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INTEGRATIONAL PROBLEMS IN SOUTH ASIA AND REGIONAL SECURITY: A POLITICO-ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH

One of the basic challenges that the collapse of the Cold War regime has posed to many regions of the Third World is the problem of national integration. The dismantling of Soviet and Yugoslav state structures has raised the question whether the ethnic assertions there would lead to similar disintegrative processes in other plural societies as well. South Asia being a region consisting of multi-ethnic states cannot any more look at the issue merely as an academic one. Not only has the region seen two dismemberments so far there are several potential cases of disintegration. Unless palliative measures are taken now, soon it may be too late.

Ethnic resurgence as a concept is of relative new currency. Not that the idea was not existent earlier but it was known under different nomenclatures. Demands for a unified German state or an Italian state during the nineteenth century were conceived in national terms. But

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when the same kinds of demand are now ventilated by, say, the Tamils of Sri Lanka, the Kashmiris or Mizos of India, or the Sindhis of Pakistan it is more fashionable to brand them as ethnic demands. Probably there is an inherent logic behind it. While the nationalistic demands by definition should end up achieving independent statehoods the ethnic demands can be satisfied short of granting them separate statehoods. More autonomy within the existing state structures is supposed to be the optimal solution.

Till recently the term "ethnicity" was unfamiliar to Marxist and anthropological theories. It was as late as 1983 that a dictionary of Marxist thought did not contain any entry under the heading "ethnicity".¹ Similarly, Winick's Dictionary of Anthropology published in 1964 did not include any entry like ethnicity as such.² Probably the term was first used in 1953 by two American social anthropologists, Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, but it did not attract the notice of scholars then. Lately, however, it has received wide academic recognition and in spite of lack of intellectual unanimity with regard to its precise definition its broad connotations have been fairly well delineated. Without going into the still on-going debate on the point it would suffice here to borrow the idea of Indian anthropologist Ajit Danda so as to put the South Asian case in perspective. According to Danda: "Ethnicity can be understood in terms of socio-cultural stereotypes as well as the manifestation of periodic stress of centrifugality and centripetality of a nation-state.

1. Tom Bottomore, *et al.*, eds., *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1983). Cited in Jyotirindra Das Gupta, "Ethnicity, Democracy, and Development in India: Assam in General Perspective," in Aul Kohli, ed., *India's Democracy: An Analysis of Changing State-Society Relations* (Princeton, N. J. Princeton University Press, 1988). p. 144.
2. Charles Winick, *Dictionary of Anthropology* (Princeton, N. J. : Princeton University Press, 1964). Cited by Ajit K. Danda, *Ethnicity in India* (New Delhi: Inter-India, 1991), p. 70.

Thus any reference to emotional integration, identification with the national mainstream, or subscription to the so-called theory of melting pot seems to express mere sentiment or wishful thinking. Instead of assuming ethnicity as a system of categorization, comprehending the same as a dynamic model having its roots in the feeling of deprivation could perhaps be relatively more practical and analytically rewarding."³

If one analyses the ethnic mosaic of South Asia one would realise that the two-nation theory was only one of the many cleavages that the society had suffered from. That the two-nation theory succeeded to divide the country while the others could not was not on account of any intrinsic worth of the idea but because of the fact that the nation was still under colonial yoke and as such the arguments and counter-arguments put forward by the Muslim League separatists and their Congress opponents could not be duly bargained with under a vibrant democratic system. It is a fact of history that neither all the states now comprising Pakistan nor all the states now comprising India had an unadulterated faith in their respective central governments.

