



Approaching ‘Shared Citizenship’ in South Asia

Global Exchange on Religion in Society

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgment	ii
Executive Summary	3
Introduction	4
Understanding Shared Citizenship	5
‘Approaching’ Shared Citizenship in South Asia	5
How to Approach?	6
Methods and Research Design	7
Conclusion	8
Findings	8
References	9
Questionnaire	10

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GERIS Team Members to Exchange Visit For South Africa During 2nd April-10th April, 2022

Executive Summary

This research analyses the relationship between the state and citizen among south asian countries. As there is increase in state imposition of the concept of citizenship in South Asia or the citizenship from above and not from below. Our focus is on the intersection defining the idea of citizenship along with the sole line of legal-politico dimensions. The study aims to have particular resonance within South Asia to think for shareable reasons/cause to re-conceptualise the idea of Citizenship in general and Shared Citizenship in Particular.

The systematic literature that, I referred and analysed for this report highlights as to how the political atmosphere in South Asia has become increasingly authoritarian, anti- democratic and volatile to have imposed citizenship from above in South Asia. The manifestations of ethnic turmoil and conflict in South Asia entails the story of lack of democratic consolidation and fragile citizenship.

This micro project has gone through much of its depth in conversation with other researchers/intellectuals to whom I met during study visits and conferences/virtual space. The methods of this study include extended qualitative interviews with expert stakeholders and focus groups with online survey in closed questionnaire that was conducted during July-August, 2021 in all eight South Asian Countries.

The very much essence of Shared Citizenship goes against the homogenising idea of liberal state that imposes a single identity/single model under the garb of legal and political necessity. While, The idea of 'shared citizenship' can be understood in the light of shared civic vision/shared aspirations, dreams and achievements of South Asian countries that have been narrated from generation to generation, inspite of the fact that different faith, religion, boundaries, cultural and political ideology exist side by side. Although, Citizenship is an essential elements of democracy and a universal feature, but an intricate and contested concept through the ages.

The key finding underscores how most of the respondents agree that South Asian societies are not woven around state but around their pluralist culture and pluralist societies. Pluralism as the very essence of liberal democracy and characterised by the coexistence of different ethnic, social, cultural, religious, linguistic groups, that has been embraced by South Asian states. Therefore, a common ground of citizenship based on shared commitments is the need of the hour. Citizenship must be a shared enterprise with the readiness to struggle against prejudices and authoritarianism, along with the limited role of state. Social and moral dispositions are essential ingredients of citizenship because legal and constitutional fencing can't cover everything and have its own limitations.



GERIS Team Members - Exchange Visit
South Africa - theme: "Shared Citizenship"

Introduction

The citizens of South Asia share the coeval global yearning for democracy and citizenship. Although the notions of democracy and citizenship are believed to have borrowed or adapted one of a small stock of west-authored 'ideal types'. South Asia being a multiethnic, multilingual, multi-religious region seems to be agreed upon to follow the path of democracy and citizenship, which is suitable for their country because it prevents authoritarianism. They believe that democratic ecology creates a space for living together and exchanging views, despite being diverse. But, the new nation states (in South Asia) that emerged in the twentieth century "was rarely homogenous. Its territory often included numerically smaller people with different national, ethnic, linguistic and religious identities, that is, minorities that did not wish to be assimilated" (Manchanda;2010) are all assumed to have their own citizenship laws and democracy drawing upon their traditions, culture, aspirations and imperial rules. So, the biggest democratic challenge to South Asian nation-states is how to respect and ensure pluralism to secure citizenship? However, there is exiguity in clear understanding of how citizenship policies actually vary across the South Asian countries. Undoubtedly, "Citizenship in South Asia thus proves to have a complex parenthood, with 'civil' and 'political' more entangled, and mutually constituted".(Chatterji;2012) Citizenship is built upon understandings of individuals and society identified with legal and political rights through a concentration on identity which can be used to divide as well as unite societies. Citizenship is an essential elements of democracy and a universal feature, but a complex and contested concept throughout the ages. However, Seyla Benhabib has underscored citizenship as "the paradox of democratic legitimacy"(Benhabib,2002).

