

Shelton U. Kodikara

THE SECURITY OF SOUTH ASIA IN THE 1990S : INTERNATIONAL CHANGE AND DOMESTIC DIMENSION*

It has become an accepted *leit-motiv* of contemporary international politics that a structural change of great importance has taken place in the international system. By structural change I mean that there has been an important change in the distribution of power within the international system as well as significant changes in the relations of states within that system. Some of these changes are still being worked out, but the main configuration of change is already very clear. The old world order was based essentially on a bipolar structure of power shared by the United States and the Soviet Union. It was an order in which there was a perceived sense of a nuclear parity between these powers, and in which it was a "balance of terror" rather than a balance of power which kept the peace internationally. It was an order in which a superpower confrontation and conflagration, which could well have meant the annihilation of all mankind, was prevented by the mutual realisation between the superpowers that both had "second strike capability"—that is, the capacity to absorb a nuclear first strike by the adversary power and retaliate in kind against the adversary, a situation which came to be known by the strategic watchword "Mutually Assured Destruction", appropriately known by the acronym MAD.

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The Cold War between East and West, principally between the United States and the Soviet Union, went through many phases, such as the period of monolithic communist bloc politics on the one side and the era of "containment of communism" on the other; it went through a period of military rivalry and confrontation between NATO and the Warsaw Pact; it went through instances of superpower confrontation when it seemed imminent that World war III was about to begin, such as during the Berlin blockade crisis, the Cuban missile crisis, the Korean, Vietnam, and Afghan wars, and of course other proxy wars in which the superpowers became involved in different parts of the world.

Apart from these instances of confrontation, however, it was the war of ideologies, the war of words, and the superpower arms escalation which were the chief characteristics of the Cold War. In the 1960s, Khrushchev was taunting the West with his determination to "bury capitalism", and in the early 1980s, President Reagan was still calling the Soviet Union the "evil empire". But it would seem that the situation changed in fundamental respects from about the mid-eighties, coinciding with Mikhail Gorbachev's advent to power in the Soviet Union.

It is now increasingly being recognized that Gorbachev was an important motive force for the changes which occurred in the international system. Gorbachev was convinced that a nuclear war should not be fought and could never be won. In his Introduction to a book intended for the American reader, Gorbachev wrote :

... we can no longer live and think as we have in the past. Attempts to push tomorrow back to yesterday are too dangerous,

especially in our day and age, and especially as they concern military affairs, where the price of a single error is irreversible catastrophe. . .

The 20th century (however) is unique; it has witnessed the appearance of a range of new factors that compel us to perceive differently the affect that decisions taken by individual governments would have on the future of civilization, the relationship between the extension of our knowledge and the way we use it, and time and space themselves. Power politics that does not go beyond the use of gunpowder is one thing, and power politics based on a potential capable of making the myth about the world's end come true in a matter of minutes is quite another. Or say, it is one thing when a handful of workshops emit smoke into the air, and quite another when we have overall air pollution threatening the world with an ecological disaster. Life itself demands that each national economy, and the world economy as a whole, be restructured, whether we like it or not.¹

What we can regard as the main components of the structural change that has already been effected in the World Order relate to the "revolution of 1989" in eastern Europe, the reunification of Germany, the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, the proposed restructuring of NATO, the historic signing of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty between the US and USSR in Washington in December 1987 and the reduction of conventional forces in Europe between the two sides, the signing of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty in Moscow on 31 July 1991, after nearly nine years of negotiation, reducing the number of long-range missiles and bombers on the two sides, and the general

1. Mikhail S. Gorbachev, *Toward a Better World* (New York, Richardson and Stierman, 1987), pp. 3-4.

reduction of international tension and rivalry arising out of the end of the Cold War and the reduced Soviet profile in world affairs.²

The most dramatic of the changes which have taken place in the international environment is the collapse of the Soviet Union itself, and the fall from power of Gorbachev, with the former Soviet Union being replaced by a loosely confederated Commonwealth of Independent States, and the problem of leadership itself being left Undefined in the new Commonwealth. It appears to have been agreed that the "nuclear button" will be in the hands of the Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin, but the new Commonwealth's nuclear arsenal is dispersed in the Ukraine, Byelorussia, as well as in Kazakhstan, and there were divergences as regards a unified command of its armed forces.

