UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH ASIA: POLITICAL AND SECURITY IMPLICATIONS

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Introduction

With the collapse of colonial system, a series of new states emerged in what came to be known as the Third World. These states were characterised by immense diversity in their mode of life, level of socio-economic and politico-cultural development, ethnic, racial and religious composition, beliefs, convictions and prejudices. Political independence and the assertion of political sovereignty have, among others, created objective conditions for nation building in the widest meaning of the term. The task, however, proved to be much more complex and difficult than the leadership of the concerned countries could even imagine. Owing to an array of reasons like, colonial legacy, inherent weakness of the concerned countries, failure on the part of their leadership coupled with the revolution in rising expectations of the common mass following political independence and the formidable challenge of telescoping the progress of centuries within decades, the process of socio-economic and politico-cultural development in the Third World has never been smooth, often highly difficult and not seldom, painful.

South Asia has been one of the first Third World regions to get rid of colonial yoke. Following independence, the countries of the region are undergoing a process of profound change which encompasses almost all spheres of life—social, economic, political, cultural and even ideological. This process of development in the
region, as elsewhere in the Third World, has most of the time been encountering enormous difficulties. Reasons are manifold. While some of them are rooted in the colonial past, others are the product of post-colonial period.

The colonial legacy left various ethnic, linguistic and religious groups, social strata and classes, geographical and administrative regions, economic and political institutions asymmetrically developed. In this backdrop, economic, administrative and political power in post-colonial South Asian countries has been concentrated in the hands of a few with the exclusion of the vast majority of the population. Even India, where political participation of the mass has been highest in the context of the Third World, does not constitute an exception. Representatives from those social, ethnic and linguistic groups, religious communities and geographical regions who fared better during the colonial rule formulated and executed development strategy of their respective countries in a way which preserved, and strengthened their vested interests. In consequence, the process of development in South Asian countries exacerbated wide-spread disparities in terms of socio-economic and politico-cultural development of different social, ethnic and linguistic groups, religious communities as well as geographical regions within the same country. Such state of affairs, which we would like to call the phenomenon of uneven development, is responsible for most of the internal cleavages in South Asian countries.

The phenomenon of uneven development is rooted in the colonial past of the region. As a matter of fact, the first major internal cleavage in twentieth century South Asia, namely, that between the two largest religious communities of the region—the Hindus and the Muslims—has primarily been caused by the uneven socio-economic and politico-cultural development of these communities under the British rule. During post-colonial period, however, the phenomenon has become multi-faceted and multi-dimensional and assumed unprecedented magnitude.

Quest for equal participation in the process of nation building by the deprived ethnic and/or linguistic groups, religious communities etc., their quest for national/sub-national identity different from that of the dominating group/groups and in desperate cases, bid for secession constitute the most volatile part of both intra-state and inter-state relations in post-colonial South Asia. Intra-state cleav-
ages of this type often assumed inter-state character and caused a number of wars and military interventions. In the past, it has redefined the post-colonial boundaries of the region giving birth to a new nation-state—Bangladesh. Currently, uneven development and resultant politico-security problems of varied magnitude are acute in a number of South Asian countries, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in particular. It is causing irreparable damage to enormous human and material resources of the respective countries, slowing the process of their socio-economic development. More important, it is also vitiating the inter-state relations in the region and hindering the emerging process of regional cooperation within the frame work of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

The problem of ethnic, linguistic and religious cleavages and related politico-security problems have received wide-spread attention on the part of South Asian academicians. While, among others, uneven development has often been discussed as one of the factors of ethnic, linguistic and religious cleavages in South Asia, the phenomenon has rarely been primary focus of academic endeavour in explaining the reasons of these cleavages and finding out solution to them. Moreover, political problems arising from uneven development, their magnitude, and the process of their transformation into security problems remain a relatively less discussed field of academic exercise. South Asian quest for finding out a more enlightened approach to the settlement of conflicts within the state is yet to yield desired outcome. While present paper is an attempt to study the phenomenon of uneven socio-economic and politico-cultural development of South Asia's ethnic and linguistic groups, religious communities and geographical regions within a single state boundary, the paper is more an attempt to initiate some fresh discussions on the problem which is so acute in the region. Uneven development among classes and social strata would, however, remain out of the purview of the present paper. Uneven development and its consequences are multi-dimensional. Our attention would be focused primarily on its political and security dimensions. Part I is designed to analyse the roots of uneven development and the politico-security problems generated by it. Part II is an attempt to review South Asian experience on this score with a focus on the recent situation in the region. For the convenience of our analysis, four countries of the region—Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh—where the
problem is more acute, would be discussed. As it was indicated, the paper is more an attempt to raise questions, initiate discussions on the problem than to offer a prepared solution to it.

Uneven Development: Political and Security Implications

The notion of development as implied to the society is very complex one. While it includes economic development as one of its aspects, it goes far beyond this to encompass the complex interrelated and inter-dependent changes in the society as a whole. Development in the context of a nation implies economic, social, political as well as cultural development in a balanced and integrated way embracing the diversity of social, ethnic and linguistic groups, religious communities, geographical regions in harmony with prevailing values.

Such a proposition is as good as an ideal as it is difficult to materialise. The process of development itself is highly complex and contradictory. Moreover, social forces—classes, professional groups, ethnic and religious communities and others who formulate and execute development strategies often act more in accordance with their group interests than text-book type ideal suggestions. In consequence, developmental efforts generate numerous distortions and deformities and create imbalances along both horizontal and vertical line within the polity. One of the outcomes of such distortions is the uneven socio-economic and politico-cultural development of different ethnic and linguistic groups, religious communities, geographical regions etc. within a single state boundary.