Citizenship is more than the right to vote. It is about sharing cultural values and learning to live together across diversity. I aim to recuperate the notion of citizenship from its aforementioned state of paradox to reframe the debate to conceptualise shared citizenship that does not merely rely on identity or state recognition, but goes beyond politico-legal analysis. The immediate concern motivates the researcher to carry out this micro project, in consonance with the current critical discourse on citizenship that the world in general and South Asia in particular has been facing; for example the Citizenship Amendment Act issue in India. It seems true that science breeds wealth of knowledge but social sciences solicit/arbitrate that knowledge for the sake of human civilisation."Citizenship is the right to have rights" has been famously claimed by Hannah Arendt'. The idea of shared citizenship postulates towards the meaning of citizenship that extends beyond the legal & political status. "A person who is not free is not a citizen"(Hoffman;2004) and a person can never be illegal when everyone is legitimate. State alone can no longer protect citizens notwithstanding the fact that, state's mechanism for protecting 'its' subjects has always been contradictory and paradoxical.

"The term 'South Asia' is indeed interesting for several reasons. First it refers to a region¹, where several religions, that may be identified with different 'civilizations', have been interacting, potentially challenging the idea that a region forms a cultural realm. Second is the ambivalent role of British colonization, which on the one hand laid the foundations (partly started by the Mughals) for a mental representation of the region, through its unification policies, and on the other contributed to create divisions between distinct states and across common cultures at the time of Independence. Third, the Indian Subcontinent, a more familiar term for 'South Asia', has been characterized by a tragic history that witnessed several partitions rendering notions of 'region' and 'regionalism' particularly sensitive. Fourth is the peculiar dominating position of a single country, India, and the specific nature of another one, Pakistan, which is the only country, along with Israel, established in the name of a religion". (Devji; 2013)

South Asia comprises of states like; Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka; Afghanistan and the Maldives too are often considered as part of South Asia. "One of the most populous and plural regions in the world, South Asia remains in the throes of divisive forces with issues such as internal conflicts, regional chasms, poverty and religio-ethnic extremism continuing to thwart efforts for safe and equal citizenship and a harmonious, interdependent regionalisation".(Europa Regional Survey of the world,South Asia;2018)

A fundamental premise of this micro-project is that, how to look-up the ways and means towards citizenship beyond the legal & political footage in South Asia and identify a coherent set of cases that face common challenges within a shared culture, shared traditions, shared history, shared heritage etc. Although, South Asian region are interdependent and interconnected but do we think and act passionately as South Asians? As for the reason that “South Asian nations being regarded as the illegitimate children of the Anglo-American legal/political tradition” (Khilnani, Raghavan&Thiruvengadam; 2013).

Understanding Shared Citizenship

The idea of ‘shared citizenship’ can be understood in the light of shared civic vision in spite of the fact that different faith, religion, boundaries, cultural and political ideology exist side by side. In general, citizenship seems to be the byproduct of shared space in a given politico-legal layout based on mutual co-existence or “ethics of care”². Shared citizenship seems to be understood as part of social remittances based on the mental framework that “Civic Virtues must not collapse into Political Virtues”(Merry;2012) Although concept of citizenship varies from state to state, but not human to human. The idea of shared citizenship must be understood as progressive leading to improvement in social conditions of concerned people. There must be a common ground of citizenship based on shared commitments.

Imperative of shared citizenship moves against marginalisation and supports pluralism, accommodates diversity, promotes trust and tolerance, leads to resilience in which living together is manifested across boundaries of belief and world-views. Shared destiny encompasses diversity of visions, affiliations, and values that citizens hold, and it also seeks to weave the historical, political, and social ties among members of the nation into a form of bonding that would sustain their shared political project. Shared citizenship may be canvassed as the revitalisation of citizenship or to re-conceptualise the concepts of “citizen,” “citizenship” in the form of shared fate through intercultural learning, interfaith dialogue at different levels of society. “Political Space is mutating in ways that the traditional distinctions between state and society, domestic and international, citizen and alien can no longer do justice”.(Nyers;2009) Shared citizenship emphasises on positive experience of co-existence (promoting interfaith dialogue) “powered by conviction and belief, with the shared values of an ethics of love, peace, freedom and justice-commit to establish, in collaboration and with due regard and respect for all faiths and religious practices, a united front to embark on restoration of families, homes, communities and societies”.³ “Shared” implies a process of developing practices and institutions intersubjectively, a process into which certain conditions of reciprocity can enter. Shared citizenship invokes to the good senses and traditions of the citizenry where complexities of pluralism can be addressed through ethical & moral positioning rather legal and political one. This idea also hoists two important questions First, that who has the authority to define citizenship? Second, how to advance a stronger understanding of what citizenship really means? Human civilisation since the beginning remained occupied in the quest of good life and human beings had migrated-settling in new lands, is an age old phenomena. So, Migration is a consistent feature of human history and indeed migration has increased the diversity of advanced democracies, leading to changes in national culture and identity. Consequently, it is our shared values, norms, aspirations, dreams, needs that binds us together not the legal and political bondage.