The present international system can certainly be characterised as being unipolar. The term *Pax Americana* is sometimes used to portray the transformation which has overcome the world order, and sometimes this order is likened to one of American hegemony. As for American hegemony, there are certainly grounds for believing that the American writ prevails the world over *at the present time*. Even though the US itself has repudiated any hegemonial designs or aspirations, and even though current budgetary constraints might inhibit US involvement in, say, another Gulf-war type of military operation, the fact remains that it has, as of now, no military competitors, and no real

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2. The START treaty related to missiles and bombers with a range of more than 5500 kms (3400 miles), and it was expected that under the pact US strategic nuclear forces would be reduced from 12,000 to 8,000, with a 50% cut in the Soviet SS 18 missile, which carries 10 warheads, the overall reduction of warheads on the Soviet side being about 35% and on the US side about 25%. *The Island* (Colombo), 1 August 1991.

adversaries in strictly power terms. It is in this sense that one can speak of a *Pax Americana* at all. America may not succeed in pulling off a deal in the Middle East, but it was America which was able to get Israel and the Palestinians to the negotiating table in the first place. The American action against Iraq could not have taken place without heavy financial subsidizing from its multinational alliance partners, but it was the resolve and the persistence of the US which made it possible at all. How long *Pax Americana* will last, however, is another matter. It is well within the realms of possibility that the balance of power will reassert itself, and that the contemporary unipolar world will give way to a multipolar world with independent power centres based on either a united Europe or a militarily powerful Germany, a militarised Japan, with China and India as independent power centres.

In this paper, I am concerned primarily with the impact of the changes in the global order on the structure of politics in South Asia in very general terms, but with a greater degree of emphasis on the security of the South Asian region.

As regards Asia itself in general terms, one must begin by recognizing that one of Gorbachev's chief objectives in launching *perestroika* appears to have been his concern with the normalisation of relations with China and Japan, and his concomitant belief that it was in the Asia-Pacific region that the destinies of the world would be decided in the 21st century. Gorbachev was also, to be sure, impelled by the compulsions of Soviet domestic politics, especially by the state of the Soviet economy, and by the sheer economic necessity of calling a halt to the nuclear arms race with the US, and to Soviet subsidies in Eastern Europe and in Cuba, and in support of national liberation movements in other parts of the world.

But, both in terms of domestic politics and of foreign policy, Gorbachev was clearly concentrating on the Asia-Pacific region, even to the extent of abandoning Eastern Europe as a forward defence area, a strategic doctrine which had a venerable history in the Soviet Union. An official Soviet statement of 23 April 1986 declared : In tackling large-scale tasks of accelerating social and economic development, the Soviet Union pays paramount attention to the areas of Siberia and the Far East, which are part of the Asia-Pacific region.³

In his Vladivostok speech, delivered on 28 July 1986, Gorbachev justified his new approach on the basis that it was "east of the Urals - in Asia, Siberia, in the Far East (that) lies the largest part of our country's (Soviet Union's) territory. It is here that many national tasks put forward by the party will be resolved".⁴ The Soviet Union's travails on the domestic front since that speech was made might pose doubts about the viability of the proposed socio-economic developmental tasks which are to be undertaken in the area mentioned. But then, much of this area lies within the domain of the Russian Federation, which is not one of the Soviet republics which posed secessionist problems to the Union. And it seems significant that Japan has already pledged \$2.5 billion in aid to the Soviets despite these prevailing domestic problems.

It is on the foreign policy front that it would appear that Gorbachev was moved by the compelling objective of changing the adversarial character of contemporary Soviet-Japanese relations, which stemmed largely from the occupation, since the end of the

3. Quoted in S.D. Muni, *India and Gorbachev's Asia-Pacific Security Proposal* (Stockholm, Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 1988), p. 7.

4. *Ibid.*

Second World War, of the four northern islands in the Kuriles chain. Whether the Soviets would go all the way in giving up all four islands, which is the non-negotiable Japanese demand, remains to be seen. But what is important is that negotiations are under way on this matter, and that the Japanese did not think it proper to tie the question of the islands to their decision to grant \$2.5 billion in aid.

The prospect of a rearmed Japan is obviously becoming a matter of serious concern in the Soviet Union, and the Soviet support of the Rarotonga Treaty (August 1985) and Gorbachev's own remark that "our Asia-Pacific platform is organically linked with our programme of stopping the arms race and liquidating the nuclear threat to mankind",⁵ was significant in this respect.