An attempt would be made below to analyse the consequences of uneven development in general framework while keeping South Asia in mind. As it has already been indicated, uneven development in South Asia, as elsewhere in the Third World, is rooted primarily in the colonial past. Countries of the region were first exposed to modern development during colonial rule, when modernization and development were conducted exclusively in the interests of the metropolis. Even development has never been in the agenda of the colonial planners. Moreover, in British India unevenness was deliberately created as part of 'divide and rule' strategy. Thus, the colonial legacy left various ethnic, linguistic and religious groups and geographical regions unevenly developed.
Political and economic institutions in these countries were also under-developed. Powerful nationalist movements—by and large democratic both in form and substance—in most of the countries suffered from severe crises. Apparently democratic institutions created under colonial rule only rarely survived. Vast majority of the population was illiterate. Their level of socio-economic and political consciousness was low. Following the independence, they were gradually turned to be rather passive participants of political process. Class structure of the society was highly under-developed. Pre-capitalist mode of production was predominant. Newly emerged entrepreneur class was weak and highly dependent on foreign capital. In the circumstances, a small segment of privileged people representing those ethnic and linguistic groups, religious communities and geographical regions who fared well during the colonial rule could easily usurp political, administrative and economic power in the newly emerged countries. It was under their leadership that development strategies were formulated and executed. They have sought to mould the society in a way that would preserve and strengthen their vested interests.

Next reason is the borrowed development strategies. Newly emerged countries usually preferred development strategies most of which have been successfully tested in the Western developed countries. However, socio-political and economic conditions in these countries, their resource base and working culture, all were quite different from those in developed countries in the early stage of their industrialization. Moreover, international environment is also quite different. This created severe problems of adaptation and adjustment in the peculiar conditions of the newly-emerged countries as well as contemporary international economic relations. In addition, Western development models were compounded by Western aid and experts, and along with them, Western influence on development programmes. All these preserved and even further strengthened economic interests of the developed countries.

In this backdrop, the process of development in the Third World countries was inevitably accompanied by scramble for scarce resources of the region among economically and politically dominating groups of the concerned countries with participation of foreign business interests. That, among others, generated uneven economic, political and cultural development of different ethnic and linguistic groups, religious communities and geographical regions within a
single political entity. In other words, certain sub-national groups established their domination in economic, politico-administrative and even cultural spheres depriving others of their legitimate share.

Such a situation was bound to give rise to a complex web of political problems in the newly emerged countries. National Liberation Movement of colonial people, particularly that in the regions like South Asia, represented a united front of extremely heterogeneous force. Diverse—often contradictory to one another—ethnic, linguistic and other sub-national groups, religious communities and geographical regions united themselves against colonial subjugation for national independence considering it as a means to achieve economic, political and religio-cultural emancipation. On the part of its participants, high degree of emotion was involved in the Movement, while from the very beginning it was suffering from inner-contradictions primarily due to its heterogeneity. Nationalist leaders themselves persistently projected a brighter future of their country that was to come once the colonial rule ended, often so bright that it existed only in their imagination. All these coupled with the exposure to modernization and communication generated great expectations among mass population following the independence. It posed a formidable challenge to the Third World countries—telescoping the progress done in the Western countries for centuries within decades. Even the sincere attempts on the part of the leadership could hardly fulfil all these expectations. Hopes in most of the newly emerged countries turned to be desperation. All these made the political processes in these countries rather volatile. In the circumstances, deliberate economic exploitation and politico-cultural suppression of one or a combination of sub-national groups by the others have over a period of time induced an insecurity amongst the people with cultures or religious/ethnic identities different from those of the ruling elite and gave rise to the sense of ‘internal colonialism.’ Subjugated group or groups came out to the political arena with demands for equal participation in the process of national development and nation building. Such was the beginning of a political problem generated by the uneven development. It has consistently been of few most difficult problems which the newly independent states faced and are still facing in the process of nation building. Instead of citing examples, it would be suffice to state that there is hardly

any state with ethnic or linguistic or religious heterogeneity which did not face such problems.

The problems of national integration of the Third World states generated by the uneven development of diverse subnational groups need to be weighed in the backdrop of some inherent weaknesses of the National Liberation Movement itself and the states and nations it created. Rupert Emerson has referred to the Third World nations as "peoples which are not yet nations in being but nations in hope". There is, at least, some truth in such an assertion. Unlike Europe, which experienced centuries of nation building, new states and their organs, political institutions, national identity of their people are the product of a relatively brief historical period and that under the alien rule. The Nationalist Movement represented passionate anti-colonialism which has been the starting point of its endeavours. With the end of colonialism, that passionate anti-colonialism began to wane. Even people who considered that they have a common heritage, with the emergence of internal colonialism, could not envision a common destiny for the future. Thus, a good number of countries which were suffering from uneven development also began to suffer from crisis of national identity.

In the backdrop of uneven development over a period of time and the absence of a politically viable national alternative, the deprived section of the society responded by seeking the proximate sources for mobilizing militancy and political pressure: i.e. the assertion of ethnic, linguistic, religious or regional identities. In this regard, the deprived groups usually tend to de-emphasize those elements of identity which unite them with the dominating sub-national group or groups and put particular emphasize on those elements which separate them. The quest of the people of Bangladesh for national identity represents a classic and the most illustrated example of similar trends. Being the victim of uneven development under colonial rule, Bengali Muslims in the early twentieth century began to assert that they constitute a nation that is different from that of the Bengali Hindus who being the beneficiary of uneven development established overwhelming domination.


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in socio-economic and politico-cultural spheres. The same people, being a rather much worse victim of uneven development in their cherished homeland Pakistan, asserted ethno-linguistic Bengali nationalism on secular foundation.

As it was mentioned, it is the deprived groups who usually mobilized militancy against the ruling groups. In recent years, however, the growing polarization of society along sub-national lines so charged the political atmosphere that in a number of cases the relatively affluent sections also began to assert their ethnic or religious identity and accordingly, mobilize militancy. Shikh militancy is the most illustrated example to this.

