

Comprehending Essential Agents of Third World Degeneration – Relocating the Factors of South Asian Crises

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“Practically every South Asian countries is almost perpetually plagued by internal conflicts and crises based on narrow consideration of caste, religion, ethnicity, language, community and the like. This distorts the national integrity/unity and the overall situation of the affected states. Moreover, constant and often excessive preoccupation with domestic problems renders such states highly vulnerable to external threats and interference, which also challenges their sovereignty and consequent legitimacy.¹This is a famous statement of Monika Bhanot who very rightly assessed the disturbing scenario of South Asia and this is very much connected with the main theme of the three days’ international seminar of the Association of Third World Studies-South Asia Chapter. Infact, Monika has raised such issues, which are not only complex but realistically the essence of all the problems faced by most of the South Asian States. If we are to land on India then it shows that she has a peculiar demographic and cross-cultural linkages with other nations and to be particular, her socio-religious connections with the neighbors which can be traced in three dimensions namely **a)** Religious affinities-countries having dominant religions of Indian origins-Myanmar, Nepal, Srilanka and Bhutan; **b)** Religious neutral country like China; **c)** Religious strangers like Bangladesh and Pakistan. On the other hand the existing borders have also a peculiar feature, in which all the neighbors of India excepting China do not share common borders with each other except through India. In this way the whole region has become India-centric and all the interactions have a direct effect on the nature of mutual relations. There are complexities on the Trans border linkages of the different communities and in a conflicting situation there occurs ethnic or social tension in other parts of the sub-continent. Most of the states over the centuries till date have not been able to control flow of people and different unwanted factors affecting the social stabilities and security of the region.

The Rise of Sectarianism- Democratic Distortions in South Asia

The rise of sectarianism in various forms in South Asia has no doubt weakened the process of integration and hastened the alarming ethno-cultural divide which in another form gives a threat to the expected national integration and political stability of the region. How the inter-state relations have been affected over the recent time can be realized from an observation by S.D.Muni. He says that sectarian forces have invited ‘democratic distortions’ in South Asia. Political turmoil, sense of insecurity, ethnic rebellions have sought shelter and support in India. In this one can assume the primary need so as to preserve the unity of South Asia and all the more to identify the core issues in view of its strategic and geographical location which is directly connected with the national goals. Moreover, there is also a question of mutual understanding which can be summarized as under:

Rise of Ethno-Nationalism

The last four decades have witnessed a kind of tension in most of the South Asian countries known as ethnic conflict. The main objective happens to be to get berth in the decision making process. This conflict very often leads to violence as the agitators question the dominancy of some social groups over the centuries. The demand of the non-Assamese groups of recognition of a separate state in India is very much similar to the demands of the Chakmas in Bangladesh and the Tamils in Srilanka. The main reason in the background is to oppose the dominance of the majority groups in the state functioning and to establish secured position over power sharing. This type of ethno-nationalism is not only a movement to get rid of the agelong deprivation of the ethnic minorities Department of History but also is supposed to redraw boundaries of the states on ethnic lines. The problem and condition of the Tamil minority in Srilanka no doubt touch the sentiment of the Tamils of India. We know that the Tamil issue has invariably assumed an important factor in the political situation between the DMK and AIDMK. Unlike the problems which

appeared in Pakistan on the question of Urdu as well as the separatist tendency of the Pushtuns and the Baluch³ and also in Srilanka over *Sinhala*, the Indian leadership has to handle linguistic challenges over the decades. Paul R. Brass in his book *Ethnicity and Nationalism* picks up this issue and categorically lays emphasis on 'inequality in the distribution of resources and social benefits between various ethnic groups.'⁴ In spite of the fact the Indian Government had adopted multilingual policy and the linguistic reorganization of the State but the recent history of India does not qualify the step taken over to that direction.

Demographic Change and the Crises in South Asia

Migration is no doubt a major source of threat to most of the South Asian States. We have already mentioned the neighboring state and their geographic location. It is a fact that over a period of time there is a change in the social landscape of these regions. The Indian parliament, for example, had passed the Immigrants Act in 1940, was repealed in 1957 and by the Indira-Mujib pact of 1972, allowed Bangladesh to relinquish responsibility over its citizens, who had illegally migrated to India before 25th March, 1971. But illegal migrants have been included in the electoral rolls and later being accepted as members of the minority community to prevent their repatriation. The problem is obvious and requires no explanation so far as the present trend of Indian politics is concerned.