The extent to which Japan will steer its own foreign policy course independent of its present dependence on the US, especially for its "nuclear umbrella", might well depend on the new relations which it will establish with the Soviets in the new world order. The US is itself a Pacific power, and will be an important part of the new power configuration which will emerge in the Asia-Pacific region in the 21st century. But the emerging trend seems to be that the major players in the international arena are beginning to see eye to eye on many issues which divided them earlier, and this seems to be borne out by the events that are unfolding in Cambodia as well as in the Koreas. North and South Korea, for example, are currently engaged in talks which are intended to bring about reconciliation between the two sides and the latest reports indicate that these are going well despite the issue of a nuclear bomb which North Korea was reportedly making and which

5. Leszek Buszynski, "International Linkages and Regional Interests in Soviet Asia-Pacific Policy", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 6(2), Summer 1988, p. 218.

had earlier been an obstacle in the way of the success of the talks. In Cambodia, too, the success of the UN-brokered deal whereby Prime Minister Hun Sen agreed to share power with Prince Sihanouk would not have been possible if China had not withdrawn its earlier support of the Khmer Rouge. The Soviets, too, switched their position on Cambodia from one of uncompromising support of the Vietnamese position, to accord with that of the US—a move intended to please the Chinese as well as the Americans. In the same spirit, the Soviets pulled out of Afghanistan in February 1989. At the same time, there was a near-identity of views between the US and USSR on the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, and the US position on Kashmir has also undergone a change.

Rethinking of Soviet policy on the Third World had been going on even under Brezhnev and his immediate successors, and can be traced back to Khrushchev himself in the fifties. But, as Fred Halliday has pointed out, there was a new theoretical dimension in Gorbachev's "new thinking". Whereas Khrushchev had continued to insist on the superiority of the socialist system and its confrontational character with capitalism, Gorbachev's approach was completely different.

Gorbachev recognized that class conflict had always been the basis of the Marxist view of politics, but that the advent of nuclear weapons had altered this. He now saw an objective limit for class confrontation in the international arena—hence a new philosophy of peace and a new dialectics of the common human and class interest and principles were required ... Gorbachev now adopted the

6. Fred Halliday, *From Kabul to Managua* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1989, p. 113.

term current in much western liberal thinking in the 1970s—"interdependence".⁶

Halliday's argument that the theoretical revision of the basis of international conflict went together with a new stress on the resolution of international issue through negotiation and compromise has been borne out by the examples given above. Looking specifically at South Asia, the portents of change are to be seen everywhere, in most countries of the region, and in socio-economic and political spheres, in foreign policy as well as in domestic politics.

Both the US and USSR regard India as the preponderant power in South Asia, but the Chinese stake in some of the South Asian countries precludes it from viewing India in the same light, and Japan is only beginning to take an interest in the subcontinent. The condominium type arrangement which presently subsisted between the US and the USSR certainly included South Asia. Both erstwhile superpowers were agreed that there should not be another Indo-Pakistani war over Kashmir, and the US has changed its position on Kashmir to the extent that it does not now support the Pakistani demand for a plebsicite as the solution to the Kashmir problem. India's Friendship treaty with the Soviet Union, originally signed in August 1971, has been renewed for a further twenty-year period, and Pakistan's alliance with the US, signed in 1959, still subsists. But both these treaties have been devalued in the context of the changing global order. India can no longer expect the Commonwealth of Independent Status to support it in any conflict in which India was involved with China. Pakistan's value as a strategic ally of the US has been greatly reduced with the end of the Afganistan war. The US is taking a hard line against Pakistan on the grounds of its nuclear

proliferation, and recently almost brought India, too, within the ambit of the Pressler Amendment, under which the US has cut off its economic and military assistance to Pakistan.

Most significantly, India is rapidly changing its economic policies, moving closer to the free market, instituting de-licensing and de-regulation, to attract western capital and assistance from the IMF and World Bank, in order to stave off an imminent economic collapse. There is even speculation that India, following upon the Soviet initiative, is considering establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. More importantly, there is talk of military cooperation at the level of all three services, between the US and India. And what initiative India takes in foreign policy is bound to have an impact on the other South Asian states. In the whole of South Asia, moreover, there are significant changes in the structure of domestic politics as well. //

As elsewhere in the world, there are winds of change which are blowing across South Asia, but some of these are having the effect of reviving old traditions and of giving new importance to old institutions like caste, community and religion. It was Gabriel Almond who, long ago, commented on the culturally mixed character of all political systems and to the fact that every polity contains an admixture of the traditional and the modern. Even in America, as Lloyd and Suzanne Rudolph pointed out, political behaviour suggests the persistence of such traditional factors as local history, ethnicity, race, and religious community, and they went on to analyse Indian political behaviour in terms of the relevance of the same forces in political development.