‘Approaching’ Shared Citizenship in South Asia

Shared citizenship may be canvassed as the revitalisation of citizenship or to re-conceptualise the concepts of “citizen,” “citizenship” in the form of shared fate through inter-cultural learning, interfaith & intra-faith dialogue and nonviolent communication at different levels of society in South Asia. Social and moral dispositions are closely associated with citizenship. South Asian citizenship is the product of awe & shock of partition and independence as well as fluid and multiple affiliations based on given multiplicity of cultural identities. South Asia is known as the land of plurality, who has also witnessed extensive migrations since inception, and ethnic identities is often cut across regional, religious and even national boundaries. People of South Asian region has some sense of shared identity. “South Asia is the pragmatic product, always in the making, of an ideological and discursive process; it is a set of interested claims by political actors on a cultural

geography that is not self-evident or singular but multiple and contested”(The International Encyclopedia of Linguistic Anthropology;2021) as more than 1.88 billion(World Bank Report;2021) people of the region they constantly negotiate with their states, societies and territories in quest for better lives.“Of the 7,099 living languages, South Asia is one of the most linguistically diverse areas in the world with four language families comprising more than 650 individual languages”(The Hindu,January08, 2018) “811 languages are spoken in South Asian region”. (UNDP Report;2004) On the other, the people of South Asian region represent almost all the major religions and few of them like; Sanatana (Hinduism), Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism evolved in this region, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Zoroastrianism have had a long demeanour in this region. While, India & Nepal recognises secular forms of government, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Maldives recognise Islam as the state religion, Sri Lanka confers foremost place to Buddhism and Bhutan also recognises Buddhism as the ‘spiritual heritage’. “South Asia has witnessed a great deal of inter- action, hybridisation, and syncretism in ideas, languages, and dialectics, cultural pat- terns, arts and crafts and folklore”.(Momin;2009)

In simultaneity they imbue citizenship with meaning that extends far beyond its original conception as a status bestowed by governments upon populations. Advancing meaningful citizenship thus entails addressing the distancing of the state from the community. Any State and region can be enhanced by studying it in the context of citizenship.

“South Asian citizenship was produced, on the contrary, as a result of complex interactions between a bewildering plethora of actors: above all, by the actions of millions of people who became stranded minorities as a consequence of partition and independence, and whose decisions to flee, stay on, or return to their homes were posited on notions of where they belonged and where they were entitled to protection”(Chatterji;2012)

The project aims for a deeper understanding and critique of the citizenship debate in postcolonial states in South Asia. “The states of South Asia imposed citizenship upon the people of the subcontinent, forcing their fluid and affiliations into neat national boxes, producing ‘with some for citizens of two nation-states”.(Zamindar;2007) While the process of citizenship should begin from below based on practical wisdom. Ethnic/ religious diversity makes the world a more intellectually and culturally vibrant and cre- ative place. There must be a sharable reasons, where;

A) S-Stands for Secularism: Secularism teaches sociability, means religion could not be the basis of citizenship. It pays equal respect to all religion and prevent discrimination on religious or cultural grounds regarding access to citizenship.

B) H-Stands for Heterogeneity: Seeks that diverse cultures must represent as equals in the public domain.

C)A-Stands for Accommodation: means learn to live a shared life

D)R-Stands for Resilience/Reciprocity: is the soul of citizenship.

E) E-Stands for Engagement:Engagement in common shared civic action/shared dimen- sion to mitigate other subnational or cross-national affiliations through public deliberation and engage people of all ages and walks of life.

F) D-Stands for Democracy:Democratic demand/ethos for respect other’s values, cul- ture, faith and conscience and pursue tolerance and to make peace with the past, be- cause democracy is not a form of government but a way of life.

How to Approach?