The threat to Assamese identity which has led to a violent anti-foreigner movement, has primarily originated due to the issue of land alienation. Later on it has proved to be a threat to linguistic and cultural identity in Assam in the form of Bodo Movement. Sumit Ganguly, a leading scholar of this field, looks the problem in the poverty-oriented economy of Bangladesh and how the victims are crossing into the neighboring states of West Bengal as well as Assam.⁵ The political parties are no doubt taking advantages of the situation from various angles which often leads to ethnic conflict in the regions.

The open border of the Nepal has also created the similar problem for India and Nepal. The Nepalese form a substantial percentage of population in the northern districts of West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. In fact there is also a large scale movement of people of Indian origin into Nepal's Terai area. This is no doubt a problematic issue both for India and Nepal. Nepali nationalism has come out against the Indian presence and an organization named *Rastriya Samaj Sudhar Sangstha* (RSSS) launched a movement with an allegation that some 5.8 million people of Indian origin were planning for colonizing Nepal.⁶ In the same way, India has also imposed on the movement of the Nepalese into the North East during the annexation of Sikkim. The Gorkhaland Movement under Subhas Ghising sought international intervention in this matter and even he placed this issue to the Nepal monarch. We know that in 1994, Ghising moved an issue that Darjeeling did not belong to India in view of Article VIII of the Indo-Nepal treaty of 1950. All the more he also argued that the Gorkhas were on the margins and suffers from a kind of identity.⁷ The Gorkhaland movement started by Subhas Ghising and subsequently the movement for a separate Gorkhaland by Bimal Gurung and in the long run the formation of the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration dated 7.3.2012 (the bill was actually placed in the W.B. Assembly on second September, 2011) are some of the intricate issues which no doubt question the future of India as a nation state. Similar challenges can be found on the question of *Nagalim* which seeks to unify all Naga people inhabited in some parts of North East including some portions of Bangladesh and Myanmar. These are no doubt a development of the colonial legacy and the problems relating to drawing up the ethnic boundaries in the post independent period.

Religious Identity and Communal Violence-vis-à-vis Politics of Separatism

Fact remains that partition of the Sub continent has not resolved problems rather invited various critical issues right from ethno religious identity down to the problems relating to customs, traditions and culture of the people of most of the South Asian countries. The most serious case is the sense of **collective alienation**. There are competitions on the religious identities in the political scenario in order to get sufficient space in the national polity. Incidentally, the claim that religion itself would always take precedence over language and culture was disproved by the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971. But the current trends give us an

alarming signal from Dhaka and it is going on for about four decades. It is said that 'Bengali Nationalism' did not accept the adivasis of Bangladesh. When their leader named Manabendra Narayan Larma called on Mujibar Rahaman and asked for cultural and political autonomy for Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), his demands were rejected.^{7a} Thus the adivasis of Bangladesh have no separate cultural right and not even special rights in representative institutions and the Constitution of Bangladesh does not recognize the rights of the adivasis.⁸ There are also demand for separate state called Kamatapur^{7b} and subsequently another movement for Greater Cooch Behar State^{7c} both in West Bengal are supposed to be the outbursts negating the government and the issues are the same being occurred in different parts of India.

One may again recall here in this light that the Pakistani leadership could not manage and maintain the national unity of the country through Islam and Bangladesh afterwards displayed a classic case of the rise of another type of linguistic nationalism. The demolition of the Babri Mosque in 1992 and the post 9/11 era have no doubt vitiated the political atmosphere of the region. Retaliations and counter retaliations have now become a feature of the inter-communal relationship of the South Asian countries and India is definitely a leading figure in this respect. Solidarity and cohesion have largely been disturbed and the future of the whole region is under question.