It is customary among scholars to equate political development with Western forms of democracy and in judging political develop-

ment in any state they are, assuredly, right in looking for the participatory character of the political system, the extent of the separation of powers among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government, the extent of the independence of the judiciary, the extent of the freedom of the mass media, and of the individual's rights of expression and conscience, the extent of geographical and social mobility, the degree of literacy, the standards of living of the masses, and so on. On these standards, the countries of South Asia have a mixed showing. India and Sri Lanka have long been held up as the two model democracies in Asia—India as the biggest democracy in the world, Sri Lanka as the oldest democracy in Asia. But the democratisation of other countries in South Asia is one of the products of the new winds of change. Pakistan, which was characterised by military rule for most of its existence since partition, interspersed with brief interludes of civilian rule, appears to have settled down to a democratic form of government under Nawaz Sharif, which is tempered by Islamic traditions and Islamic law. Bangladesh has reverted to parliamentary democracy after 16 years of military rule. Nepal is now a functioning democracy after nearly 30 years of *panchayati* rule.

One of the most interesting political developments in Pakistan in recent times has been the changing internal balance in the structure of state power. Referring to the changing relationship between the military and bureaucracy, the two vital elements of the state apparatus in Pakistan, Akmal Hussain has observed as follows :

Over the last three decades the social origins of both the bureaucracy and the army have shifted from the landed elite to a wider base in the urban middle strata and the burgeoning class of

rural capitalist farmers. The latter class did include scions of some of the former feudal landlords who had transformed themselves into capitalist farmers following the "Green Revolution" in the late 1960s when owner cultivation with hired labour was made an economically attractive proposition. However, these capitalist farmers also included many rich peasant families who were able to move up the social scale by reinvesting the increased profits that became available from farming.⁷

Hussain observes further that the change in social origins of officers in both these institutions worked in the same direction, that is, towards a broadening of the social base, though the levels of professional competence might have worked in opposite directions with respect to the bureaucracy and military respectively. Pakistani democracy appears to have taken a secure foothold after the demise of Zia ul-Huq. There is a lively opposition to the government led by Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples' Party, and the manner in which Nawaz Sharif handled the succession to the post of Army Chief vacated by the outspoken General Mirza Aslam Beg in June (1991) appears to indicate that the civilian administration is in control in Pakistan. However, there are intractable problems facing Pakistan in its attempts to consolidate democratic government. Pakistan's literacy rate, at 25 percent, is one of the lowest in the world; its rapid urbanization rate, instead of being an index of development, is likely to pose new difficulties for governments, which will be called upon in the immediate future, to provide basic civic services for an expanding urban population at prohibitive costs. And the economy itself will be hard put to maintaining current GNP per capita (\$ 350 per year) in the context of rising debt and a 25 percent margin of foreign exchange

7. *Lanka Guardian*, Vol. 14(5), 1 July 1991, p. 24.

debt servicing. The Nawaz Sharif administration is currently undertaking economic reforms which it claims will make Pakistan an Islamic welfare state.

A writer has recently identified six crises of political development which have bedevilled Pakistan throughout its brief and turbulent history. The first was the crisis of identity. With no historically integrating roots, except Islam, Pakistan stood polarised into religious, ethnic, linguistic, regional, and tribal groups having divergent loyalties. Second was the crisis of legitimacy. Successive governments in Pakistan established their legitimacy for limited periods of time, but could not ensure their continuity. Third, related to the crisis of identity was the crisis of integration, with the integrity of the state itself being challenged by Pathans, Baluchis, and an ongoing problem of integration in Kashmir. Fourth, there was the penetration crisis, with the government faced with problems of reaching down into society and effecting basic policies, of reducing the gap between the ruling elite and the masses. Fifth was the crisis of participation of marshalling the support and participation of the masses in the processes of government. Pakistan had four constitutions over a period of 25 years, and experimented with such innovations as "basic democracies", but these did not work. Finally there was the crisis of distribution. There was the divergence between the rhetoric proclaiming greater equity and distributive justice, and practice, where very little was in fact done to distribute goods, services and values more equitably and justly throughout the society.⁸ Islamisation has been found in Pakistan to be a way out of these dilemmas.