For example, in Sind the Pakistan movement was not a mass movement. Whatever support the movement could muster in the province came from the Muslim zemindars who feared land reforms under the Congress rule and from the poor Muslim peasants who were pitted against the Hindu money-lenders. Still one of the dominant streams of Sindhi politics centered round independence of Sind, neither as part of India nor Pakistan. This was reflected in the second Hur movement in the 1940s which compelled the British government to clamp martial law in Sind in 1942 which was not lifted till only a few months before independence in 1947.⁴ This movement was very

3. Danda, n. 2., p. 69.

4. Feroz Ahmed, "Nationality Rights", *Seminar* (New Delhi), November 1984, pp. 24-25. For an analysis of the fact as to how difficult was it for the Muslim League to establish itself in Sind between 1935 and 1941, see Allen Keith Jones, "Muslim Politics and the Growth of the Muslim League in Sind, 1935-1941," Ph. D. Thesis, Duke University, 1977.

popular and only with difficulty that the Muslim League could sell the idea of Pakistan to the province.

The case of Baluchistan and the North West Frontier Province was no different. Baluchistan which comprised mainly of three linguistic groups, namely, the Baloch (26%), the Brahuis (23%) and the Pathans (21%) was virtually "garrisoned" than governed by the British.⁵ After the creation of Pakistan although the province became a part of the country its strong sense of ethnicity and identity remained. On 14 December 1947, speaking in the newly elected 52-member Kalat assembly, the Baluch leader Bizengo, then 29, declared: "If Pakistan wants to treat us as a sovereign people, we are ready to extend our friendship. But if Pakistan does not do so and forces us to accept this fate, flying in the face of democratic principles, each Baluch will fight for his freedom."⁶

In NWFP also there was a strong sense of Pathan identity. When on the eve of partition the people of the province were asked through a referendum to decide whether or not to join Pakistan a sizeable section probably did not decide in the positive. It may be noted that the Khudai Khidmadgar party led by Abdul Gaffar Khan which showed its virtual allegiance to the Congress boycotted the referendum on the ground that it did not give any scope for an independent Pakhtunistan which they demanded. The referendum went in favour of Pakistan. But although 99 percent of the votes cast were for Pakistan what was important to note was that only 51 percent of the eligible voters had cast their votes. Indeed a substantial number of people had abstained

5. Joseph Russel Rudolph, Jr., "Federalism and Nation-Building: India, Pakistan, Malaysia and Nigeria," Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Virginia, 1971, p. 94.

6. Quoted by Bhabani Sen Gupta, "Baluch Nationalism and the Future of Pakistan," *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay), 28 November 1981, p. 1949.

from voting on account of the boycott call given by the Khudai Khidmadgar. It gave rise to speculations that about 49 percent were not in favour of Pakistan.⁷

India's experience was not much different. Since Indian states did not have to choose between India or something else this question did not really surface. But wherever it had, the problem found its expression. Naga and Mizo insurgencies India did inherit. In Punjab there was an opinion for an independent Sikh state. In Kashmir the plebiscite front was already active, and notably, even the Dogra Hindu Maharaja Hari Singh tried his best till the last moment to retain the independent status of Jammu and Kashmir.

Even with regard to other states the feeling of identity was not absent. It was as early as in 1916 that the Andhra Mahasabha had resolved: "In seeking the constitution of Andhra Desa into a distinctive province, there has not been simply the calculation of the advantage accruing therefrom to a particular community, but, also the setting forth and advancing of the conception that, in preserving its own clear individuality, it shall seek only to stimulate the self consciousness of the sister communities and by a happy blending of all those, enrich the ideal of Indian nationalism."⁸

Rajendra Prasad's report on Bihar, endorsed by Congress, in 1938, had clearly propounded the theory of Bihar for the Biharis.⁹ A

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7. James W. Spain, "Pakistan's North-West Frontier: Political Problems of a Borderland," Ph. D. Dissertation, Columbia University, New York, 1959, pp. 308-13.
 8. The Andhra Provincial Congress Committee, "Reorganisation of Indian Provinces: Being a Note Presented to the Indian National Congress," Masulipattam, 1916, p. 10. Quoted by Ashis Bannerjee. *The Reconstruction of Federalism*, Monograph, New Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, Forthcoming.
 9. Das Gupta, n. 1, pp. 148-49.