The consequences of uneven development—essentially political problems—assume security dimension in some specific circumstances. In this regard a point needs to be clarified. Consequences of uneven development while creating politico-security problems of great magnitude, usually acted in combination with a host of problems rooted both in the historical past as well as current dynamics of the process of development and nation building.

In certain cases, faced with the political consequences of uneven development, the elites of these countries failed to act within the perspective of strengthening the democratic institutions by decentralizing political and economic power, and failed to create an environment of freedom to practice religion and culture among diverse communities. Instead, these elites responded by strengthening and using the coercive power of the state to preserve regime interests against resurgent sub-nationalism. At the political level, the ideologies of the ruling elites became increasingly narrowed. Sinhalese nationalism in the Sri Lankan elite, resurgent Hindu nationalism in the Indian elite and an obscurantist version of Islam in Pakistan’s Panjabi-dominated ruling elite are cases in point. In the face of the rising tide of national/sub-national assertion the use of coercive power of the state hardly could bring any lasting settlement to the problems. Instead, such measures themselves pushed the aggrieved sub-national groups to the extreme path of the bid for secession and/or political violence. The aggrieved sections as well, in certain cases, failed to realize the political wisdom in finding out peaceful solution to the problems through accommodation. For instance, the Panjab crisis and a number of its gravest consequences are the result of intransigence on the part of both the parties.

4. Ibid.
Another significant aspect of intra-state violence over ethnic, linguistic and religious issues in the Third World in general, and in South Asia in particular, is that it often assumes inter-state character with cross-border implications. Reasons are rooted both in the historical past as well as the current dynamics of inter-state relations in the region. In certain cases, pre-colonial antagonism has been revived in the post-colonial period. On a number of occasions, state boundaries have been challenged in the form of irredentist claims. More than anything else, cross-border affiliation of ethnic, linguistic and religious groups often created almost irresistible temptation for the involvement in the intra-state cleavages in the neighbouring countries. While external involvement has been a fact of life, the ruling elites, often tended to seek external bogey with a view to justifying repression and mobilizing people to defend the 'sovereignty and integrity' of the country.

Before proceeding to the review of South Asian experience with uneven development and its consequences, it might be stated that the factors which created and widened the cleavages along ethnic and linguistic groups, religious communities and geographical regions are highly complex and that any monocausal explanation could distort the picture. It, however, in no way undermines the importance of specific studies on one or some of the reasons which are responsible for numerous intra-state cleavages in Third World.

An Overview of South Asian Experience

The first major conflict generated by the uneven development in South Asia has been that between the two largest religious communities of British India—the Hindus and the Muslims. Uneven socio-economic and politico-cultural development of these two communities has primarily been the outcome of a deliberate policy pursued by the colonial administration. In pre-colonial India, the ruling elite consisted of predominantly, but not exclusively, Muslims. That is why, the British considered the Muslims as the most severe threat to them. The British distrust of the Muslim community was crystallized following the Great Uprising of 1857.

To avoid controversy, let it suffice to state that while both the communities suffered from colonialism, the Muslims certainly have been the worst victim. Upper classes lost their power and privileges, in certain cases, they were destroyed. Educated professional groups
lost their earlier privilege of getting employment in the army, police, the judiciary, and the revenue departments of the Government.\textsuperscript{5}

However, the deprivation of the Muslims has also been uneven. In Bengal, the backwardness of the Muslims was most marked. Its upper classes were destroyed.\textsuperscript{6} The Permanent Settlement introduced by Cornwallis in 1873 created a landed aristocracy (the zamindar class), composed almost exclusively of the Hindus. In addition, the Muslims have rejected the system of education introduced by Macaulay and continued to adopt blindly Madrasa education. In course of time, they have divorced themselves from the modern world and modern way of life. The Hindus, on the other hand, by late 19th century—early 20th century, established overwhelming domination in almost all spheres of life in Bengal. Such domination has been manifested most vividly in the East Bengal, where most of the zamindars were Hindus and the tenants—Muslims. Even the poor Hindus, who, like the poor Muslims were being exploited by the upper-class Hindus "developed a psychological hatred towards the Muslim."\textsuperscript{7} Such unevenness in the level of socio-economic and cultural development of the two communities created the background for communal turmoil.

Meanwhile, during the early 20th century, a class of jottedars or rich and middle peasant in Bengal consolidated its position in the rural economy and was thriving for a role in politics. A significant part of this class was Muslim. They gradually changed their attitude towards Macaulay's education system and began to send their sons to secular schools and colleges. By 1920s-1930s, a sizable western educated Muslims came to exist. Primary objective of this education has been to secure jobs in government offices. However, when these young educated Muslims with fresh memories of exploitation by Hindu zamindars and money-lenders came to the cities in search of jobs or business, they found that their way in all directions has been closed by their Hindu counterparts.

It is in this backdrop, that the Bengali Muslims came out to the political arena with demands for equal participation in the socio-

\textsuperscript{5} D. N. Benerjee, \textit{East Pakistan: A Case Study in Muslim Politics}, (Vikas Publications, New Delhi, 1969), pp. 5-6.


economic life of the country and made a common cause with the Muslims of the rest of India. Failure on the part of the majority of Congress leadership to realize the magnitude of the political problem generated by the uneven development of the two communities led the Bengali Muslims to become the most jealous supporter of 14 points and subsequently the demand for a separate state on the basis of two-nation theory. Common anti-colonial front of the Muslims and the Hindus fell apart. Failure to find out an amicable solution to the problem led to a series of traumatic developments. Finally, the country was partitioned on religious ground.