8. See *Pakistan Times Overseas Weekly*, 30/8/91, feature article by Shahid Mehmood, "An Overview of Political Fluctuations in Pakistan".

The crises of political development are, to a larger or smaller degree, featured in all the South Asian countries. Bangladesh is more ethnically homogeneous than Pakistan, comprising as it does very preponderantly of Bengalis, with the tribal hill people, the Chakmas, who are Buddhists, forming an ethnically and religiously distinct community. Of course there are a minority of Hindus, too, who are not politically significant. But Bangladesh, also, has gone for Islamisation as a panacea for the numerous problems afflicting the state. As in other states of South Asia, Bangladesh's biggest problem is not ideological, it is economic. Bangladesh has been peculiarly susceptible to natural disasters such as floods, cyclones, and tornados. With only \$ 160 GNP per capita, it is one of the poorest countries of the region. It is also the most populous Muslim state in the world, second only to Indonesia, and more populous than Pakistan. It has an endemic problem of student unrest. Its historical experience of parliamentary government is very short and very turbulent. It was the founding father of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman himself, who subverted the democratic process by terminating the parliamentary system in 1975, and instituting a one-party dictatorship, which itself was subjected to a coup, and which eventuated in successive military dictatorships under Ziaur Rahman and Mohamed Ershad. Ershad's belated attempts to resort to democratic procedures did not prevent the collapse of his regime. The joint opposition mounted by Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, wife of Ziaur Rahman and daughter of Mujibur Rahman respectively, ultimately proved too strong for him. The Constitutional amendment, which ushered in parliamentary government in Bangladesh has been endorsed as required, by a referendum. And the new civilian administration, as in Pakistan, appears secure in the seat of power for the foreseeable future.

Talking of political development in South Asia, considerable interest attaches to the democratic constitution adopted by Nepal in

November 1990 in the wake of a political and constitutional crisis which pervaded the country earlier in the year. It is significant in the context of the very cursory democratic experiment in Nepal previously lasting not much more than a year, in 1959-60, and in the context of the prominent role of the King in the Nepali polity from 1951 to 1990. The new constitution replaced the *panchayati* system of hierarchical indirect government with a parliamentary system of government based on direct universal franchise. There is a bicameral legislature, consisting of a House of Representatives of 205 members, a National Assembly of 60 members. The former is directly elected by the people; in the latter, 35 members are to be elected by the House of Representatives according to the proportional representation system by means of the single transferable vote, 10 are to be nominated by the King from 15 amongst distinguished persons who have rendered eminent service in various fields of national life, and 15 are to be elected by an electoral college to represent the various development regions into which the country is divided. An interesting feature of the representative system is that at least three of the 35 members are elected from the House of Representatives to the National Assembly, and that at least five percent of the total number of candidates contesting election from any organisation or party to the House of Representatives, must be women candidates.

Nepal is described in the constitution as a multi-ethnic, multilingual, democratic, independent, indivisible, sovereign, Hindu and a Constitutional Monarchical Kingdom. It is noteworthy that Nepal is described as a Hindu kingdom, but under Part III of the constitution which deals with fundamental rights, the State cannot discriminate against citizens on grounds of religion, race, sex, caste or ideology or any of them. Indeed, the definition of fundamental rights

in the constitution is very comprehensive, and covers equality before the law, no discrimination between men and women in remuneration for the same work, freedom of thought and assembly, of movement, freedom of association, freedom of the press and of publication, the right against preventive detention, right to property, the right to religion, and so on. These rights are justiciable.

The executive power is vested in the King and the Council of Ministers, headed by the Prime Minister, and the Prime Minister and Ministers are collectively responsible to the House of Representatives. The appointment of the Prime Minister, and the supremacy of the House of Representatives as regards Money bills, are in accordance with accepted parliamentary democratic procedures. A separate Constitutional Council was set up, consisting of the Prime Minister, Chief Justice, Speaker of the House, Chairman of the National Assembly, and the Leader of the Opposition in the House, to make recommendations for appointment of officials to the various constitutional bodies provided in the Constitution. The Nepal King is declared "the symbol of the Nepali nation and the unity of the Nepalese people", and existing customs and traditions regarding the succession to the throne of Nepal are protected, as well as the personal property of the King, and "no question shall be raised in any court about any act performed by the King". The constitutional monarchy is, therefore, entrenched in the constitution, with the King still enjoying a significant residue of power, especially at times when the political situation in the country might be fluid.