- Greater dissemination of positive experiences of coexistence among actors of different faiths, culture, identity etc.
- Open dialogue and deliberation free from state interventions.
- There must be a common ground of citizenship based on shared commitments.

- Making citizens aware of shared norms as the primary moral commitments of State.
- State has to become mature enough to accompany ethics of sharing in her given circumstances.
- Promoting inter cultural learning and interfaith dialogue at different levels of society among all the South Asian member states.
- Critical and dissenting voices are important for a vibrant society, Diversity is not a teaser rather it's a treasure or source of enrichment for society.
- Only institutionalised form of secularism can't pave the way for shared vision.
- Positive media-mediated public discourse with non-violent communication at different levels of society.
- Follow the principles of compassion.
- Engagement among South Asian political, legal, cultural and religious communities to use and develop law and culture as a source & an instrument for social change.
- Strong civic and community foundations are necessary if people are to have the confidence to welcome asylum seekers and migrants.

During, July-August 2022, 216 Professors, Citizens, College students participated in some form of google survey, which contains ten items in the form of closed questionnaire' through out Eight South Asian countries. This statistic leads to questions of how to approach shared citizenship in South Asia? Out of 213 responses, 62% citizens are age group, 35 Citizens falls between 50–60 Years age group and 20 citizens falls in 60 and above age group. The pattern shows that young generation are more sensitive towards understanding the idea of citizenship and its related concern. I have tried to consult the citizens of South Asian countries through educational institutions and the pattern shows that 37% respondents are having the education of Post-Graduation and equivalent degree, 27.3% respondents are having the education of Under Graduation and equivalent degree, 20.8% having the education of Higher Secondary and equivalent degree, 13.4% having the education of Doctoral and equivalent degree, 0.9% are possessing the secondary education, as, we know that citizenship is a complex and con- tested concept, so as a researcher I preferred to select the respondents from formal educational background. The respondents are from all faith-Hindus 62.5%, Muslims-14.4%, Buddhists-15.3%, Christians-3.2% and rests are non-believers. Out of these 64.8% agreed that they are familiar with the idea of shared citizenship and 63.9% accepted that the idea of citizenship has been imposed upon the people as the bounded citizen. 78.2% respondents are agreed upon the idea that there is the possibilities to bring together sub-national and cross national affiliations around shared cause. 68.5% disagreed that only political affiliations are sufficient preconditions for citizenship be- cause 84.7% respondents agree that South Asian societies are not woven around state but around their pluralist culture and pluralist societies based on shared norms.

Methods and Research Design

This micro project has gone through much of its depth in conversation with other re- searchers/intellectuals to whom I met during study visits and conferences/virtual space. I began with an examination of what citizenship is, and what would be the probable shareable reasons. South Asia comprises of states like; Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pa- kistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka; Afghanistan and the Maldives too are often considered as part of South Asia. The project aims for a deeper understanding and critique of the cit- izenship debate in postcolonial states in South Asia. The researcher preferred for the area because of his interest in political philosophy and quest for practical and feasible application of citizenship to produce usable social knowledge. To address these puzzles, the researcher attempted a careful negotiation with some historical contexts of citizen- ship as they are available during the present times. The study undertook an analytical, descriptive and exploratory discourse with the help of theoretical and philosophical ex- plorations based on secondary sources (such as books, articles in journals and newspa- pers, online sites and blogs etc.) & primary sources (such as Interviews, Closed Ques- tionnaires etc.). A closed questionnaire had been developed and an online survey was conducted during July-August period, 2022 (Refer Schedule). The study has used qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the essentials for sharable common ground as well as to address the complexities of citizenship in modern times.

In this field of inquiry a set of impartial accounts and academic neutrality has been maintained and researcher tried to aggregate the main agreed results through dialogues, interviews and communication ethics. It was a descriptive ethical inquiry which led to the conclusions about the message of moral social science. The project strived to go through various debates with the aim to put forward measures meant to strengthen the changing notion of citizenship in a globalised world. Humanistic Social Science research has the potential to persuade us to change our behaviour and provide answers to major global challenges such as the idea of citizenship. It's pertinent to take note of the fact how these south asian countries are able to share a list of their respective common grounds of citizenship.

