

State-Society Relations & the Security Dynamics of South Asia

More human casualties are suffered in South Asia because of the prevailing structural violence in the region which constitutes the generally deplorable conditions in the region done to disease, malnutrition, illiteracy and unemployment, than the direct violence of war. The institutions of governance are directly responsible for this chaos. There is need for radical reforms.

South Asia remains one of the most conflict-prone regions of the world because it continues to be governed by a narrow and conservative thinking on security, which subjugates everything to territorial survival and physical security leading to exorbitant military expenditures, which in most cases are considerably higher than social sector budgets. The most important of South Asia is its people which have enormous developmental potential. Unfortunately, the last fifty years are years of missed opportunities. The region has lost out on all fronts, i.e. social, economic and political. The vision of South Asia has three key elements, a lasting peace between India and Pakistan, greater intra regional trade and massive investment in human development. [Khadija Haq, The South Asian Challenge]

The concept of security, being a fundamental one, is elastic and ambiguous. Usually, to be secure means to feel free from threats, anxiety or danger. The people feel themselves free only after seeing that nothing adverse can be done to them by other states or by other foreign non-state actors. Peter Hough in his study 'Understanding Global Security' includes the following securities:

- 1. Military threats to security from states.**
- 2. Military threats to security from non-state actors.**
- 3. Economic threats to security.**
- 4. Social identity as a threat to security.**
- 5. Environmental threat to security.**
- 6. Health threat to security.**
- 7. Criminal threats to security.**

Talking those threats require global thinking and global actions. The present state system is inadequate for the satisfaction of human security and calls for global integration. As a consequence, security has been defined as the absence of physical threat to the territorial and functional integrity of a given state. Such a security requires the unity and loyalty of the population within the state. The security picture, since eighties, has been changing because of

international development such as the end of the cold war and the process of globalisation. In 1994, the United Nations introduced human security as a people-centric approach in which security consists of secure environment, food, social and medical security. According to the UN Commission on Global Governance, lasting security will not be achieved until it can be shared by all, and it can only be achieved through cooperation, based on the principles of equity, justice and reciprocity.

A working definition of comprehensive security could be the absence of threats against physical and functional well-being and their forms of political and social organisation.

The state is a legal concept describing a social group that occupies a defined territory and is organised under common political institutions and an effective government. The German political sociologist and economic historian Max Weber established many of the parameters of statehood which are still common to discussion a century later. According to Weber, state could not be defined in terms of its goal and functions, but rather it needs to be understood in terms of its distinctive means. He argued:

‘The state cannot be defined in terms of its ends. There is scarcely any task that some political association has not taken in hand, and there is no task that one could say has always been exclusive and peculiar to those associations which are designed as political ones’. Ultimately, one can define the modern state sociologically only in terms of the specific means peculiar to it, as to every political association, namely, the use of political force.’

‘Nation, nationalism and internationalism are all products of the colonial legacy and are alien to South Asian history. The objective of this was the construction of common political culture, submerging the past, political traditions to the new requisites of social innovation and super imposition of an ideology. Therefore, South Asian nations have been described by Emerson as nations. Not yet nations in being but only nations in hope, whereas Gertz describes the problem as a dilemma of ‘old societies and new states’ where region-based primordial sentiments are yet to be transformed into trans-regional civil sentiments. [World Development Report 1997]

The relative success of democracy in India and its failure in neighbouring Pakistan and Bangladesh are also dimension of state society in articulation in the region. The political process in Pakistan and Bangladesh remained hostage to highly inequitable state structures. The imbalance in the state structures and also between them and the civil society foreclosed the possibility of a significant re-apportioning of political power and economic resources. The military and bureaucratic structure in Pakistan and Bangladesh and dominance of a political party in India, having links in the bureaucracy and the military, endorses authoritarianism. If Pakistan and

Bangladesh have a history of military dominance then India also has an imperfect democracy, which in spite of being intact and functioning, has not been able to remove gross inequalities and social injustice.

The state effectiveness is greatly dependent on an aware and active society. The civil society is anchored to equality and rights. The active participation of all segments of society is obviously workable in democratic political structure. Society cannot hold the state accountable unless its political power base lies with the people. Governance can be defined as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of the country's social and economic resources for the development. Governance is a process whereby citizen's needs and interests are articulated for the position and socio-economic development of the entire society in the light of perceived common good. The good governance encompasses a wide range of issues starting from efficient governments, where accountability and transparency are emphasised upon, to concerns about human rights, social cohesion, equity, democracy and political participation.

More human casualties are suffered in South Asia because of the prevailing structural violence in the region which constitutes the generally deplorable conditions in the region done to disease, malnutrition, illiteracy and unemployment, than the direct violence of war. The institutions of governance are directly responsible for this chaos. There is need for radical reforms. The solution lies in restoring the solution of the people. The national security is considered synonymous with the survival of a regime or preserving particular elite interest as a consequence of which the institutions of the state and society have shown no inclination to rethink and re-evaluate the existing concept of security. A major impediment is the tussle between the forces of status quo and those of change

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