

## **Violence and Veneration in The Name of Religion – The Dilemma of Demolishing Religious Sites in South Asia**

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### **Abstract**

This article investigates the dilemma of demolishing Holy sites because of intolerance and violence in the name of religion in South Asia. Religious discrimination and other strife in South Asia have destroyed the Babri Masjid in India, the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan, as well as temples in Pakistan and sacred places in Bangladesh. The purpose of this study is to understand the deeper ideological and political motives behind these violent acts as well as the ramifications for communal identity. The study highlights the impacts of political chaos and extremist ideologies in relation to the destruction of holy sites, which is not only the result of hostility against religious groups. The aim is to destroy the religious and intellectual identification marks of such groups. The research shows that the protection of places of worship is essential to maintain South Asia's religious legacy as well as to promote harmony.

**Keywords:** Violence, religious sites, mosques, temples, politics, South Asia

### **Introduction**

Religious sites frequently serve as focal points for conflict among South Asian countries. Communities often engage in conflict over places of worship because spiritual sites have profound significance for various people. These venues are an expression of identity, customs, past times, familial connections, and faith traditions. Religious sites for minority groups can foster a sense of identity and act

as a testament to their historical presence within the community but, owing to their symbolic meaning, they are susceptible to attack from external forces. Harmful actions aimed at sacred structures and symbols are evident globally, particularly in identity-based disputes. But investigation of such assault and its relation to nationalism has not been sufficiently explored, especially in South Asia, where the attainment of freedom of faith is not easy to achieve.

The obliteration of sacred edifices across South Asia, including mosques, shrines, cathedrals, and temples, has been in evidence for centuries. Frequently justified by means of religion, such incidents of devastation have generally concealed deeper realities of political, geographic, and identity-driven motivation. Spiritual edifices, as indicators of the presence of community cohesiveness, serve as symbols of faith and reasons for conflict. The obliteration of such symbols in the Indian subcontinent has served as an offensive strategy for establishing supremacy, consolidating political power, or marginalizing opposition groups. (Hinnells & King, 2007).

## **Historical Background**

Throughout the mediaeval and contemporary periods in South Asia, the destruction of holy sites frequently took place during the territorial growth of kingdoms and the consolidation of authority by new monarchs over different demographics. The rise of different civilizations throughout history resulted in disputes about the legitimacy, possession, and governance of cultural heritage. Notwithstanding attempts at reconciliation, disputes about history persisted, particularly those tied to ethnicity and faith and often resulted in the detriment of holy places. For instance, the Mughal monarchs engaged in the creation and demolition of holy monuments while navigating India's intricate theological multiplicity. (P.B. Singh, 2008)

During the colonial era, the exploitation of spiritual affiliations and the encouragement of community divisions established the foundation for contemporary

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disputes around holy areas. The influence of colonial rule in India transcended political, financial and economic dimensions and permeated the societal and theological structure of the country at large. A notable method utilized by the British Raj was the deliberate destruction of temples and shrines. (*British Rule - The Impact of British Rule on India's Culture & Economy*, n.d.)

The influence of belief systems on the demolition of holy sites is a significant issue. In "The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India," Gyanendra Pandey examines the role of colonial strategies and discourses in fostering conflicts between Hindus and Muslims. He contends that the British colonial rule significantly contributed to the formation of inflexible holy opinions, which subsequently incited violent acts between communities, involving assaults on sacred spots. He illustrates the way cultural iconography evolved into distinctive features in colonialism and post-colonial India, fueling disputes over sanctified sites. (Pandey, 2006) This shows that the demolishing of religious sites has a long history in different regions of South Asia.

## Politics and Destruction of Holy Sites in The Name of Religion

Several academics have investigated the longstanding causes of the devastation of sacred sites in South Asia, particularly during the eras of expansion of imperialism. Among these causes, political motives were the foremost and religion has remained an easy card to play in South Asia. Richard Eaton contends that the demise of temples in the mediaeval era was often prompted by political motives instead of solely associated with religion. Eaton asserts that administrators, especially Mughal royalty, focused on temples to establish supremacy in politics instead of undermining religious convictions. He argues that numerous conquerors supported temples as well as various holy establishments. His analysis questions the reductionist perspective that associates temple devastation exclusively with prejudices related to religion. (Ticku & Iyer, 2017)