Conclusion

The micro research project has emphasised on the revitalisation of citizenship through shared vision/reason because apart from political tasks (being able to vote) citizens must perform to shape and sustain the collective life of the community. Social and moral dispositions are closely associated with citizenship. Advancing meaningful citizenship thus entails addressing the distancing of the state from the community. To address the deeply unsettled issues like the citizenship, meaningful application of social sciences is the need of the hour. The approach and analysis of an argument may begin to realise the promise of a long-standing line of speculation, demonstrating the possibility of ushering a new era of citizenship such as shared citizenship. Good citizenship can't be measured according to some fixed standard of law or institutional design. Citizenship ought to be understood as an activity guided by practical wisdom and preserved by civic virtues. Sharing the citizenship is the fullest realisation of human capacities, in which reciprocity/resilience is the soul of citizenship. Only direct political participation does not account for good citizenship. There are other ways too. Digital space has also created an active and informed citizenry led to the manifestations of political, social, legal, cultural participation in a variety of contexts beyond borders. Today, unconventional participations are much easier to share the ideas, beliefs, political circumstances and makes an unprecedented way beyond borders, authority and sovereignty. It also gives a sense of living together, belongingness and mutual responsibilities.

Findings

Citizenship must be a shared enterprise, struggle against prejudice, with the limited role of state. The project finds out certain sharable reasons in general and with South Asia in particular apart from globalisation and multiculturalism, such as; Environmental Citizenship, Digital Citizenship, Global Citizenship, Corporate citizenship, Multicultural Citizenship etc. through which a shared vision/reason of citizenship can be established. There is enough room for a lot of trial-and-error learning, and incase the need arises persuasive arguments may do the rest about how best the government/policy makers should do to accept the necessity of shared citizenship in the present world. This task is capable of becoming a possible reality only through cross-fertilisation of thoughts and feelings among the member states of South Asia.

Footnote:

1.The region primarily refers to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, the Maldives, as per the definition of the SAARC (South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation), which has however included Afghanistan lately (2007) among its members.

2.Ethics of care is a way in which trust, connections and community could be sensitively built as suggested by Dr. Rebecca Walker with the Scalabrini Center, Speaking In The Gap, Cape Town as the centre was also the part of South Africa exchange visit of GERIS Team members on 6th April,2022.

3. The Cape Flats Interfaith Declaration; Collective action for the restoration of communities, social Cohesion and Safer Communities, As adopted by the Interfaith Prayer Service for Peace at the Joseph Stone Auditorium, Athlone, on 25 AUGUST 2019, as the Cape Town Interfaith Community was also the part of South Africa ex-

change visit of GERIS Team members on 8th April,2022 and had the discussion & deliberation on the theme of shared citizenship.

4.The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. “We therefore call upon all men and women to restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion ~ to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate ~ to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures ~ to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity ~ to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings—even those regarded as enemies”. <https://charterforcompassion.org/charter>

5. On February 7,2002 the UK Government released a White Paper called ‘Secure Borders, Safe Haven’(Home Office 2002) appeared as to modernise the nation’s ‘immigration and asylum’ policy which states that . Strong civic and community foundations are necessary if people are to have the confidence to welcome asylum seekers and migrants. . They must trust the systems their governments operate and believe they are fair and not abused. They must have a sense of their own community or civic identity – a sense of shared understanding which can both animate and give moral content to the benefits and duties of the citizenship to which new entrants aspire. Only then can integration with diversity be achieved.

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Questionnaire

Q1. Your Gender

Male

Female

Q2. You are _____ years old.

Your Answer _____

Q3. What is the highest educational level that you have attained?

A) Early childhood education / no education

B) Primary education

C) Secondary education

D) Higher Secondary Education

E) Vocational Education

F) UG or Equivalent

G) PG/Master or Equivalent

H) Doctoral or Equivalent

Q4. Do you belong to a religion or religious denomination? If yes, which one

A) Do not belong to a denomination

B) Hindu C) Muslim D) Buddhist E) Christian F) Jew

G) Others

Q5. Your Nationality/Citizenship-

Your Answer _____

Q6. Are you familiar with the idea of shared citizenship? Yes

No

Q7. Is it possible to bring together sub-national and cross-national affiliations around shared cause?

Yes

No

Q8 The states of South Asia imposed citizenship from above upon the people as the bounded citizen.

Yes

No

Q9. South Asian societies are not woven around state but around their pluralist culture and pluralist societies.

Yes

No

Q10. Do you agree that only political affiliations are sufficient preconditions for citizenship?

Yes

No