It was, in fact, the fluidity of the political situation in Nepal which preserved royal authority in the country from the time when the figurehead Kings of Nepal were freed from the yoke of their heredi-

tary Ranas or Prime Ministers with the assistance of the Government of India and the fledgling Nepali National Congress in the early fifties. The campaign mounted by the Nepali Congress to establish a parliamentary democratic government in Nepal was marred, however, by recurrent splits in the party, by the fact that it was too often identified with India and invariably operated from the safe haven of India, so that the King could always project himself as the symbol of Nepalese nationalism and unity. Indeed, what lent success to the popular movement against the King in 1989-90 was not any reversal of Nepali opinion against the King *per se*, but a train of events beginning with India's dispute with Nepal over the renewal of the Trade and Transit Treaty in 1989, and the closure of the majority of the Indo-Nepali border checkpoints resulting in a virtual blockade of the Nepali economy. Previous to this, the King's government had committed the cardinal sin of entering into an arms deal with China which was, arguably, against the letter if not the spirit of Nepal's treaty commitments with India. It could be said, therefore, that the popular movement which led up to the adoption of the new constitution in Nepal had the backing of India. After the elections under the new dispensation, B.P. Koirala, leader of the Nepali Congress, took office as Prime Minister in a polity now characterised by a multi-party system, with the Nepal Communist Party constituting the main opposition group and the United Peoples' Front of Nepal Sadbhavana Party as the other opposition groups.

The largest democracy in the world is also witnessing significant political change. India always had a vibrant multi-party system at the centre as well as at the state level, but until recently, the Indian polity could correctly be characterised as a "one-party dominant democracy". The Congress Party had an unbroken tenure of power at the Centre

from 1947 to 1977, then again from 1980 to 1989, and has again returned to power after the 1991 elections, though without an absolute majority in Parliament. Congress is still the only Indian political party which has an all-India political base, but it would appear that its dominance in this regard is under challenge. Of the plethora of political parties in existence in India today — besides Congress, the important ones are Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the two factions of the Communist Party (CPI and CPI-M), Janata Dal, Telugu Desam, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and All Indian Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), Akali Dal, Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), Samajvadi Janata Party (SJP) — only the BJP has now emerged as a party with a national appeal. All the others are parties with only a regional support-base, and this goes for the Janata Dal too, which managed to make a showing, in the 1991 elections, in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and in Orissa. These elections also saw the CPI-M retaining its hold in West Bengal, the AIADMK-Congress combine sweeping the polls in Tamilnadu, Congress also sweeping the board in Haryana, Pondicherry, to a lesser extent in Assam. What is new in party politics in India is the rapid rise of the BJP. It had only 2 Lok Sabha seats in 1984, which rose phenomenally to 85 in 1989, and then to 120 in 1991—a spectacular performance by any standard, considering especially that its showing in the most important Hindi heartland state, Uttar Pradesh, was very impressive, and that for the first time it won Lok Sabha seats even in the South, in Karnataka. One can not, therefore, call India one-party dominant democracy any more.

Indeed, nation wide exit polls conducted by the Marketing and Research Group of India indicate that the second phase of voting at the 1991 elections was marked by a clear swing in favour of the Congress as a result of the Rajiv Gandhi assassination, and that if all the 511

Lok Sabha seats were contested during phase I of the elections on 20 May 1991, Congress would have won only 190 seats, and not 224 as it eventually did. This demonstrates the extent to which volatility has come to be a factor in electoral politics in India. This is not a new development in Indian politics. It has been a feature of the Indian political scene in the post-Nehru era, when organisation as a determinant of electoral politics declined, and loyalty to particular personalities like Indira, or Sanjay, or Rajiv, and appeals to issues concerning society, or the regime, or caste and religion, became more important.