In his article "The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India," Paul Brass examines the orchestration of disagreements over religion by political figures. Brass argues that the demolition of holy locations, illustrated by the Babri Masjid in 1992, cannot be solely a consequence of impromptu religious zeal but is frequently planned by politicians to fulfil particular political or partisan goals. This viewpoint emphasizes the utilization of faith-related symbols in contemporary South Asian electoral politics, especially in India, where nationalistic faith has been essential.(Brass, 2003)

### **Destruction of Bamiyan Buddhas-Afghanistan**



The obliteration of the Bamiyan Buddhas in March 2001 by the Taliban gave expression to a profound ethnic and archaeological displacement, and epitomized the wider concern about legacy degradation for political motives. The two colossal figures, measuring 35 and 53 meters, were hewn into the limestone walls of the Bamiyan Region in central Afghanistan circa the middle of the sixth century. They exemplified the affluent Buddhist heritage of the era, which flourished before the arrival and expansion of Islam. Despite global appeals for the preservation of the sculptures, the Taliban mandated their demolition, insisting that the Buddhas constituted idolatry in opposition to Islamic doctrine. The act incited worldwide indignation because the Buddhas were esteemed not only by Buddhists but recognized as irreplaceable cultural assets by people throughout the world. The devastation constituted a calculated assault on the region's multicultural heritage,

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obliterating traces of Afghanistan's heritage. (Leoshko, 2011).

The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas serves as a poignant warning of how historical heritage can fall victim to ideological and political intolerance. The Taliban took twenty-five days to destroy the statues but on 15th November 2014 the Afghan government, in collaboration with UNESCO and funded by the Republic of Korea, initiated a global design contest for the establishment of a Bamiyan Cultural Centre adjacent to the Bamiyan Buddhas. A primary motive for this contest was to leverage culture as a mechanism for developing the economy of the region while also showcasing the persistent customs and social fortitude of Afghanistan, a nation historically marred by disagreement and frequently portrayed to the international public through a reductionist lens. The architectural principles included centering the structure on themes of togetherness and intercultural communication while also preserving and respecting the site's natural setting. In February 2015, UNESCO revealed the winning scheme for the Bamiyan Cultural Centre, which was also endorsed by the Afghan leadership. UNESCO is now engaged in the effort to re-create the original environment of Bamiyan. (*Bamiyan Buddhas*, n.d.)

## Demolition of Babri Mosque- India



The demolition of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya, India, on 6th December 1992 is a pivotal and contentious event in contemporary Indian history. The building, which was constructed in 1528 by Mir Baqi at the behest of Mughal ruler

Baberi, has been the focal point of a protracted conflict between Hindus and Muslims regarding ownership of the property. (Ratnagar, 2004) Hindus assert that the mosque was erected on Ram Janmabhoomi, the birthplace of the venerated Hindu divinity Rama. (*Babri Masjid, Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024*) This longstanding disagreement intensified in the later portion of the twentieth century, resulting in the mosque's destruction. The disputes initially came to the surface in 1853 during a period of social transformation in the subcontinent. During imperial rule, the space was divided to permit devotion to both Muslims and Hindus but this did not resolve the dispute. Following the declaration of autonomy and the partition in 1947, hostilities escalated once more in 1949 when statues of Rama were clandestinely inserted into the mosque. This resulted in the site's restriction to Hindus and Muslims but the sculptures remained in place, exacerbating tensions. (*Anatomy of a Confrontation: Ayodhya and the Rise of Communal Politics in India. Edited by Sarvepalli Gopal. London: Zed Books, 1993. Viii, 240 Pp. Rs. 195 (Cloth). | The Journal of Asian Studies | Cambridge Core, n.d.*)

In the 1980s, the initiative to construct a Hindu temple at the site gained momentum since it was propelled by Hindu nationalistic organizations. In 1984, a restoration movement was officially initiated and throughout the next ten years the matter grew profoundly controversial. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) became a prominent advocate of the restoration movement, associating it with fundamental principles of Hindu revivalist thought. The Party's growing influence elevated the problem to national significance.

On 6<sup>th</sup> December 1992, counter to pledges from elected officials, a substantial crowd of Hindu activists, referred to as *kar sevaks*, assembled at the location. With the oversight of police officers, they dismantled the Babri Masjid within several hours by employing a sledgehammer along with other basic implements. The demolition of the mosque incited extensive clashes between communities throughout India and led to numerous fatalities as well as the intensification of religious divisions. (Engineer, 1989) In 2010, a high court adjudicated the division of the

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property between Hindus and Muslims but both parties filed appeals. In a pivotal 2019 ruling, the Supreme Court of India granted the property solely to Hindus for the development of a temple while instructing the authorities to provide additional space for a mosque.<sup>13</sup> The demolition of Babri Masjid symbolizes both religious and political discord in India and has influenced the country's political and socioeconomic environment for generations. (*“Enshrining a Secular Idol: A Judicial Response to the Violent Aftermat”* by Sheetal Parikh, n.d.)

