations with India forced Pakistan to put security concerns at the top of its preferences in its foreign policy.

Relations with Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh also depict that the main concern of Pakistan, as well as the respective countries is to balance the power in region against India. Indeed, there are trade, cultural and other concerns, but within region Pakistan is considered to face the India as number two. The efforts to normalize relations between the two nations break and hurt time and again by any big terrorist act or war, Mumbai terror attacks in 2008 being the latest. There is very little chance of any meaningful and productive relations between two without addressing the basic hurdles in such relations, the dispute of Kashmir and mutual agreement of non-aggression.

Sri Lanka, a nation of strange talents in South Asia, having highest literacy rate in the region this eye-drop island is master in make wonderful political achievements. During cold war it was one of those few nations who maintained equally warmed relations with USA and USSR. After cold war the list of its near contacts is astonishing to have with same degree of relations with such diverse and even rival states. Like Sri Lanka received constant supply of high tech weapons all along three decades from Pakistan and Israel. It manages to get economic aid from Arab nations and yet have very equal share of trade with India and China at same time.

Within region its relations are based on the aims of national integrity and economic interests. It has to fight a long Civil War from 1980s to 2009, thus for Sri Lanka regional relations were mainly gauge on the only stick of loyalty with Sri Lanka against Tamil separatists. Naturally Pakistan came first by this criterion that supported government and state of Sri Lanka all along and in each area of weapons, trainings and intelligence sharing. Pakistan has close ties with Sri Lanka in realms of security and trade. Pakistan also played a key role in developing the relations between Sri Lanka and China, a relationship that is now responsible for the major trade and weapons supplies to Sri Lanka. (Czarnotta, 2015)

With India, despite cultural, historic and social similarities the Tamil Separatist Movement and the role India played in it destroyed mutual trust. In 1987, when Sri Lanka in effort to guard off Tamils blocked all supplies to Jaffna, India air lifted the food and weapons. This act, and later the conclusion of peace accord and

stationing of Indian army on the soil of Sri Lanka give necessary fuel to anti-India sentiments in Sri Lanka. The streets filled with nationalist with demands to dislodge Indian army. This was not only the common man but policy makers also were of negative about the attitude of Indian decision makers. Yet Sri Lanka having its strange talent to maintain the foreign relations in the areas that suites to their national interests, Sri Lanka is not lagged behind in collection of economic fruits by boost of Indian economy. As for Sri Lanka, politics is politics and economy is economy.

With Bangladesh, Sri Lanka relations are rooted in history date back to 2000 BC. But in modern political reality, Sri Lanka supported Pakistan in war against India in 1971 and provided the facility of harbor and refueling. After Pakistan recognition of Bangladesh as independent state Sri Lanka wasted no time in establishing its relations with a state that promise good trade and which counter balance to some degree to India. To date Sri Lanka relations with Bangladesh is mainly in the realms of trade and security. Maldives maintain good relations with Sri Lanka for cultural but most importantly for economic reasons. Tourism being the single most means of foreign exchange earnings for Maldives is managed and en-routed by Sri Lanka.

Political culture of mutual intolerance among states of the South Asia, in fact provide rent for any intervention by non-state actors. This is not unusual to get funding and all required help by any anti-state actor by another neighboring state. Tamils got help from India, Khalistan Movement of Sikhs aided by Pakistan; the separatist movement in East Pakistan got state military aid by India.⁴ This culture of rivalry also penetrates into groupings and re-groupings of states against another state on any given issue. India supported Tamils for political reasons thus Pakistan extended its help to Sri Lanka with no direct interest except wining a friend in region against India.

In such political culture the element of religious extremism or even terrorism find the ideal to spread and strength. Any religious extremist group, capable to damage and challenge the state and having few of such events at its record find no problem in getting resources by another state within region. This nationalistic trend of intolerance and constant cold war in the region,

⁴It is a kind of proxy war, though official sources deny this policy of any kind, yet there have been instances which proved the involvement of certain elements aided by the one state against the other.

coupled with poverty, inequality, and non-democratic traditions not only give birth to religious extremism but also ensure its growth by constant funding and support.

Indeed, such intentional practice and its development as political culture, of weakening neighbor states with any available way never contribute or even accept the idea of cooperation and integration for mutual interests. Thus the result is ever weakening state system in the region and growing influence of non-state violent actors in forms of extremist, terrorist and fascist.

4. CONCLUSION

It is a piece of research to find the answer for a simple question: How religious fundamentalism effect regional politics in South Asia. At first what we discovered is that being the hub of world's oldest cultures and religions subcontinent of India now, forming the South Asia in modern terms, the ideas of clash or compromise both are not new among religions. Even its use in power struggle is not a strange idea. Religion is used, like in any other part of the world, as legitimacy tool for power acquiring and to prolong it. However, it is colonial era that first time Indian subcontinent experienced political identity based on religious divide. Though this setup proved a helpful policy for colonial rule but after Independence this politico-religious identities and agendas give birth to political aspiring religious extremism.

The causes behind the birth of religious extremism are mixed and at least of three sources. Firstly, the aspirations and ideals inculcated in the minds of masses turned into political demands. As such demands were impossible to meet within Western democratic system, soon the sense of insult and non-participation turned into potential of emotionally charged masses, ready to support any anti-state action in the name of religion. This further strengthened by racial, parochial and other divides in these newly formed states.

Second source is indeed the political activist belonging to religious parties and organizations. They after having scarified everything for the setup of ideal religious political system, and left nothing with them, felt cheated and turned into extremist of the kind who ready to explode him or her along with all those who are responsible for that cheating, indeed including those who are not protesting against cheaters. This mentality proves especially dangerous once able to get resources from inside or out-side state.

Third and last source that give birth to extremism in South Asia is absence of social justice. Every state of the region is corrupt; the only difference is of the degree and time. This monopoly of power, corruption, and widespread poverty with no chance for a common man to attain his or her right resulted in a society where individual transformed into somewhat sub-human creature. The accumulated anger, poverty and sense of humiliation prepare the kind of masses that are ready to cooperate in any anti-state or even un-ethical chores if it guarantees any kind or degree of personal benefit or satisfaction.

On the other hand, the politics and political culture in the South Asia is just replica of what is being practiced in third world countries in post-colonial era. Agendas of nation building, defining national interest and setting preferences are made by few and for the few. No real democratic process is encouraged, thus result in a non-participator masses. Besides the poor quality of governance, coupled with corruption and non-creative procedures further make the gap between ruler and the ruled wide.

This culture also effects the state to state relations. Within region the states compete with each other, using all means, just to make other player weak. Indeed, the power struggles is oldest mood of politics within states, but the type of struggle in vogue at South Asia could be termed as an effort of defeating neighbor without any aim and as an end in itself. This tendency helps global actors to manipulate and bargain with ease.

Thus interplay of religious extremism in regional politics is very specific in nature. At one hand the religious extremism is product of such political culture, that divide and assign identities to the social groups on the basis of religion and on the other hand the-weak, wary, and un-stable state system with no culture of tolerance and having too many reasons to go to war with each other, provide strength and patronage to religious extremism and anti-state activities by non-state actors against neighbor states.

To answer the basic question, religious extremism is indeed a major road-block in regional cooperation but this is not a complete answer without context. The context is the very state system in South Asia is based on the culture of intolerance, non-democratic, corrupt, and elitism. In such political culture at one hand religious extremism is one of the natural output, and on

the other hand it serves the purpose of states who wish to diminish each other. Thus if religious extremism is roadblock of regional cooperation, in fact it is located on a deserted road which no one wish to adopt.

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