Maladministration and Crisis in the Governance

A clear picture of the South Asian society is the breakdown of governance or male administration of the Nation States. The conflict between the Chakma tribal and the Bengali population in the CHT and side by side the ongoing migration of people from Bangladesh into Assam and other areas of India, has no doubt angered the native inhabitants.⁹ The unequal development in the region concerned has definitely resulted in the migration of the people to the economically better off regions. Thus the ethnic conflict is the ultimate result of the situation. S.D Muni has sought the reason in the economic backwardness of the sub- continent, which was left unheeded and underdeveloped during the British rule.¹⁰ In the post- independent period the failure of the state to carry out expected economic development has also intensified the crisis.

The state system of South Asia has come up in different settings and there must be a historical background during the colonial rule in South Asia. The success and failure of the system depends on the model of the Western Socio-political norms and as it was something mechanical application of alien standard which has been flawed. The South Asian nation state is not necessarily the provider of safety and security to all its citizens rather the state has invited - **A.** Conflict between defferent nation building enterprises and **B.** Power struggles between contending social groups and elites. The ultimate result can be seen in the declining process or erosion of the democratic principles in the state functioning and time and again the emergence of authoritarian regimes particularly in the countries likes Nepal and Pakistan at different point of time. Bangladesh witnessed a kind of revival of democracy after several years of military rule. The development of Nepal with the re appearance of monarchy is not a good sign for the democratic process and this type of ups and downs of the South Asian states are not the examples of good governance.

The present Scenario-Globalisation

The emergence of a new world order in the form of globalization has no doubt deepened the crisis of the South Asian states. We know the end of Soviet Communism and appreciation of the Chinese communism of 'global capitalism' which has resulted in a new brand of capitalism vis a vis globalization. It has shown its capacity to use the networking logic of the information age along with bio technology, and all possible productive forces for the purpose of economic growth but millions of people of the backward countries are excluded from the benefits of the so called information revolution. The victims are obviously the peoples under-developed or the developing countries. For example, more than 90% of 'world patents' is handled by the United States and the Europe which hardly come to the benefit of the third World countries.¹¹ Infact the globalization of communication and commercial enterprises and spread of

technology and weapons and all the more ecological and military risk creating problems which cannot be solved through merely mutual agreements.

The security mechanisms of the Third World State are in a critical position in terms of law and order, safety and stability. We have mentioned ethnic conflicts, inter border tension and as an ultimate result 'terrorism' in the form of confusing ideologies or to say in a better way religious fundamentalism under the cover of religion. These factors have practically become the order of the day and as a result extensive conflicts, social tensions and insecurity in the public life have created cleavages in relationships among the people, army and the Governments. Rapid population growth, unchecked criminality, prevalence of serious diseases and above all scarcity of resources have forced the Third world today to sink into unbelievable anarchy and chaos.

Problems of State Building of the Third World Countries

After the colonial rule there was an expectation that the Nations which were under the colonial rule would adopt the process of state building. In its elementary level political institutionalization was required. Various governmental organs were to be trained up with emotion and ideologies in order to bring up strong nations. In such societies deep communal divisions and conflicting forces prevent the effective formula in this respect. But what has happened over the decades need no explanation. Some of the countries like India preferred secularism in its state policy. But inter communal conflict down the decades, increasing number of communal riots in various occasions have no doubt shaken the solid foundation of India as a nation. It does not mean that such a situation would not invite tensions in the neighboring countries. Perhaps C.P Bhambhri is absolutely right in this respect when he observes that "a secular State becomes very vulnerable if the major religious community asserting their separate religious identities and social order faces militant religious confrontation."¹² So the agenda of state/nation building is thus disturbed and is not known how to revive or counter it to achieve the goal.