### Destructive Attacks on Mosques in India

India claims to be a secular state as per the Constitution. But, unfortunately, the statistics present a different picture. According to one report, more than a hundred mosques and shrines have been demolished in Gujrat in the name of politics, religion or public welfare. According to statistics gathered by the Indian scholar, Surinder Khochar, who studies religious sites in Pakistan and India, the anti-Muslim movement of the BJP is responsible for the destruction of 650 mosques and shrines of different sizes and dimensions in Amritsar. The Modi government also supports these demolitions. For example, last year an ancient mosque built during the Sher Shah Soori era was destroyed in order to widen the road in Allahabad. (*Historical Mosque Demolished in India to “Widen Road,”* n.d.)



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<sup>13</sup> “Citizen’s Inquiry Reports on Ayodhya and Its Aftermath | Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East | Duke University Press,” accessed September 15, 2024, <https://read.dukeupress.edu/cssaame/article-abstract/14/2/1/350/Citizen-s-Inquiry-Reports-on-Ayodhya-andIts?redirectedFrom=PDF>.

On 9<sup>th</sup> January 2024, bulldozing machines destroyed the Shahi Masjid, a historic mosque dating from the sixteenth century located in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, India. The task at hand was a road-widening operation. Furthermore, Shahi Masjid is not the only historic mosque to have been demolished to make way for a new highway. A three-centuries old mosque that lined a road in the Muzaffarnagar area of Uttar Pradesh was also destroyed. (*Politics of Ruin: Why Modi Wants to Demolish India's Mosques* | *Politics* | *Al Jazeera*, n.d.)



Several other historical mosques are at stake because of Hindu extremism in India. The Jamia Mosque Shamsi, situated in Badaun, is also in danger because Hindus have filed a case that the mosque was built on the site of a Shiva Temple. Akhil Bharat Hindu Tava (ABHT) is trying to gain control of a mosque which they claim to be a Neelkanth Mahadev temple. (*Plea Claims Badaun's Mosque Is Site of Temple, Seeks Permission for Hindus to Offer Prayers*, n.d.) Hindu nationalist parties have started a movement to “reclaim temples”, which has endangered the historical sites of Muslims. Communal tensions can easily flare up because of the circulation of lists of endangered mosques. (McGuire & Copland, 2007)

These examples highlight how confrontations regarding sacred places in India have been stoked by religio-political motivations. Destroying or degradation of Muslim places, in particular, usually happens within the context of recovering Hindu



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history, which is a fundamental motif in the political philosophy of Hindu nationalism. These disputes are profoundly ingrained in larger socio-political disputes for authority, identity and ethnic domination and they are not limited to differences of religion.

### **Destruction of Jain Digambar Temple in Pakistan**



The vandalism of the Jain temple in Lahore is an important incident in the tumultuous past of religious-based strife in South Asia, especially during the period surrounding Partition in 1947. Lahore, a hub of different religions, underwent a substantial transformation in its socioeconomic and cultural context throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Jain community, albeit numerically limited in Lahore, had an impact on the city's design and customs. The finest edifice constructed by this ethnic group was the Jain temple in Anarkali, adjacent to Mall Road, a vibrant and central area in Lahore. (desk, 2022)

The Jain Digambar Temple was demolished amid a surge of reprisals after the destruction of the Babri Masjid India in 1992. The demolition of the Babri Mosque by Hindu fundamentalists incited extensive turmoil throughout South Asia, especially in Pakistan, where inter-religious tensions escalated. In Lahore, a Hindu temple was subjected to an attack by a crowd. The mob, unaware of the differences between Jainism and Hinduism, directed their fury towards the temple, erroneously

linking it to the Hindu culture. The temple, situated at the well-known Jain Mandir junction, sustained significant harm during the uprising, which resulted in extensive structural damage. This crime of vandalism was reminiscent of a broader reaction in Pakistan, where numerous Hindu and non-Muslim sacred sites were attacked following the demise of the Babri Masjid. For some years after the destruction, the temple lay in ruins with just the dome remaining intact. In 2016, the dome was protected from further damage by a fence built during the development of the Orange Line Metro Train (Rizwan, 07:17:34+05:00).