recent study has shown how the seeds of Indian federalism were sown in the 1920s and 1930s which underlined the basic reality that India was a country of distinguishable units which could not be governed through a centre alone. Although the Nehru Report of 1928 envisaged a strong centre it provided enough room for the play of provincial politics.¹⁰

The reorganisation of states in India on linguistic basis in 1955 was yet another recognition by the Indian state of the existence of different ethnic groups in the country. Subsequently several states have been carved out on ethno-linguistic lines such as Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, and so on. At the moment demands are on for separate statehoods for Jharkhand, Bodoland, Uttarakhand, and so on.

Like the experience of Pakistan and India, in Sri Lanka also there was a strong sense of ethnic identity expressed by both the major ethnic groups of the island — the Tamils and the Sinhals. Since I have dealt with the subject elsewhere and the matter has received wide academic attention of late it is not being detailed here.¹¹

The purpose of referring to all these historical realities is to suggest that in South Asia both the tendencies — an integrative tendency and a disintegrative tendency — are equally forceful. It all depends on how a state manages its developmental problems. So far there has been only one evidence of failure and that is on the part of Pakistan which was disintegrated in 1971. But this does not mean that the records of other states are perfect. Each South Asian state is a potential case for disintegration and unless this is realised by all in time

10. Banerjee, n. 8.

11. Partha S. Ghosh, "Colonial Origins of Sinhala-Tamil Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka," in Ramakant and B. C. Upreti, eds., *Nation Building in South Asia* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1991), vol. 2, pp. 309-26.

they might be condemned to commit the same errors as the centralised authoritarian regimes of Europe have done.

In this paper I would submit two concepts from anthropological theory and then refer to a couple of propositions which might be helpful for the South Asian states to manage their integrational problems. The first concept deals with multiplicity of identities and the second with the idea that international borders do not necessarily divide they also unite.

The essential argument of the first concept is that assertion of ethnic identity does not necessarily mean one monolithic identity nor does it mean something permanent. Depending upon the state's capability to accommodate the grievances of ethnic groups these assertions fluctuate from one end to the other — from dormancy to militancy. Danda writes: "In a pluricultural situation like India, empirical evidences of multiple loyalties are expected as well as in abundance. A man can be a Maitheli, a Behari, a Hindu, a Brahman, and a Hindustani all at a time although in actual situation one scarcely projects more than one identity in response to the immediate stimulus. Nevertheless, this does not mean that there is any order of priority among them In other words, plasticity of identity formation by and large can also be represented by the movement of expansion and contraction depending on the nature of stimulus in the given situation."¹²

In South Asian context it would mean that a man can be a Pakistani, a Sindhi, a Muslim, a Sunni, a PPP sympathiser, a feudal lord, or something else. And yet he is all in one. Similarly, a man can be a Sri Lankan, a Tamil, a Vellala, an LTTE, a pro-Indian or anti-Indian, or something else. And yet he is all in one. Again, a man can

12. For a detailed discussion of the idea, see Ajit K. Danda, "Processes of Ethnic Integration: Some Theoretical and Methodological Problems," *Human Science* (Calcutta, vol. 37, no. 4, 1938), pp. 356-68.

be a Kashmiri, a Muslim, a Pakistani, an Indian, and so on.¹³ It is the failure of the state if his Pakistani or Sri Lankan or Indian identity gets marginalised for a reasonably long period of time.

