

Rita Manchanda Talking points

Substantive root causes of contemporary conflicts involving minorities

South Asia region spans : 8 countries: largely constitutional democracies with fundamental rights chapters. These states are comprised of a mosaic of ethnicities and religions...challenges of pluralism are huge and so too is the gap in the constitutional promises made: especially in the contemporary context of **ascendant extreme ethno religious nationalism** which has reinforced **structural marginalisation of minority communities: i.e.** structural inequality, discrimination, institutionalised exclusion and state complicity in the targeted persecution and repression of minorities amidst a culture of impunity--- It is an 'othering' of minority communities --produced by deficits of democracy, development and justice.

Minority Crisis in several of the countries has reached a new threshold --pick out three developments 1) In India practices of religious discrimination, prejudice and persecution have got formalised into state laws and policy --manifest in a slew of laws : Freedom of Religion Acts, Prohibition of Conversion laws, Cow Protection Acts and Citizenship Amendment Act (2019) which introduced for the 1st time a religious clause into the secular framing of citizenship law.

2) Explicit targeting of minority communities : stigmatization and disproportionate persecution and violent assaults, the spread of anti-minority hate speech with impunity -- here single out role of the state agencies and especially **state driven narratives** in the othering and positioning of entire communities as suspect rendering them vulnerable to mob violence: **anti minority spin has become default narrative : Covid** and stigmatization of minorities

3. **Aggressive silencing of any counter narrative: stifling** independent civil society fact finding efforts, reports of journalists and lawyers are suppressed and activists and victims are harassed, assaulted and charged with a battery of violations including anti security laws while likely perpetrators roam free.

The crackdown on civic and human rights movements has disproportionately impacted marginalised communities

SA has become a region in which -peaceful protest gets conflated with violent politics, and ethno-nationalist and ethno-religious struggles get conflated with 'terrorism' .

Across the region--- analytically a common pattern can be identified of the roots causes that are at risk of producing the conditions that produce conflicts involving minorities

-internal power seeking politics : manipulation of religion and politics by competing insecure elites jostling for power --- whether it is use of politicised religion in the effecting Great Partiton and founding of two states Pakistan and Indian or present day populist governments in Sri lanka exploiting minority politics fo regime consolidation. In SA the manipulation of religion and politics is **not specific to any one faith** – Islamist mobilisation in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Maldives, ascendant *Hindutva* right wing populist politics in India, Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka, etc

Inter-state: In a **region of kin states** where the majority in one state is a minority in another, and trans- regional competitive ethno-religious nationalisms are implicated in cross border violent struggles: India: LTTE and liberation War in Bangladesh, Pakistan in *Taliban* . Also -where ethnic and social groups frequently spill over political borders, such violence feeds into the rhetoric of fear and social fragmentation propagated by militant religious groups–Bangladesh violence Oct 2021- spill over into retaliatory and **planned** violence across the border in Tripura India ----

Geo-political entanglement of the region in great power militarist projects and globalised ideological conflicts has produced a context in which local ethno-nationalist struggles and communal (religious) conflicts get conflated with global master narrative of extremism: e.g. Islamic *jihad* and ideology of Islamophobia .

Recommendations

1. In view of the pernicious role of **state driven populist narratives** that construct minority communities as ‘suspect’ and a national security risk ----the importance of supporting and protecting the production and dissemination of counter narratives, in a repressive environment where critical fact dissent and fact finding is criminalised.

Protect and support HRDs/journalists/lawyers from state repression and vigilante violence.

2. **Strengthen rule of law and institutions** necessary for protection of minority rights and countering impunity, and **document the abusive practice of heaping multiple**

charges including anti-security laws against dissenters, and disproportionate targeting of minorities, including in Jammu and Kashmir

- 3.** In a region of kin states the claims of cross border ethno-religious communities feeds into the rhetoric of fear of ‘proxy citizen’, engage with the minority question regionally and transcend entrapment in local majority–minority dynamics. **Situate minority rights claims within the broad based struggle for constitutional values and equal rights of citizens**

- 4.** Given that spread of religious orthodoxy of all faiths and the manipulation of religion and politics has grave ramifications for women’s rights and freedoms, **recognise the inter-sectionality of oppression of gender and identity in framing advocacy and interventions for minority women.**