The pattern of Hindu-Muslim conflict in the British India could be summarized in the following words:

i. The victim of uneven development, the Muslims, came out to the political arena with demands for equal participation in the socio-economic and politico-cultural life of the country with the Hindus, the beneficiaries. In this regard, they have consciously subdued their ethno-linguistic identity, which unite them with their counterparts to the religious one, which separate them. Religious rhetorics have been the means, not the end.

ii. Parochial approach on the part of the dominant group towards an amicable settlement of the problem, transforms the subnational consciousness into quest for separate national identity and the demand for equal participation within the polity into that for a separate state.

iii. Conflict generates a dynamism of its own that becomes difficult to reverse. Essentially a political problem that could be resolved peacefully, threatens the security of the parties involved.

iv. Intransigence on the part of both sides, led to violence causing enormous damage to the material and human resources of the concerned parties. Finally, the country is divided between the two claimants with bitter enmities to persist.

While except Pakistan, none of the countries in post-colonial South Asia has been dismembered, this pattern of conflict is to a significant extent similar to most of the ethno-religious and linguistic conflicts in the region. The instances of uneven development in South Asia are, now a days, numerous. The magnitude of politico-security problems generated by them are multi-dimensional and much more complex. For the convenient of our analysis, we would discuss only some of the major conflicts witnessed by four South
Asian countries—Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh—during the post-colonial period of their development with a focus on the most contemporary problems.

Pakistan

Political development of the territory which constituted Pakistan was characterized by numerous contradictions and asymmetries. The than East Pakistan with its populist and broadbased nationalist movement, strong student, youth and trade union movements and relatively high degree of consciousness became politically the most developed region in the country. In the West Pakistan, on the other hand, political life has been deeply influenced by the feudal structure of the society and the feudal interests. Both, political participation and consciousness has been under the influence of feudal prejudices.

In the circumstances, the elite that came to power in the country consisted of a small group of people with a narrow support base. Most of them either belonged to or settled in the West Pakistan. The Bengalis, however, constituted 55 per cent of the total population of the country. It made them reluctant either to broaden their base or risk an election. Consequently they became overwhelmingly dependent on the civil-military bureaucracy of the country where the Bengalis were almost nonrepresented. Even in 1955, Bengali representation in the Central Civil Secretariat was below the 8 per cent. In the army, the number of Bengali officers was 14 as against 894. Capitalist class also belonged to the West. Only 2.5 per cent of the total industrial asset to the country belonged to the Bengali Muslims. The ruling elite in Pakistan, therefore, faced little difficulty in establishing and continuing West Pakistan's economic domination over the East. They have formulated and executed development policies that were designed to enrich the West Pakistan at the expense of the East. For instance, during the fiscal years 1950/51-1954/55, 80 per cent of the total development expenditure was spent in the West.

has further been supplemented by the suppression of Bangali language and culture. In the face of severe protest, Urdu was declared as the state language of Pakistan giving birth to a cultural movement that was to have far reaching impact on the politico-cultural life of the country.

Unevenness in the socio-economic development between the two wings of Pakistan has been further exacerbated during the military regime of Ayub Khan. The regime itself came to power suppressing the verdict given by the Bengalis in the 1954 Election in favour of equal participation of the two wings in the overall development of the country. The development efforts under Ayub Khan turned to be a deliberate process of economic development of the West Pakistan at the expense of the East. West Pakistan, while providing the 40 per cent of the total revenue of the Government, received 75 per cent of its expenditure. The ratio of the development between the East and the West has been 77 and 23 respectively. West Pakistan’s contribution to the total foreign exchange earnings was 41 per cent but it received 70 per cent of these earnings. Similarly, the West was also allocated a highly disproportionate share of the foreign aid. An estimate shows that between 1951 and 1961, only 18 per cent of the total foreign economic assistance was allocated to the Eastern Wing. After 1961, the situation did not change.

Development strategy during Ayub regime have had disastrous effect on the economic development of the East and generated severe uneveueness between the level of economic development of the two wings. Growth rate per annum in the West Pakistan during the 1960-1965 has been 7.4 per cent as against 4.6 in the East, during 1965-1970 it was 7.4 and 3.3 respectively. As a consequence, per capita income in West Pakistan rose from Rs. 355 in 1960 to Rs. 492 in 1970 while that in the East rose from Rs. 269 in 1960 to only Rs. 308 in 1970.

Uneven development in Pakistan, however, have had a specific feature. Economic deprivation had a disastrous impact on the economic development of the Eastern Wing, and it stood far behind the West. Nonetheless, despite economic discrimination and politico-cultural suppression, the Bengalis politically and culturally remained much more advanced than their West Pakistani counterparts. As a matter of fact, 'internal colonialism' itself gave rise to a broad-based democratic movement. Not only the middle class of the city, student community and the workers, but also the peasants gradually became highly politicised. Their level of political consciousness was also significantly higher than their counterparts in the West Pakistan. Culturally as well, the Bengalis have been more advanced. Bengali language and literature remain richer than those of West Pakistan. Despite relative poverty, literacy rate also continued to be higher. More important, the Eastern part was blessed with a strong cultural movement with progressive political undertone.

As a consequence of the deep-rooted cleavage generated by the uneven development between the two wings of Pakistan, Muslim nationalism was in the wane. The most conscious segment of Bengali intelligentsia began to emphasize the ethno-linguistic identity of the people which separated them from the West Pakistanis as against their religious identity which united them with the later. Bengali grievances in a synthesized form were first reflected in the 21 points of the United Front that was formed in the eve of 1954 Election. Demands for provincial autonomy and the equal participation in the politico-economic processes of the country were rather modest and were being far from unduly weakening the Centre. Nonetheless, the ruling elite in Pakistan was far from prepared to bring such issues in the agenda.

Such a pattern of behaviour has been one of the characteristic feature of the conflict. Six points of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Student Movement of 1968 and its 11 points while correctly reflected the genuine demands of the Bengalis, also offered the ruling elite of Pakistan an opportunity to resolve the political crisis amicably. They rather preferred to use brute force to suppress the movement for provincial autonomy. As a consequence, the movement transformed into a full-fledged nationalist movement with a
viable programme, veritable symbols and passionate apathy towards the dominating sub-national group.