At this stage let us again move to the issue of globalization which is fascinating in terms of modernisation, development and change in all respects of our life and society. But what globalization has brought to the Third World countries is no doubt a matter of investigation. Infact the scope of trade and market which was accelerated by the process has brought to our notice a kind of cultural problems. For example, India which had traditionally developed base of trade and market, the impact of the changing role of these institutions has been gradual because even today the market and trade relations continue to be located in local cultures. Incidentally on Indian case the full momentum of globalization started in 1990s onward, but many check and balances are still in our society. According to B.K Nagla, an eminent scholar on globalization " globalization brought changes which altered the traditional mode of cultural expression, usage of language and communication, media at the local, regional and national levels."¹³ Nagla has also raised some other issues like the rise of 'sub-culture in urban areas'. In his words "the rise of popular culture is a new phenomenon with linkages both in rural and urban centers..... the forces of industrialization and development in agriculture had impact on the consumption style of people."¹⁴ One may also come across the conversion of traditional objects namely art and aesthetics as marketable commodities. On the other hand this impact seems to have disrupted the autonomy of folk culture as well as the dislocation of the life pattern of the artisans in the level of new networks of 'competition and price war'. The electronic media comprising Television to computer network have also brought new transformation in the meaning of life of our time. Infact globalization is an accepted fact but the basic challenge is; how to harmonize or humanize the affects of globalization in order to ensure a happier Asia or a peaceful world.

Many national governments blame global economic forces or international organizations for their own failure to satisfy or respond to the demands of their subjects. The cases of Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and even of Chile are the best examples which justify the point in particular.¹⁵ The Third World states within their frame work of backward economy and fragmented society are unable to qualify or welcome the

changing phases of the market. Here they are the clear victims of the globalization. In this process they are supposed to lose control on their boundaries, both ideologically and geographically.

The Concept of Welfare State and the Third World Countries

The concept of welfare was one of the cherished goals of most of the nation states after the end of the colonial rule. In the name of globalization today there are signs of destruction of the content of the welfare state which developed right from the middle of the 20th century. The main objective of the state policy in this direction was to ensure social solidarity. But the privatization process has brought a new mechanism of inequality popularly known as “winners take all, losers- loss all” markets income pattern. Fact remains that privatization of public enterprises and accumulation of resources in the few hands has reached to a maximum proportion in the Third World. Every sector of the economy has been affected including the natural resources, still plants, parks and various modes of urban life. Privatization can be taken as a part of global strategy and naturally it has also brought its impact on civil society and democratic politics. This is because of the fact that the privatization brings ultimately two changes and both are negative in terms of the development of national economy. At first, privatization stands for lucrative source of accumulation when the investors can send their earnings abroad. Secondly it no doubt deliberately affects the state system in the form of the priorities of education, employment and health.

If one is to summarize the present condition of the Third World states one can see that these states suffer three major crises;

- i. There is a growing polarization of the society along ethnic, linguistic or religious lines. Associated with these, the undermining of social values through which diverse communities had an opportunity to live together in a pluralistic society.
- ii. There are symptoms of failure in highly centralized structures of political power to offer effective political representation to all strata of society. In various occasions there is growing militarization and in some cases it is associated with the use of coercion to quell resurgent sub- nationalism or ethno- nationalism.
- iii. There is also a tendency of the collapse of the approach to the goal of national development adopted in the post colonial period in South Asia. The growth process with such approach has no doubt given birth to unending poverty, growing interregional disputes, erosion of the ecological environment and finally growing dependence on foreign aid on the excuse of overall development of the nation.

The Third World states have also generated some other crises which no doubts make a question mark to their future. In terms of ‘capacity crisis’, one may identify the crisis in the fiscal basis of the state, administrative inefficiency, endemic corruption, unfavorable work ethics and so on. It has already been stated earlier the governance crisis and basically this crisis involves the failure to develop institutions for a competition that would encourage politicians and pressure groups to conduct and guide state politics in the light of the constitution and not through violent method. We have also highlighted the security crises involving inter-border conflicts and ethno-religious tensions which have invariably brought social physical effects of organized and random violences increasingly right from 1990s. These have taken an unprecedented toll of the social fabric and civic culture of many societies of south Asia. It is likely that these activities have support from the highest levels of the government concerned in order to interfere in the public life of many countries of South Asia. The condition of global competitiveness replete with social disintegration is not favorable to ensure democratic norms for the civil society. Infact whenever confidence of the people on a political system or law and order begins to breakdown, freedom soon turns into a primordial condition which to mean invariably ‘the war of all against all’. It is such a situation when liberty leads to anarchy.