The second concept highlights the point that people living near the international borders generally have cross-border identities both for reasons of ethnicity as well as day to day economic compulsions and as such can function as both bridge and buffer simultaneously. This theory has been popularised by one of India's leading anthropologists B. K. Roy Burman. He has derived his model of bridge community from a small tribe, the Toto, who live in the border of West Bengal and Bhutan. Comprising of a small group of about 400 they serve an important purpose of maintaining the trade line in the area across the Indo-Bhutanese boundary.¹⁴

Roy Burman's buffer model is derived from the Kuki group of tribes in Manipur and adjoining areas who play the buffer role between the Meithei and the Naga, the Naga and the Lushai, the Naga and the Kachari, the Lushai and the Kachari, and so on.¹⁵ Actually there is a number of cross-border tribes in almost every bordering state of India and interestingly 16 states of the Indian Union out of a total of 25 about one or more neighbouring nations. According to Roy Burman: "The problem of buffer communities, which also from time to time play the role of bridge communities, is a matter of considerable theoretical importance. While it is in the interest of the organised states to ensure that the buffer and bridge communities maintain their socio-political identity, such states also try to extend their sphere of influence over

13. The problem of defining Kashmiri identity has been discussed in Riyaz Punjabi, "Kashmiriyat: The Mystique of an Ethnicity," *India International Centre Quarterly* (New Delhi), vol. 17, No. 2, Monsoon, 1990, pp. 101-16.

14. Makhan Jha, *An Introduction to Anthropological Thought* (New Delhi : Vikas, 1983), pp. 160-61.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

the buffer and bridge communities. In other words maintenance of distinct identity by the buffer and bridge communities does not necessarily mean equidistance from the communities which constitute the core of the organised states."¹⁶

Having briefly discussed the two major integrational issues from some anthropological perspectives it would be useful to see how best they can be politically addressed. With regard to the first issue referred to above, that is "plasticity of identity formation", the experience of all South Asian states has been the majority-minority cleavage built up around an unending debate over nation-building. Depending upon the way strategies of nation-building are conceived and projected variations in the building of ethnic consciousness are caused. Thus while secularism as a state policy in India tends to give rise of Hindu "fundamentalism" as a protest, the pro-Sinhala-Buddhist policies in Sri Lanka or pro-Islam policies in Bangladesh or Pakistan leads to the same sort of majoritarianism in those countries. Yet these majority assertions (as well as the minority ones) have their high and low tides. For example, the Islamic assertion in Pakistan is not so strident now as it was in the aftermath of Bangladesh and more particularly during the Zia regime notwithstanding the fact that it is only now that the Shariah law has been enacted.

The greatest challenge for the South Asian states now is how best they can coordinate their efforts for nation-building. Given the historic memory of the partition it is indeed a tall order but there is no escape from facing the challenge. Against the background of the fact that both India and Pakistan tend to cast upon each other's real and potential failures in national integration it is primarily upon them that this

16. See B. K. Roy Burman's "Foreword" to Gangumei Kabui, *Anal: A Trans-Border Tribe of Manipur* (Delhi: Mittal, 1985). See also his "Historical Ecology of the Himalaya: Nature's Bridge," in N. K. Rustomji and Charles Ramble, eds., *Himalayan Environment and Culture* (Simla, Indian Institute of Advanced Study), pp. 175-79.

responsibility rests. And since Kashmir forms the crux of their respective nation-building theories it has to be addressed without hesitation.

It must be conceded that the nature of politics in both India and Pakistan has been such that an easy solution of the Kashmir problem is not possible. Pakistan is yet to get over the trauma of its dismemberment and, therefore, banks primarily upon its Islamic ideology to keep the nation united. And in this strategy Kashmir figures prominently. But now that democracy has been restored in the country with all its attendant advantages to bolster federalism it is expected that in due course it would not be all that necessary to bank upon only Islamization to boost nationalistic feelings. It must always be remembered that provincial consciousness always gets muted when the province concerned gets the feeling that it has a stake in the proper banking of the national cake. For example, Sind which has a strand of seperatism in its ethnic psyche has also a strong pull towards Pakistani nationalism depending upon the nature of prevailing politics. Sindhi politicians with larger national ambitions always wanted to make a dstinction between federal demands and Sind's role in the unity and strength of Pakistan. For exmample, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto had said in 1954: "Sind played a national part in the creation of a state in which she expected to be an equal partner of all component units. Sind still stands for that equitable distribution of political power between all the provinces and not merely between the two major units."¹⁷