The bifurcation of the state and national political systems in India, in other words the rise of regional politics as a determinant of national politics, is another parameter of the Indian political process in the past two decades. Commenting on what they saw as "the emergence of dual political arenas" in India, Lloyd and Suzanne Rudolph wrote, in their excellent book entitled *In Pursuit of Lakshmi* (Chicago, 1987) :

These do not necessarily entail confrontation and standoff between the national and state governments. But the Congress 'system' that held together state and national units has passed away and will now have to be replaced by new forms of cross-party bargaining and accommodation. Stable Congress dominance of the state and national elections has been supplanted by volatile electoral patterns. These accompany the plebiscitary politics from the top that has replaced the older politics from below rooted in local and regional social solidarities. Coordinating the outcomes of plebiscitary politics in national and parliamentary elections with the outcomes of regionally based politics at the state level will require new political conventions that have yet to be crafted and practiced. (pp 206-7)

Writing in 1987, the Rudolphs also foresaw the rise of Hindu fundamentalism as yet another feature of Indian politics in the chan-

ging Indian political system. "Patronizing Hinduism in order to acquire status and power" did have "an ancient pedigree in India", but what they termed "Hindu confessional politics" had become "a form of cultural nationalism in the Hindi Heartland states". The Janata Party's victory in the 1977 elections put proponents of Hindu confessional politics in power in New Delhi for the first time. After 1980, Sikh extremism and terrorism entered national consciousness and politics. After the National Front victory at the 1989 polls, Prime Minister V.P. Singh took up the Mandal recommendation to raise the quota of jobs reserved to "other backward castes", besides the scheduled castes and tribes, to the maximum 50% prescribed by the constitution. The BJP then promptly responded by taking up the Babri Masjid issue—building a Hindu temple at the site in Ayodhya which was alleged to be the birthplace of Lord Rama, but which was already the site of a mosque built by the founder of the Moghul empire in India, Emperor Babur himself. The showing of the BJP and the Janata Dal provide indications about the manner in which caste politics and Hindu confessional politics are likely to be a determinant of electoral politics in India in the future.

The Janata Dal, which had contested in 1989 as part of the National Front, fared badly at the 1991 elections, when the BJP went it alone, reducing its Lok Sabha seats from 146 to 53. Nation-wide, it is arguable that the Mandal issue was the main cause of this debacle. But, on the other hand, in Bihar, where it won 25 out of 54 seats, and in Uttar Pradesh, where it won more than 25% of the Lok Sabha seats, it was conceivably the Mandal issue which carried the party through. The BJP also won considerable support among the backward castes, but it did very poorly with Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe voters. The Janata Dal scored well above its average among the

backward castes, but not among the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe voters.

The Congress (I) had its most impressive support base among the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe voters who remained solidly behind it in almost every state. The national Muslim vote was divided almost equally between the Congress (I) and the National Front/Left Front combine. At the state level, it would appear, the Muslims resorted to a kind of 'tactical' voting, favouring either the Congress or Janata Dal, depending on whoever was likely to beat the BJP.

Electoral politics apart, however, it is the issue of national identity and national integration which is at the core of contemporary Indian politics. The Kashmir issue is no longer soluble by resort to war, and war appears, in any event, to be ruled out by the internationalisation of the issue. In Assam, where Congress won a majority of the state assembly elections, there is a powerful insurgency mounted by the United Front for the Liberation of Assam. In Punjab, the Khalistan issue has become a festering sore on the body politic of India. India is not in a worse plight than Yugoslavia or even the Soviet Union. But Punjab and Kashmir are, hopefully only temporarily, outside the electoral process, and India has yet to come to terms with its insurgencies.

For all that, the largest democracy in the world can boast of a participatory political system with a free press, regular elections, a wide degree of social mobility and, above all, a military bureaucracy very firmly under the control of the civilian authorities.

As regards the oldest democracy in South Asia, Sri Lanka, it exhibits features very much like those of its big neighbour. Sri Lanka has enjoyed adult franchise since 1931. Since independence in 1943, it

has had a consistent record of holding regular parliamentary elections, and quite often, of peacefully changing the governments in power at those elections. 1947, 1952, 1956, two general elections in 1960, 1965, 1970, 1977, 1988—these were all years when national elections were held. 1982 was an aberration, when the ruling party took a decision to postpone the general elections which were due in 1983, by resort to a referendum which was held in 1982. Some have argued that the postponement of the elections which were due in 1975 to 1977, under the terms of the new constitution adopted in 1972, was also an aberration. Anyhow, governments in power were changed through the electoral process in 1956, 1960, 1965, 1970 and 1977. The process of change got halted there, and the next year, the second republican constitution changed the character of the polity from the Westminster model to the presidential executive model, with consequences which are now under debate. The point that is sought to be made here is that whether it was the Westminster model or the presidential model, Sri Lanka could always boast of an advanced political system, with the participatory level of politics in the island higher than anywhere else in the region. Sri Lanka's literacy rate, now nearing the 90s, is also far and away higher than in any other South Asian country. GNP per capita, at \$ 400, is also higher than Pakistan's which comes next, at \$ 350, India's which is \$ 300, and Bangladesh and Bhutan, both of which stand at \$ 160.⁹