In case of East-West conflict in Pakistan, the degree of irrationalism in terms of using force by the dominant sub-national group to resolve a crisis of national integration has been unparallel. Even despite the risk that the country may be disintegrated, the ruling elite in Pakistan did not consider it to be useful to set off in quest of a peaceful settlement that would give the Bengalis their legitimate share in the developmental process of Pakistan. Instead, in 1971 it opted for a military adventure that set off the worst genocide and exodus in the post-War history. The case of Pakistan also remains unique in the sense that it has been the only country to be dismembered.

Post-1971 Pakistan

Post-1971 Pakistan as well was characterized by sharp unevenness in the level of socio-economic and politico-cultural development of ethno-linguistic groups and geographical regions. As we have discussed it earlier, ruling elite included the Panjabis and the Urdu speaking Muhajirs from India, while the Sindhis, Baluchis and the Pashtuns occupied a subordinate position in the nation building process. East-West conflict during the pre-1971 period, however, to a significant extent overshadowed and contained the consequences of uneven development. Following the emergence of Bangladesh, ethnic conflicts in Pakistan was being exposed in a politically more meaningful way.

While the experience of 1971 has generated a degree of awareness with regards to the uneven socio-economic and politico-cultural development of Pakistan's ethnic groups, it has not resulted in a viable policy that could resolve the problem. Policies of Bhutto was controversial at best. Restoration of the provinces to the pre-1955 administrative status has been an important gesture of Bhutto government. However, his progressive socio-economic reforms in and generous development funds to the aggrieved provinces were supplemented by the attempts to consolidate day to day administrative control by the Central government which aroused sharp resistance from Baluchistan and NWFP and finally he had to resort to the use of brute force.16 Similarly, Ziaul Huq

as well adopted a policy of “carrot and stick”, his main objective being to contain not to resolve the problem. Afghan crisis, however, provided him with such an opportunity.17

During the last years of Zia-ul Huq, and particularly since his death, national issue once again came to the forefront of Pakistani politics. To grasp the problem, it is necessary to understand where do these five groups stand in the developmental process of the country. In the federal government secretariat and related departments Panjab and urban Sind (comprising mainly Urdu-speaking Muhajirs and Panjabis) have around 81 per cent of the posts while rural Sind has around 3 per cent, NWFP around 2.5 per cent. In the government sector corporations, Panjab and urban Sind has about 88 per cent of the middle and senior level posts, while rural Sind has around 3.5 per cent, NWFP around 8 per cent and Baluchistan around 1 per cent. Even these statistics understate Punjabi and Muhajir representation in such institutions.18

Data on the level of industrial development of the provinces are highly misleading. Along with the cities of Panjab, Karachi, Hyderabad, Peshawar and Quetta, particularly, the cities of Sind have a substantial industrial base. But, Karachi, Hyderabad and many more prosperous cities in Sind have a non-Sindi predominance while Peshawar is largely a non-Pushto city and Quetta a non-Baluch city.19

In Pakistan, Baluchistan and the rural Sind are the worst victims of uneven development. While agriculturally, along with Punjab, Sind is as well developed, significant part of its fertile land belongs to either the Muhajirs or the Punjabis.20 Such a peculiar condition of Sind is primarily responsible for the recent deterioration of ethnic relations in the province. Politically, however, Sind remains the most advanced province in the country. It was in the forefront of the democratic movement. In the last election, predominantly Sindi based Peoples Party of Pakistan (PPP) has done well. More

17. Ibid.
18. Charles H. Kennedy, “Politics of Ethnic Preference in Pakistan”, Asian Survey, (Vol. xxiv, No. 6., June 1984), the figures are calculated from the Table 1.
20. Ibid., p. 7.
important, present Prime Minister is a Sindi. All these generated
certain degree of hope among the Sindis that their problems of
economic backwardness could still be resolved within the frame­
work of Pakistan and thus, contained the deep-rooted secessionist
movement in the province. In Baluchistan, the youth is becoming
increasingly politicised, radicalised and to a significant extent
militant. They are challenging the apparently conciliatory policies
of more polished leaders like Bizenjo and turning into an important
pressure group. Their grievances are, however, not only against
Punjab, but also against Pashtuns for their influence in the economy
of the province and against Sind, particularly because of repression
unleashed by Bhutto against the Baluchis during his rule. Pashtuns
have a sizable representation in the civil and military services,
business circles and in informal services sectors. They have also
been benefited from the oil-boom in the Middle East and the black
economy in the region. These coupled with the Afghan crisis split
the Pashtun mind between their present benefits and nostalgia for
Pakhtunistan. They, at least for the time being, appear to have
a stake in the status quo.

The advent of a freely elected government in Pakistan and
an environment of relative political freedom could not create
favourable conditions for the settlement of politico-security
problems generated by the uneven development. While the army is
tolerating the Sindi dominated regime, Punjabi political elite is
increasingly showing its intolerance with it. Recent developments
in Pakistan added a new phenomenon to its intra-province
conflicts. This time demands for greater autonomy is being voiced
by the Punjabi leadership. Whether they mean it or design it to
weaken Benazir government is a moot point, but it would certainly
create additional problems for the country. The government is too
fragile to initiate any meaningful policy. Recent developments
in Pakistan have painfully demonstrated that the elite have learned
too little from previous experiences.

India

The degree of diversity in India in terms of ethno-linguistic
groups and religious communities is unparallel in the world. So
was the degree of unevenness in the level of their development
when it achieved independence in 1947. As in any South Asian
country, political and economic power as well was concentrated in
the hands of a few privileged strata that fared during the colonial rule. The situation in India in many respects also significantly differed from that in other countries, Pakistan in particular. In terms of political participation and consciousness it was the most advanced country in the region. The nationalist movement was broad based with grass-root support base. National bourgeoisie was anti-imperialist and prepared to share power with the middle class and the professional groups. Civil and military bureaucracy accepted the supremacy of the political leadership. And above all, Indian leadership opted for a participatory democracy and a federal system of government which from the very beginning let the grievances of aggrieved section be expressed within the constitutional framework. A combination of such contradictory factors influenced India’s policy towards the problems pertaining to uneven development.