The obliteration of the Jain temple in Lahore exemplifies the way historic and geopolitical occurrences such as the demolition of the Babri mosque have enduring repercussions, frequently provoking unrest and resulting in the degradation of holy structures. Since then, the Pakistan Evacuee Property Board has renovated the Jain Digambar temple. (“No Jains, but Pak Works to Restore 40 Temples,” 2022)

### **Terrorists Attacks on Churches and Shrines in Pakistan**

Pakistan experienced a severe wave of suicidal attacks during the second decade of the 21st century when even sacred places were not safe from the terrorist attacks. On 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2013, a deadly blast in All Saints Church in Peshawar left more than 100 people dead and more than 250 were injured .(*Death Toll from Peshawar Church Bombing Rises to 81 - Pakistan - DAWN.COM*, n.d.) In 2015, more than 70 people were injured as a result of a suicide attack in Saint John’s

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Catholic Church in the district of Youhanabad, Lahore. Two men suspected as terrorists, were killed by the mob. (*Deadly Blasts Hit Pakistan Churches in Lahore - BBC News*, n.d.)



These attacks were not limited to churches. Mosques and shrines were also attacked. for example, on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2009, the Rehman Baba Shrine in Peshawar (saba.imtiaz, 2010); in 2010, the Data Ganj Bakhsh Memorial in Lahore (*Pakistan Data Darbar: Bomber Kills Nine Outside Sufi Shrine in Lahore*, n.d.); on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2010, the Abdullah Shah Ghazi sanctuary in Karachi, (salman.siddiqui, 2011); in 2016, the Shah Norani shrine in Balochistan. (*Pakistan Shah Noorani Shrine Bomb Kills 52 - BBC News*, n.d.) and in 2017, the Lal Shehbaz Qalander shrine in Sehwan, Sindh. (*Blast Hits Pakistan's Lal Shahbaz Qalandar Sufi Shrine | ISIL/ISIS News / Al Jazeera*, n.d.).

## Destruction of Religious Sites in Bangladesh

The destruction of places of worship in Bangladesh reflects pervasive problems with communist ideology, hostility towards religion, and the way politicians make use of the weaknesses of minority groups. Despite Bangladesh's democratic foundation, conflicts have increased due to the growth of political Islam and rising bigotry. The Bangladesh War of 1971 resulted in the destruction of many religious sites. During the decades of 1970 and 1980, religious minorities faced

violence due to the increase of religious and political tensions. (Shourie & Goel, 1990) Communal extremists attacked temples to express their response to riots happening in neighboring India. The 2001 general elections also led to an increase in communal riots. Many temples were destroyed and the Hindu minority was besieged especially in Chittagong and Chandpur etc. (Rashiduzzaman, 1994) Moreover, in 2012, extremists destroyed and pillaged nineteen Buddhist monastic structures in southeast Bangladesh, which were later restored. (Barua, 2018)

More recently, demonstrations in Bangladesh caused PM Sheikh Hasina Wajid to flee from the country. Religious minorities complained they were affected by the actions of protesters after the fall of the government. (*Religious Minorities in Bangladesh under Fire after Fall of Secular Regime*, 2024) According to estimates, more than 100 temples and crematoriums were attacked during these riots. (Bangla, 2024)



Furthermore, any incident in Pakistan and India has a direct or indirect effect on Hindu, Buddhist and Christian minorities in Bangladesh. (Uddin, 2015) Historically and socially, Bangladesh is an Islamic country and its status as a secular or non-secular state is still an open question. (Wohab, 2021) Defacement of its artistic and sacred legacy has damaged inter-religious relationships, eroded confidence and provoked hatred.

## Demolition of Mosques in Sri Lanka

Since 1880, Sri Lanka has a history of Islamophobic, discriminatory practice against the Muslim community. (Ali, 2015) The fundamental causes of such violent incidents include anxiety about the increasing Muslim population and trade disputes between Muslims and Sinhalese. During the past few decades, Sri Lanka has experienced a rise in extremist Buddhist groups such as Bodu Bala Sinha (BBS), which regard Muslim sacred places as a challenge for Buddhism. The view that these Muslim sacred places should be made available for Buddhist religious activities intensified attacks on mosques. (Lastname, 2018)