All the conflicts mentioned above some way or other highlight the need to bring about peace in the region. It is generally seen that ethnic conflicts have been resolved to some extent whenever the contending groups have been accommodated in the power structure of the state by democratic de centralization. It is

likely that any retreat of the state from such zone of conflict would only be the remedial of their existing grievances. The case of Tripura and negotiation with the tribal leader Bijay Kumar Hrangkhawal is a case in point in this regard. The talks with Laldenga on the question of Mizo insurgency and the peace process of the North East is another example of the mechanism to ensure peace in the troubled politics of the North East.

Exclusive reliance on military strength does not guarantee either sovereignty or security. So a more pragmatic and comprehensive approach to security needs to include the well being of the subjects in terms of economic empowerment and safeguarding basic freedom. One South Asian scholar Lakshman Kadirgamar gives a realistic view about he writes, “the concept of nation state with all its homogenizing ramifications, cannot encompass the diversity of South Asian society; each individual, community and nationality in this region has a ‘plural self’ that simply cannot be embodied and represented by the single category and frame of the nation-state.....we need to go beyond modernity and evolve indigenous concepts and tools, best suited to South Asian social realities.”¹⁶ Under the situation of growing conflicts the South Asian states are in need of a definite frame work to resolve inter-intra state conflicts. There are some scholars like Susane Hoeber Rudolph who are to argue whether a civil society is the answer or a panacea for the crisis of the South Asian nations. He has also brought to our notice another big question how well does civil society as a precondition for democracy.¹⁷ So it is really a big question and when there are signs of erosion of democratic norms and in some cases economic restlessness and inequality in South Asia are getting reflected strongly in some of its political conflicts there is a need to employ efforts to resolve the issues of mutual discord and to reach a consensus. But, how to proceed from the world disorder of peace to world order of peace. This may be a visionary question of our time and to find out the right full conflict resolution as a mission of world peace in general and South Asia in particular. It is fact that peace is a culture of the inner and outer revolution of consciousness and practice of the same for achieving balance in human, state and territorial behavior and relations.

Concluding Remarks and Suggestive Arguments

At this juncture there may be some suggestive formula to develop to find out possible peace resolutions. It is sure that the responsible partners of South Asian region are well acquainted with particular issues that why conflicts and crises occur and how peace can prevail. Experiment and measures are being taken and have also been taken but still the region lacks a sense of direction with a result of continuing feature of instability and tension. This instability and political currents are not only inherent within the nation state of South Asia, but also due to the potential danger of the dominant actors of the international system. But the situation is not desirable; people want peace and would aspire for tension free zone. So there may be new avenues and possible mechanisms in this direction. For a tension free zone and stability the following issues may be taken in consideration and if possible to recast in the need of the hour.

- i. To review the activities of the peace building mechanism in South Asia namely SAARC, NAM etc. and to exchange views in various platforms;
- ii. A thorough study of geo politics of south Asia in the light of international diplomacy.
- iii. South Asian states and the process of their nation- building.
- iv. To review mass media and peace process.
- v. To study marginal societies and their voices.
- vi. To review the condition of public health and
Environmental crises.
- vii. To highlight pacifism and peace-experiments-personalities and peace initiatives.
- viii. To asses changing historiography of South Asia – dimension and consequences.

- ix. To trace elements of peace initiatives- voices and bridge of harmony in (a) culture and heritage, (b) Songs, music, dance, drama and sports. (c) Literature (d) syncretic tradition.

Lastly, we may refer here to a particular slogan called 'democratic peace' which can be seen as a part of the liberal theory of history and all the more an integral part of the peace process in the global level. The validity of this theory, however, depends on its application side in 21st century.¹⁸

In fact, the association between democracy and peace is quite understandable. To democracies, it may be necessary but always regrettable and it is not like the Fascists who find war convenient for survival. In this sense there is a need to foster more democratization and promote socio-cultural interaction and economic co-operation in the context of neighborhood and nationhood. The Indian state or any other South Asian Countries can't negate the international implications of events damaging human rights and citizenship. In this sense 'peace discipline' is the totality of peace research and in another way it can take the peace science. Peace science explains the roots, nature and reasons of conflict, violence and above all behavioral aspects of their distinctive trends as well as viability of peace. It can, therefore, be regarded as a modern human and humanistic science, since its foundation being scientific- its application being result bearing, in this way every kind of crises-political, cultural or the crises in value system in particular, may find its way of solution at any level- national or international, what so.

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