

HUMAN RIGHTS AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN SOUTH ASIA

Role of Youth in Religious Freedom in South Asia

by

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Introduction:

Mahatma Gandhi said, "Each civilization should be judged by the way it treats her minorities!" In this very sense we are all minorities in some part of the world in one way or the other. Here, civilization could either mean State or Religion at the present time. In some countries there is separation of the two and in some countries there is no separation of the two concepts for the purpose of administration. An important aspect for youngsters is to have clarity of thought and clarity of purpose.

Diversity is a complex phenomenon. It is dynamic and is not static in any given environment. Diversity stems from any of the following, such as gender, religion, class, culture, community, colour, race etc. The list is inclusive in this regard. Religious freedom and human rights are often at conflict which each other and many nations use religion to fight their own wars. Hence, for youngsters what is the way forward in these tense times? I sincerely believe that the following pointers will have an impact on youngsters for proper understanding of religious freedom and human rights.

- a.) **Know your Religion:** Every individual who is a follower or believer has to make an attempt to understand one's own religion/faith/denomination. Normally, we all follow the practice part and the studying is left to priests but it is essential for all of us to truly study and understand the basic tenets of our religion/faith/denomination. This will help to learn and unlearn ideologies that we have developed over time. In a way it also makes a person to truly open their mind to learn the underlying message and the evolution of the religion/faith/denomination over time.
- b.) **Appreciate & Accept:** The other most important thing is to appreciate and accept the existence of other religious beliefs and practices that we see around us. In this global world it is difficult to be an isolated group of followers. Spreading the message of any religion/faith/denomination is being done for many centuries now and it still continues in various forms at the present time. Hence. It is essential to not see competition or rivalry between two ideologies but we will be better off to encourage space for all thoughts. Otherwise we will be going back in time and rather than going forward. Youngsters must be encouraged by one and all especially to open their mind to the diversities around us.

- c.) **Clarity**: The above points need something to trigger the process of understanding that is clarity. Clarity for youngsters has to come from their homes, peers/elders of their community, school or college of study, place of work, family they belong to and family they have after marriage etc. Clarity about ones religion/faith/denomination and practice in their community and family and acceptance of other practices around us have to be impressed upon youngsters through their different stages of growth. This will enable them to be informed and educated about diversities around them. This will keep them in good stead when they eventually start their family and develop future generations.
- d.) **Information Revolution**: Technology has united the world and divided the world in the same vein. The more and more we are seemingly connected the more it seems we are isolated in thought and practice in the World Wide Web. Information is easier to pass on these days and spreading the message is just a click away and hence people in responsible positions need to be cautious while doing so as it is bound to impact millions of people.



Conclusion:

In Sanskrit there is a saying which goes, “Athithi Devo Bhava”, meaning guest is god. If we can treat our guest who is going to be with us for a short while as god, we can surely try to treat our fellow human beings in our community with more respect and goodwill. As a youngster I am looking forward to the next few decades in this global world with a positive mind and lot of expectations. Religion has become part of my identity. Spirituality is something I have come to practice and live with. I don’t expect to be ridiculed or set aside for my belief system without reasonable or genuine intent. In the same vein, I believe and practice to accept and appreciate the differences around me in my society and elsewhere. This philosophy will keep us in good faith.