Moreover, the expected decline of the role of military in Pakistan's political set up both on account of democratisation as well as gradual dilution of US-Pak strategic linkage would probably reduce the influence of Punjab in the nation's politics leading to the growth of

17. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, *Politics of the People, Vol. I, 1946-1966, Reshaping Foreign Policy : A Collection of Articles, Statements and Speeches*, (Rawalpindi: Pakistan Publication, n. d.), p. 58.

federalism which itself will ensure Pakistan's unity. It may be noted that inspite of Pakistan government's full-throated noise about the human rights violations in Kashmir there are voices in Pakistan which ridicule this disproportionate concern. Referring to Pakistan government's indifference to the drought affected Hindu community of Tharparkar area in Sind a recent editorial in *Frontier Post* (Peshawar) under the heading "Tharparkar matters less than Kashmir" said : "Newspapers are frontpaging the Kashmir issue, and meetings on it are being held with great fanfare in between cups of tea, how Pakistan will not rest till Kashmir is liberated. No one is worried about the hapless victims of Tharparkar, no minister is making statements about whether money can be diverted from the colossal Zakat funds to relieve their sufferings."¹⁸

Like the problems with Pakistan politics Indian politics has also not been conducive to good neighbourliness between the two countries. The assertion of Hindu identity of India is no longer a matter of sheer academic interest. Secularism as a model of India's nation-building is under tremendous pressure. The emergence of Hindu-chauvinistic BJP as a strong political force has rattled Indian politics from its very core putting Congress secularist platform on the defensive.

The point to be noted in this *Hindutva* related politics is that the Muslim majority province of Kashmir has become one of the focal points for both the BJP and the Congress political strategies though for obvious reasons their lines of projection are different.¹⁹ BJP's

18. Quoted in *Times of India* (New Delhi), 17 December 1991.

19. It may be noted that there is an undercurrent of Hindu consciousness among the rank and file of the party from the very beginning. With politics becoming more competitive in India of late this consciousness has become more sharp. See Partha S. Ghosh, *Cooperation and Conflict in South Asia* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1989), pp. 37-43. See also Ashish Bannerjee, "Comparative Curfew : Changing Dimensions of Communal Politics in

argument is direct and Hindu-centric. Emphasizing the point that Muslims in India have been unduly pampered it has made the question of Kashmir's special status in the Indian union as enshrined in Article 370 of India's Constitution as its whipping boy. It challenges the Congress to assert the Indian nationalism which in BJP's reckoning is co-terminus with Hindu nationalism. This has found its most candid expression in the party's on-going Ekta Yatra (unity march) which was launched in Kanya Kumari and was supposed to terminate at Kashmir's capital Sri Nagar on 26 January 1992, the Independence Day, with the hoisting of India's national flag at the city's Lal Chowk.

Congress which has its political compulsion to project its secularist platform tends to retrieve its potentially lost ground among the Hindus by incessantly referring to Pakistan's hands in the growth of terrorism in Kashmir and Punjab. While there is hardly any doubt about the fact that Pakistan has had training camps on its soil meant for Kashmiri and Punjabi terrorists, it is to be noted that Indian leaders' criticism of this is more strident while addressing the Indian public and not so much at diplomatic fora. A comparison of the statements of India's External Affairs Minister Madhav Singh Solanki and the Defence Minister Sharad Pawar would reveal this.²⁰

The Government of India's somewhat disproportionate emphasis on the Pakistan factor is revealed by its repeated failures at initiating a political process in Kashmir. So long as India is not able to project a Kashmiri leadership which can fill in the political vacuum that has been created in the state no amount of India's criticism of Pakistan's

India," and Upendra Baxi, "Reflections on the Reservations Crisis in Gujarat," in Veena Das, ed., *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia* (New Delhi: OUP, 1990), pp. 37-68 and 215-39, respectively.

