

Violence against Religious Minorities: A Case Study of Aluthgama Muslims in Sri Lanka

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The purpose of this paper is to explore violence against religious minorities in Sri Lanka with specific focus on the violence in Aluthgama in June 2014. It has been over a year since the Muslims were attacked by some Sinhalaese in Aluthgama. The violence continued for five days and it caused three deaths and injured 88 persons. It is also reported that over 100 houses and businesses were looted and burnt down during the violence. It is estimated that the violence in Aluthgama has caused a loss of around Rs. 600 million to the Muslim community. Sri Lanka is a multi-religious country where Buddhists (70%), Hindus (13%), Muslims (10%) and Christians (7%) have lived in peace and harmony for over a thousand years. However, in the past few years, especially in the post-conflict era after 2009, some Buddhist monks began their hate campaign against religious minorities in Sri Lanka. Aluthgama was one such incident of violence against the Muslim minorities in the recent years. It has created fear among the Muslims and widened the gap between the Sinhala majority and Muslim minorities. Some scholars say that if religious violence persists, it will create another conflict in Sri Lanka. This research will employ pluralism theory and utilize both primary and secondary data in order to explore the religious violence in Aluthgama. Pluralism means equal rights, i.e., one community should enjoy the rights which are enjoyed by the other community. In the case of Sri Lanka, there have been disputes over religious places and practices in the past. This research will analyze both primary and secondary data through qualitative and quantitative methods. The author visited Aluthgama and conducted about 20 interviews with the victims. The overall conclusion of this research is that the violence in Aluthgama was one of the worst cases of religious violence in terms of economic losses in the recent past. The Sri Lankan government which is responsible for the protection its people failed to prevent violence and ensure security in Aluthgama area.

Keywords: Violence, Religious minorities, Muslims in Aluthgama