While colonial past left India’s ethnic groups unevenly developed, unlike other South Asian countries, there was no single dominating sub-national group. Geographically as well, comparatively more developed areas were spread over different corners of the country. As a matter of fact, it became virtually impossible for a single group to establish overwhelming domination. The nature of ruling elite in India and its development strategies, however, ensured that the phenomenon of uneven development would remain as a constant feature of its socio-economic and politico-cultural life.

Ethno-linguistic conflicts in India generated by the uneven development are so numerous that it would virtually be impossible for us to highlight at least some of them. For the convenience of our study, we would concentrate only on two of such problems: Punjab and Assam.

**Punjab**

Punjab crisis is a rather unique case where a beneficiary of the uneven development reacted violently against the central authority. Sikh community since the mid-Nineteenth century, particularly following its loyal service to the Raj during the Great Uprising of 1857, emerged as the most favoured ethno-religious community by the British. Sikh princes got the land seized from the anti-British feudals. Enormous opportunity opened to the Sikhs to join
the army and other services was supplemented by a grandiose programme to build canals in Punjab.\textsuperscript{21}

As a consequence, from the very beginning of independent India, Sikhs were substantially over-represented in the civil and military bureaucracy, in informal professions. Sikh villages as well became comparatively more prosperous. Trade and services in the urban areas were controlled by the Hindus which did not at that time bother much the Sikhs. Green Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s gave another boost to the upper strata of Sikh peasantry. Both, the Sikh peasantry and the Hindu traders benefited from the Green Revolution, and thus, relative intercommunal harmony was maintained.

In course of time, however, the overall economic position of the Sikh community in the country changed substantially. By late 1970s, Green Revolution reached its plateau. Meanwhile, the price of agricultural inputs as well as industrial goods went up. But, as perceived by the Sikhs, the price of agricultural products set by the Centre was too low. Diversion of the part of water from the Ravi-Beas basin also generated serious grievances among the Sikhs.\textsuperscript{22}

Furthermore, Punjab never had a strong industrial base. Moreover, the Sikhs business community in terms of economic strength and experience was lagging behind their Hindu counterpart. In the circumstances, Sikh efforts to invest in trade, transport and industry led them to inevitable conflict with the Hindu business interests.

Affluence of the peasantry led to the spread of education in the rural areas and the expansion of the rural middle class. However, Punjab was too small to provide all of them with jobs. Despite Sikh migration to other parts of India and abroad, there were 56,000 unemployed graduates in Punjab, more than half in the rural areas. By the 1980s, recruitment to the army fell drastically—from 35 per cent to only 8 per cent. However, in government services, the Sikhs have done well. They have increased their share and constituted 8 per cent of the total number of Central Government employees.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{23} Urmila Phadnis, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 36.
If the above picture is weighed against the Sikh population which constituted only two per cent of the total population of India, the Sikhs would appear rather a privileged ethno-religious community in the country.

The reasons for the violent reaction by a beneficiary of uneven development are many-fold. Punjab has been developed, over a historically long period, at the expense of the rest of India. Last among the measures designed to develop Punjab has been the green revolution which brought some radical changes in Sikh rural areas creating a group with vested interest in continuing the process. However, with the green revolution reaching its plateau the development of this group stagnated. When the green revolution in Punjab was initiated, it was not taken into consideration that rural prosperity could generate surplus money in the hands of the richer section of the peasantry and create a large army of educated unemployed. A prosperous group—Sikh peasantry—when found that its way is further blocked in many directions, it responded adversely. Neither they themselves, nor the central authority could find out any alternative way to sustained prosperity.

The Sikh problem is primarily, though not exclusively, a product of the socio-economic development of the community and its specific position in Indian polity. Only thanks to the lack of political solution and mishandling on the part of both sides, it degenerated into a religious one. Intransigence and the cult of violence on the part of both sides, though degree may vary, led to a crisis and a series of tragic consequences shattering the stability of the country and jeopardizing its security involving real or imaginary 'foreign hands'.

Assam

The situation in Assam to a certain extent reassembles that in Sind. Like the Sindis, Assamese as well are the victim of twin exploitation. As a state within the Indian Union, Assam has rather been neglected in government development programmes except the exploitation of its mineral and natural resources. Control over the mineral resources remained with the central authority. Relative backwardness of the Assamese encompassed not only economic, but also the socio-cultural life of the ethnic community. Historically,
Assam's economic life was dominated by the emigrants from other parts of India. However, the Bengalis constituted the single-most dominant group among the outsiders. Better educated Bengali Hindus overwhelmingly dominated the administrative set-up. To this was added Bengali Muslims engaged in cultivation. The Marwari Hindus dominated the commercial life. Tribals from Bihar and Central Province provided the labour force in the tea plantations. Nepalis came as herdsmen, Punjabis as artisans and so on. As a matter of fact, in economic avenues, whether in trade and commerce, transport and communications, manufacturing and construction industries, the dominance of the migrants, particularly the Bengalis and Marwaris, continued. Economic domination has also been supplemented by the cultural one, particularly on the part of the Bengalis.

Meanwhile, during the post-independent period, education was spread among the Assamese and a middle class emerged which found all its avenues virtually blocked in all directions by the migrants, particularly the Bengalis. Such a situation cannot, but generate deep resentment among the ‘sons of the soil’. Assamese gradually developed a sense of self awareness to the extent of xenophobia in relation to migrants. While their demands included a greater share for the state of its mineral resources and accelerated economic development of the state, the focal point became the deportation of “illegal immigrants”.24

The uneven development of Assam and other states in the North-East India is more rooted in the past than the current developmental dynamics. However, socio-economic development of these ethnic groups in recent decades generated an awareness and raised self-consciousness with regards to their position in the process of development. These movements, were primarily been designed to ensure the equal participation of the ethnic groups who have been deprived for a historically long period. Secessionist trends that could be discerned in the movements are rather the outburst of frustration with the concerned authorities.