20. Partha S. Ghosh, "Indo-Pak Relations: Rhetorics versus Policy," *Financial Express* (New Delhi), 3 November 1991.

involvement there would cut any ice. Of course tackling terrorism in the state is another issue and there is no substitute for dealing it with an iron hand.

In the meantime, however, besides keeping the present process of confidence building up both India and Pakistan would do well to consider the mode of solution of the problem presented by B. G. Verghese. The model in brief, is as under:

There are two strands of the militancy in Kashmir. Those favouring Pakistan and others seeking independence for all of J & K (Jammu & Kashmir) state including POK (Pakistan occupied Kashmir) and the Northern Territories. A soft frontier across an adjusted Line of Control would transform it into an international border and permit easy movement and commerce both ways. May be one could go further and suggest that both India and Pakistan vest their respective parts of J & K with greater autonomy as might be negotiated separately by the local people with their respective metropolitan governments and then permit the two units to federate around the devolved subjects with regional autonomy within each as desired, as for Jammu, Kashmir, Laddakh on the Indian side and POK, the Northern Territories and Gilgit within Pakistan.

The model would be the confederation India actually created for a while when it admitted Sikkim into the Union as an "associate State" with the passage of the Constitution 35th Amendment in 1974 If POK and the Northern Territories are given a similar confederal status in Pakistan and the two halves of J & K are permitted autonomy in internal governance, with "federal" and regional legislatures, what would emerge is an autonomous J & K with further regional devolution within an Indo-Pakistan condominium.²¹

21. B. G. Verghese, "New Perspective in Changing Scenario," *Mainstream* (New Delhi), 20 July 1991, pp. 10-12.

What Verghese points out is that "the people of J&K on both sides of the Line of Control are yearning for a dialogue and a *modus vivendi*. Their interests and those of India and Pakistan can be harmonised and accommodated with a loose *azadi* within a condominium with no sacrifice of ultimate sovereignty or security." After all, as Roy Burman has repeatedly emphasized to me in his private conversations, the goal of a modern state should increasingly be not merely to defend borders but defend different ways of life.

Closely connected to this solution within federal and confederal structures which would absorb the shock of ethnic dissonances it would be imperative to revamp the local administration which would take care of the grievances of small communities scattered all over the border region. Now that democracy is the order of the day in almost the entire South Asian region it is in the common interest of all the states that they take advantage from each other's experience. In India there is a vibrant debate now on the entire gamut of relationship between the centre and the state and the local bodies on the other. A recent monograph published by New Delhi-based Centre for Policy Research and authored by the old-time bureaucrat and a perceptive author, Nirmal Mukarji, underscored this point:

In the centralisation-decentralisation continuum, the system inherited from colonial times was in many respects more decentralised than centralised. With the arrival of democratically elected governments at the centre and in the States, the balance was heavily tilted towards centralisation. Four decades of experience yielded the lesson that centralised governance and central planning had not worked particularly well. Meanwhile mass politicisation began to make its presence felt and generated a demand for participation. It is now necessary as well as possible to reverse the tilt

away from centralisation towards more decentralised governance, including more decentralised planning.²²

It is high time that the Technical Committees of SAARC take up these issues as well for not only the problems are common, they also have serious bearing on regional cooperation.

22. Nirmal Mukharji, *Decentralisation Below the State Level: Need for a New System of Government* (New Delhi: Centre for Policy Research, February 1989), p. 4. For an analysis of some of the aspects of Sri Lanka's local government and their implications for the Tamil ethnic question, see, Partha S. Ghosh, "Local Elections in Sri Lanka," *ICSSR Newsletter* (New Delhi), Vol. 21, no. 3, October-December 1990, pp. 1-14.