After the post civil war era of Sri Lanka in 2009, the gap between Buddhist and minority groups widened. As a show of Buddhist strength, Muslim sacred places were targeted. Nationalism also increased inter-religious hostility. (Fowsar et al., 2020) Political leaders have frequently manipulated religious tensions to gain advantage in elections. Such manipulation has included inflammatory remarks about Muslims in order to garner sympathy from the Buddhist sections of the population. Such activities have occasionally empowered factions to assault Muslim communities, particularly their mosques. (Spencer et al., 2015) For example, in 2009, Buddhist extremists destroyed a 50-year-old mosque in Dambulla.<sup>14</sup> Aluthgama also has a history of destruction as Buddhists attacked and burnt Muslim

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<sup>14</sup> State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2013: Events of 2012. United Kingdom: Minority Rights Group International, 2013.

sites such as mosques, houses and Muslim shops. (“Sri Lanka Muslims Killed in Aluthgama Clashes with Buddhists,” 2014)

Hijrapur mosque in Digana was also assaulted by a Buddhist mob in 2018. The escalating communal riots caused the demolition of other mosques as well. Even the local task force remained brutal towards the minority. (Fernando, 2018) Following the 2019 Easter Sunday assaults, several political figures blamed Muslim group, thereby exacerbating societal polarization and inciting assaults on mosques.((C)*Overt Islamophobia: The Aftermath of the Sri Lanka Easter Attacks / openDemocracy*, n.d.) During Covid-19, hatred against Muslims led to the destructon of Muslim places of worship. (Abdul Razak & Mohamed Saleem, 2022) Moreover, Sinhala Buddhist extremist groups spoke out against the veil, the abaya, halal food, slaughter houses and Muslim businesses (Mujahidin, 2023).

## **Iconoclasm**

Organizations such as UNESCO face situations in which citizens who experience multiple adversities continue to advocate for the safeguarding of their rich heritage because they feel that the obliteration of their heritage will exacerbate their anguish and jeopardize their identity as individuals. They consider that their cultural treasures are an expression of their identity as a community. Preserving hold sites and artifacts is essential for sustaining the societal structure and individual identity. The safeguarding of artistic heritage is intricately linked to the welfare of those whose lives it embodies. The erosion of an oral legacy can result in a significant sense of dislocation and alienation, exacerbating the distress of persons who already face many other difficulties. Consequently, conservation of culture is a matter of maintaining the social and mental health of individuals. (*Principles for the Resolution of Disputes Concerning Cultural Heritage Displaced During the Second World War*, n.d.)

## Contemporary National Regulations

The safeguarding of sacred places in South Asia is governed by diverse regulatory structures designed to avert their demise or sacrilege, recognizing their historical and religious significance. The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, in India, is a crucial statute aimed at preserving the spiritual identity of holy sites. This legislation specifically forbids the alteration of any place of worship and mandates the preservation of religious sites, save in instances of active legal challenges (*The Place of Worship(Special Provisions) Act, 1991*, 1991), such as the Babri Masjid case, which was already in court at the time the law was established. Notwithstanding the presence of this legislation, political and social pressures have occasionally challenged its efficacy, as evidenced by the Babri Masjid destruction in 1992.

The Evacuee Trust Property Board in Pakistan is responsible for overseeing the assets of minorities, particularly sacred sites abandoned by Hindus and Sikhs following Partition in 1947. (*Evacuee Trust Property Board | Tenant Bills*, n.d.) Examples of sacred property vandalism by extremist organizations expose deficiencies in the execution of these regulations. Notwithstanding legislative safeguards, religious minorities can encounter obstacles in securing and preserving their houses of worship, necessitating enhanced enforcement procedures.

Bangladesh has also implemented legislation to safeguard its religious and cultural heritage. The Antiquities Act of 1968 pertains to the conservation of cultural and religious heritage, encompassing temples and shrines. (*The Antiquities Act, 1968*, n.d.) Nonetheless, assaults on Hindu temples amid religious turmoil highlight the inadequacies of justice systems in confronting rioting or abuse of power. In Sri Lanka, the Antiquities Ordinance of 1940 and its revisions safeguard Buddhist historical monuments, reflecting Buddhism's designation as the official faith. Conflicts between the Buddhist majority and the Muslim and Tamil Hindu minorities have occasionally led to assaults on non-Buddhist holy sites, underscoring

the necessity for a more comprehensive legal framework. (*The Antiquities Ordinance, No. 9 of 1940 (Cap. 188)*, n.d.)