The ethnic problems in Assam and elsewhere in the North-East India proved to be too complicated to be resolved easily or immediately. The question of “illegal immigrants”, for instance,

has been so complicated that it was virtually impossible to agree to a common criteria, not to speak about their number. Nonetheless, while the mechanism of conflict management and resolution, has not been effective enough, it did not collapse.

One characteristic feature of these conflicts is that they involve a host of parties representing quite a good number of sub-national groups. It is also typical to most of the ethnic conflicts in India. While the increased number of parties complicate the problems, it also let the central authority play the role of an arbiter. Indian way of dealing with the ethno-religious conflict or crisis situation is characterised by significant degree of flexibility of response. Democratic institutions and federal system of government let the grievances be expressed and in certain cases draw proper attention on the part of the Centre. Even during the 1970s and particularly the 1980s when force has often been used by the state, pragmatic approach subsequently prevailed.

In dealing with her numerous ethnic problems, India appears to have opted for a policy of ‘finding out solution where it is possible and learning to live with others’, while minimising their politico-security consequences. In this regard, her success is obvious. Indian state despite endemic crises, demonstrated tremendous ability to live with the problems.

Sri Lanka

Ethnic conflict between the Tamils and the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka has been sparked off by the transformation of the beneficiary of uneven development into a victim. Because of numerous Christian missionary schools teaching in the Jaffna peninsula, the Tamils secured a lead in English education from the very beginning of colonial rule. It has played a decisive role in over-representation of the Tamils in government services and in other selected professions. In 1921, while the Sinhalese comprising 78 per cent of the total population held only 46 per cent of the “selected professions”, the Tamil making up only 13 per cent of the population, held 31.9 per cent of them.26 Despite Sinhalese exposure to Western education following the early 1920s, the situation did not change too much.

In 1946, proportion of the Tamil to Sinhalese in the Civil Service was 1 : 2, the proportion in the Judicial Service was 2 : 3. 27

Such a situation, from the very beginning was resented by the Sinhalese middle class, educated sections and the Buddhist religious leadership. By the mid-1950s, they also found an able leader who could transform their ideas into reality—S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. Prior to the 1956 elections, Bandaranaike promised to make Sinhala the only official language of the country and did it following his election victory. Following 1956, a process of deprivation and intimidation, coupled with occasional persecution, began which transformed the Tamil from a privileged minority to a deprived one. Tamil representation in Sri Lankan administrative service from 30 per cent in 1956 declined to 5 per cent in 1970. Their representation in clerical service, professionals (engineers, doctors, lecturers) armed forces and labour forces declined during the same period from 50 per cent, 60 per cent, 40 per cent and 40 per cent respectively to 5 per cent, 10 per cent, 1 per cent and 5 per cent respectively. Moreover, between 1956 and 1970, 189,000 persons were recruited by the public-sector corporations and 99 per cent of them were Sinhalese. 28 Discriminating measures also brought substantial reduction in the number of Tamil students in the institutions of higher education. Tamil student admitted engineering courses fell from 48.3 per cent of the total in 1969 to 14.2 per cent in 1975. It is one of the primary reasons what made the Tamil youth an easy target for recruitment in the terrorist groups. 29

It was supplemented by other form of deprivation. The single major field of government investment in the country has been irrigation. Up to 1973, no less than Rs. 3.7 billion was spent and not even 0.01 per cent accrued to the benefit of the Tamil people. 30

Sri Lankan case is unique in the sense that a beneficiary of uneven development within a short span of period turned into its worst victim. Earlier over-representation of the Tamils in all category of professional groups has created genuine resentment

among the majority Sinhalese community. However, this resentment was not properly channeled. The programme followed by the Sinhalese leadership was not exactly designed to bring evenness in the level of the development of the two feuding communities, but to create unevennes in favour of their own community. Thus, the Tamils were unduly deprived. It was bound to create socio-political repercussions. Long-standing frustration among the Tamils led to violence wherein both the parties have been equally ruthless. A problem pertaining to the process of socio-economic and political development of the country turned out to be a security one and finally, invited the much publicised involvement of India. The ethnic problem in Sri Lanka, however, remains to be resolved.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh is the most homogenous of the states of South Asia. Almost 98 per cent of the population is made up of Bengalis. Nonetheless, since its independence in 1971, the country was facing considerable problems in integrating its ethnic minorities to the national mainstream. These minorities, primarily, but not exclusively Chakmas, constitute less than 1 per cent of the total population and concentrated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)—a hilly, sylvan territory covering about 9 per cent of the total area of Bangladesh. During colonial period these tribal peoples were living in isolation in the CHT area under a so-called Hill Tracts Regulation. Even during Pakistan period, they remain detached from the modern world and modern may of life.

However, relative exposure to modern education and political turmoil during the last years of Pakistani rule, their failure to support the Liberation War en mass and its aftermath generated an upsurge in their political consciousness and the sense of deprivation. They were being gradually alienated from the national mainstream and becoming aware of their identity and appeared to the political arena with socio-political demands that would end their century old backwardness.


The then Awami League government failed to understand the nature and magnitude of the problem. A combination of three reasons were responsible for such a failure. First, the territory that constituted Bangladesh and the leadership of the country have had no experience of handling similar problems; second, Bengali nationalism, achieving a tremendous victory over Pakistan was too confident of its strength and unaware of its limitations. It intended to unite everybody in the country irrespective of ethnic differences. Third, due to the failure of the Chakmas to support the Liberation War of Bangladesh en mass, they have also incurred certain degree of apathy on part of the Bengalis.