Like in India, the most urgent but also the most intractable problem of political development is that of national identity and national integration. Problems of language and citizenship, at one time divisive forces in Sri Lankan politics, are no longer controversial. Problems relating to devolution of power at the regional level, and the

9. World Bank, *World Development Report 1989*, Oxford, 1989.

connected problem of claims to land in contested and border areas, have become the new areas of contention. In fact, one might say that the crux of the political problem in contemporary Sri Lanka is the problem of land ownership. The population is increasing, but the amount of cultivable land is constant. Who has the right to settle where is the leading question. Had the land settlement policies of previous governments in Sri Lanka the deliberate intent of changing the ethnic balance of groups claiming the contested areas as their traditional homelands? Is the concept of traditional homelands consistent with a polity which claims to be multi-lingual and multi-ethnic? In India, Hindu fundamentalism was a response to a situation in which there was a perception that in the so-called secular democracy Hindus were losing ground to the minorities. In Pakistan and Bangladesh, Islamisation of the polity was an attempt to strengthen the hands of the ruling elite. Nepal declared itself a Hindu state under its new constitution. Sri Lanka's first republican constitution of 1972, copied into the second republican constitution of 1978, declared Buddhism as "the foremost religion" in the state, subject to the fundamental rights provisions guaranteeing freedom of religion and conscience to votaries of other religions, but that declaration was one of the factors which did not endear the 1972 constitution to the Tamils, and appears to be still resented by them.

Though education, too, is more widespread than elsewhere in South Asia, and Sri Lanka provides for free education from the kindergarten to the university, access to universities is more hotly contested than in other parts of South Asia. Youth unemployment, particularly amongst twelfth graders denied access to universities as well as jobs, was a powerful cause of the Sinhala insurgency which was crushed by the government in 1989, the present plans of which

entail the establishment of new Colleges affiliated to universities in each of the eight provinces now existing, and indications are that such colleges will be established in each of the 24 districts in to which the island is divided. Youth unrest, at least in the Sinhala areas, could conceivably be diminished considerably if this scheme, ambitious though it appears, is to be attended with success. The Tamil insurgency in the north, however, is now a full-scale war, and while everybody seems to be agreed that there is no military solution to the ethnic issue in Sri Lanka, it would now appear to be the case that a successful basis for talks between the contending sides can only be laid when *both* sides acknowledge the futility of armed struggle.

The record of both India and Sri Lanka as performing democracies has been blemished by allegations of human rights violations and, for the first time, an Amnesty International Report has highlighted human rights violations both by the government side in Sri Lanka, as well as by the Tamil Tigers. The Tigers have lost much of the sympathy which they had in India, both amongst official circles in Madras and New Delhi and amongst the people of Tamil Nadu, as demonstrated by the results of the 1991 elections in Tamil Nadu state and internationally, too, they could be said to be now on the defensive. This might be a strong reason for bringing them to the negotiating table and so there are hopes that all is not lost in Sri Lanka.

Winds of change, therefore, are blowing across South Asia, and these do not appear to be ill winds that do nobody any good. In South Asia as a whole, we can look forward to better times. The kind of political institutions which obtain, and the political processes which operate, in South Asia, are no doubt significant for any assessment of the security situation in the region. But while these are important, there

are even more significant changes in the international environment which will have a decisive bearing on the future of South Asian security. One of the most dramatic changes in this respect might be the manner in which China and India seem to be forgetting their erstwhile aloofness and their differences on the border issue and getting closer together in the context of the rapidly changing world order. The Chinese Prime Minister, Li Peng, during the course of his recent visit to India, the first by a Chinese Head of Government after thirty years, and reciprocating Rajiv Gandhi's own visit to China in 1988, joined together with the Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao to denounce "international oligarchies in any form", and called for an international order in which "all countries irrespective of their size have the right to formulate their own views and decide their own destinies", adding that no single country should be allowed to dominate the world following upon the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹⁰ If this is any indication of a developing Sino-Indian collaborative effort on security, then it would appear that, whatever the determinants of South Asian security might be at a domestic level, these are being presently overshadowed by systemic changes at the international level which are having a spill-over effect on South Asia.

10. *Daily News* (Colombo), 14 December 1991.