### **International Bodies and Preservation of Holy Sites**

Transnational entities such as UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) are crucial in preserving the beliefs and history of cultures throughout the world. The World Heritage Convention established by UNESCO in 1972 offers an agreement for safeguarding natural and cultural treasures of exceptional universal significance. Numerous religious sites in South Asia are recognized as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including Buddhist monuments in Sri Lanka, Hindu temples in India, and Islamic architecture in Pakistan. UNESCO collaborates with national governments to safeguard these monuments from destruction or deterioration caused by disputes, abandonment, or political agendas. (*UNESCO World Heritage Convention (1972)* / SpringerLink, n.d.)

UNESCO has engaged internationally to advocate for the safeguarding and rehabilitation of vulnerable places of worship.

Following the obliteration of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan by the Taliban in 2001, UNESCO spearheaded global initiatives to rehabilitate sections of the monument and avert further artistic degradation in sections that are at risk. Although UNESCO's function is mostly regulatory and collaborative, its worldwide impact underscores the significance of safeguarding sacred sites as integral to mankind's collective legacy. (*UNESCO World Heritage Centre - The World Heritage Convention*, n.d.) International initiatives have proven essential in mitigating the devastation of sacred places, particularly when such occurrences jeopardise regional stability. Global diplomacy frequently emphasizes promoting dialogue among opposing spiritual and partisan groups to avert the intensification of bloodshed. In South Asia, where worship frequently overlaps with national politics, consular initiatives are especially crucial.



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Following the collapse of the Babri Masjid in India, negotiations were undertaken to mitigate ethnic tensions that had escalated in Pakistan and Bangladesh, where Hindu and Muslim groups became victims of reprisal assaults. Bilateral negotiations between India and its neighbouring countries, coupled with international attempts from entities such as the United Nations and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), have sought to avert additional devastation of sacred places and foster peace. Peacemaking programs in South Asia frequently engage both local and international stakeholders, including nonprofit organizations (NGOs) and spiritual figures, who endeavour to promote intercultural communication and mitigate hostilities. Initiatives such as *Interfaith Reconciliation* in Pakistan and *The Temple of Understanding* in India have been pivotal in fostering compassion across faith groups. These projects frequently emphasize training, promote comprehension of diverse religious traditions, and facilitate the repair of destroyed sacred sites as emblems of harmony and cooperation.

### **Recommendation**

To combat the devastation of sacred spots in South Asia, it is imperative to enhance the implementation of current national legislation designed to safeguard artistic and spiritual property. States must implement more rigorous systems for the surveillance and safeguarding of holy places, guaranteeing the enforcement of legal structures irrespective of governmental or social factors. Encouragement of bilateral cooperation is essential, with South Asian nations working to establish a common task force dedicated to the preservation of religious and cultural monuments, thereby alleviating international conflicts. This effort might collaborate with international organizations such as UNESCO to offer scientific knowledge, financial support, and global supervision.

Moreover, promoting interfaith discussion at the community level is essential. Educational initiatives designed to foster acceptance and reverence for various faiths ought to be augmented, especially in areas susceptible to religious conflict.

Engaging spiritual authorities and local personalities in such campaigns will enhance their effectiveness.

Ultimately, authorities should pledge to depoliticize tensions surrounding sacred sites. Political groups and leaders ought to abstain from employing religious imagery for partisan advantage and need to be made responsible if they cause divisions in society. Competent tribunals ought to be established to examine occurrences of sacred site degradation and guarantee the administration of fairness impartially.

## **Conclusion**

For many centuries, South Asia has been a land of diverse religions, cultures and civilizations. Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh, Christian, Jain and other religious followers have coexisted in this region. History has observed examples of interfaith harmony as well as religious and ethnic conflicts, which were driven by land ownership, authority issues, power games and many other motives. Religious places have been greatly affected by these conflicts. The demise of religious places in South Asia signifies not merely the elimination of material edifices but also the disintegration of heritage cultures, social unity, and ecumenical concord.

This situation poses a persistent threat to South Asia's diverse fibre and emphasizes the necessity of ongoing legislative safeguards and ecumenical communication in order to maintain social peace and institutional purity. Although national legislation and global structures, like as those established by UNESCO, can provide certain protections, their efficacy is constrained by entrenched ethnic divisions and political manipulation. Hence, South Asian states must move beyond legal frameworks and adopt a comprehensive, long-term strategy for rehabilitation and forgiveness. Enhancing legal frameworks is essential; but, the fundamental solution is in cultivating a common moral ethos that appreciates variety and encourages respect for religion. Academic exchanges that prioritize acceptance of all religions along with popular intercultural campaigns could act as life-changing

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instruments for influencing future populations. In this way, South Asia may transcend religious disagreements and progress towards a future founded on solidarity, reverence, and endurance.

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