During BNP regime, CHT was considered a serious problem. The necessity of finding out a solution was also realised. But, the problem was viewed only as a case of economic under-development, ignoring its political aspects. More problematic, however, has been the type of solution that the BNP government intended to bring about to the political unrest in the CHT. It tried to win over the people by accelerating the economic development in the areas and by reserving seats for tribal students in educational institutions. Such small carrots were accompanied by substantially bigger sticks. Army and police forces fighting Santi Bahini guerrillas were significantly reinforced. Most frightening to the tribals, however, has been government-sponsored resettlement of the Bengalis to the CHT areas which numbered probably several hundreds of thousands. These measures severely alienated the tribal peoples. The situation turned from bad to worse. Such an approach continued for a considerable time even after the BNP was out of power.

Persistent failures of the previous approach to bring any positive change in the situation in the CHT generated a rethinking in Dhaka on the whole issue. Very recently, it was realised that to bring peace in the area, it is necessary to involve at least a significant part of the tribal people in the process and find out a compromising solution. After about two years of negotiations between the government and some representatives of tribal communities an agreement was reached. Accordingly, four bills, commonly known as CHT District Council Bills, were passed by the Jatio Sangsad (parliament) on 26 February 1989. These bills envisage the administrative autonomy and the excluded area status of the CHT Districts. These measures

33. Ibid., p. 270.
34. BLISS Reviews and Analyses, February, 1989, pp. 21-29.
are yet to bring any qualitative change in the situation. The problems of the CHT areas are the product of a historical period and cannot be resolved so easily or within a short span of time.

Concluding Remarks

From the very beginning of South Asia's exposure to modern development, uneven socio-economic and politico-cultural development of its different ethnic and linguistic groups, religious communities and geographical regions was exposing itself with far reaching politico-security consequences. First and foremost among them was the collapse of Hindu-Muslim united front against colonial rule. In addition to weakening the position of both the communities vis-a-vis the colonial power, it has also caused enormous damage to the material and human resources of the two communities.

During the post-independent period, along with the accelerated process of development, unevenness and its politico-security implications became much more complex. All of the countries of South Asia suffered from it, while the degree of unevenness and the nature and magnitude of its political and security consequences varied. In this regard, Pakistan has been the worst victim. A well planned unevenness between its two wings in favour of the West and attempts to bring military solution to politico-economic problems led to the dismemberment of the country. Despite traumatic experience, it is yet to develop a mechanism of conflict management and resolution on ethnic problems generated by the uneven development. In Sri Lanka, a relatively deprived majority while facing the task of bringing evenness in the level of the development of its two major ethnic community, has unduly subdued the minority which shattered the polity and jeopardized the security of the country. The settlement of the ethnic conflict still remains the most urgent task of the country. Bangladesh, after a brief period of trial and error, appears to have emerged on the path of negotiated settlement to its ethnic conflict. Democratic institutions and a federal form of government let India create a more or less effective mechanism of conflict management and resolution. In dealing with her numerous ethno-religious and linguistic conflicts, India appears to have opted for a policy of finding out solutions where it is possible and learning to live with the rest. In this regard her success is obvious. Indian state, despite endemic crises, has demonstrated tremendous ability
to live with the problems. In recent years, however, the cost of living with the problems has substantially increased.

Past experiences have demonstrated that the political systems in South Asia, whether it is parliamentary democracy of military rule or whether it is unitarian or federal system of government, lack built-in mechanism to accommodate adequately the aspirations of the minorities. However, a democratic and federal system certainly have some advantages. Inherent weaknesses of South Asian states—under-development and asymmetrical development of classes and social groups, political and economic institutions, narrow elite base, scarcity of resources, external dependence and the contradictory nature of the very process of development—would ensure that uneven development would remain as a constant feature of their socio-economic and politico-cultural life.

Facing the challenge thrown by the uneven development is one of the cardinal tasks of nation building process. As the problems are the product of internal development of these societies, the solution also must be found primarily through national efforts. Economic disparities and disproportionate opportunity to socio-political advancement lies at the centre of the problem. Development strategies should be formulated and implemented in a way so that the grievances of the victims of uneven development could be redressed. State-sponsored special measures should be undertaken with a view to accelerating the development of backward communities. The process, however, must be designed to ensure the equal participation of all the groups in the socio-economic and politico-cultural development of the country.

While democracy by itself is not a solution, it would let the grievances be expressed in legal forms. Democratic institutions would also create better conditions for power sharing. In multinational countries, democracy coupled with a federal system could transform ethnic conflicts in to competition. Even where the minorities are too small, certain degree of autonomy could generate among them a sense of participation in the political process.

While facing conflicts or crisis situation, it is necessary to avoid the imposition of settlement—whether good or bad—from the above. It has been observed empirically that negotiated settlements involving all the parties concerned tend to be more viable than the imposed ones. In this regard, attempts to bring military solution
to ethno-religious conflicts mostly ended with disastrous consequences.

National efforts alone, however, would not be sufficient to deal with the consequences of uneven development. Cross-border affiliation of ethno-linguistic groups and religious communities in South Asia would make spill-over effect of such conflicts in one country on the other almost inevitable. Moreover, occasionally South Asian countries also have taken the advantage of each others difficulties. In addition, the ruling elites, unable to find out solution to the internal problems of their own countries often held 'foreign hands' responsible for the problems. In the circumstances, national efforts needs to be supplemented by the collective efforts of all the regional countries. It would let them avoid unnecessary complications of the problems as well as interstate relations in the region. A regional body could be set up to study the underdevelopment and related problems of transnational ethno-religious and linguistic groups, identify their impact on interstate relations and recommend measures that could be undertaken to preempt and resolve inter-state conflicts. In this regard, SAARC could be the most ideal forum.