Introduction

The discourse on security is still unresolved. With the broadening of the concept of security as a result of new issues faced by human beings, critical threats provide new opportunities for further research on the state of security particularly in the context of South Asia.

Human Security paradigm reflects genuine issues faced by human beings ranging from hunger, diseases, illiteracy, displacement, human rights, environmental degradation, social and gender biases, crimes, violence, terrorism and natural disasters. Emerged in the decades of 1990s and reconceptualized by Dr. Mahbub-ul-Haq, Pakistan’s renowned economist, human security became a pillar of non-traditional security paradigm. It is believed that the scope of human security is quite wide and needs to be focused because ‘virtually any kind of unexpected or irregular discomfort could conceivably constitute a threat to one’s human security.’ Limiting the scope of human security may, however, seriously jeopardize the discourse on security because of the presence of critical issues which although very broad depicts the comprehensive nature of security studies in today’s world. Critics of human security point out that it is too general and lacks focus and precision.

South Asia, like other regions of the developing world is still grappling with issues which impact on the lives of millions of people who still lack basic necessities of life. Regardless of the need to invest on the human development and well being of
the marginalized sections of society, state authorities pursue objectives which do not match with the ground realities. The parochial interpretation of national security by the military establishments of South Asia further complicate security discourse because human security, which is a very important segment of security is either not taken seriously or is accorded a low priority. Yet, in the last two decades or so, the concept of human security in South Asia seems to have gained ground, particularly at the non-governmental level.

This paper attempts to examine the concept of human security in South Asia from four dimensions. First, the role of state actors in dealing with the issue of human security. Second, how the marginalized sections of society respond to their disempowerment and to what extent the concept of human security can elevate their status. Third, the role of civil society in understanding and practicing the concept of human security and the reasons of its failure to forcefully advocate people’s concept of security. Finally, how the process of conflict management and resolution can contribute to human security in South Asia. The paper will also focus on the linkages between extremism, whether ethnic or religious, and the concept of human security by responding to the following questions:

1. What is the linkage between extremism and human security?

2. How by effectively reducing the menace of extremism one can ensure human security?

3. What are the impediments which are present in South Asia for curbing extremism and how state and society can expect stability and peace by promoting tolerance and moderation?

Furthermore, the paper will also examine the fault lines which impede the process of accomplishing the goal of human security in South Asia. In view of the broad scope of the theme
of this paper, focus will be on generating fresh ideas which can add to the existing literature on human security and help build a new perspective on empowering people with better security.

South Asia is still not able to pursue a scientific course of action on human security because of two main reasons. First, there is a lack of proper leadership to take steps for augmenting human security particularly in those sections of society who are marginalized and thus deprived. Second, human security is not a priority even at the grassroot level because of the failure of the less privileged segments of society to challenge established norms which tend to only promote and patronize the state centric approach of security.

If one tries to examine the concept of human security in the context of Japanese experience, it becomes clear that not only leadership but also education, skillfulness, professionalism, hard work, commitment and dedication shifted the priority of Japan from military to human security. The replacement of a chauvinist mindset with a tolerant one made it possible for Japan to move in the direction of human development rather than aggression and militarization. Japan’s racial, ethnic and religious homogeneity also contributed for giving a practical shape to human security, but it was also the defeat and destruction which caused a major shift in Japanese perception on major issues faced by the people at the grassroot level. According to Ronald Paris, “the most vocal promoters of human security are the governments of Canada and Norway, which have taken the lead in establishing a human security network of states and non-governmental organizations that endorse the concept.”\(^5\) South Asia, though heterogeneous in terms of societal structures do provide an opportunity to strive for human security because of some critical unresolved issues which accentuate insecurity among people. It is another matter that despite more than six decades of emancipation from the imperial tutelage, the people of South Asia are exposed to
internal colonization thus deepening their plight whether it is economic or human.

Conceptual Framework

The concept of human security is not new in South Asia but it got an impetus with the transformation of state and societal paradigms. With the shift from traditional to non-traditional security paradigm in the last two decades or so, the approach to deal with critical issues faced by the region also underwent a radical change. State centric approach of security which since long remained a dominant paradigm of security, however, failed to address vital issues faced by the people of South Asia.

One cannot proceed in terms of articulating a conceptual framework on human security without citing the pioneering work of Dr. Mahbub-ul-Haq, Pakistan’s renowned economist and the founder of Islamabad based Human Development Center. His original thinking on the concept of security, particularly human security should have been pursued as a road map for bettering the socio-economic conditions of 1.5 billion people of South Asia. But, despite more than a decade of his concrete ideas on human security, nothing qualitative has been achieved to give a practical shape to his vision which talked about the security of people. Human security has been further defined by Haq in the following words:

"Human security, in the last analysis, is a child who did not die, a disease that did not spread, an ethnic tension that did not explode in violence, a woman who was not raped, a poor person who did not starve, a dissident who was not silenced, a human spirit that was not crushed. Human security is not a concern with weapons. It is a concern with human dignity."

He further explains human security by saying that, "Human security is a concept emerging not from the learned
writings of scholars but from the daily concerns of people – from the dread of a woman that she may be raped in a lonely street, from the anguish of parents over the spread of drugs among their children, from the choked existence of prosperous communities in increasingly polluted cities, from the fear of terrorism suddenly striking any life anywhere without reason. A people’s concept and a people’s concern, human (in) security is reflected in the anguished existence of homeless, in the constant fear of the jobless, in the silent despair of those without hope. Human security also means first, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression. And second, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life.\textsuperscript{8} How far there exists political will and determination among the established elites of South Asia to realize and recognize issues which deepen human insecurity among the people of the region is still a big question. The oasis of wealth in South Asia which got an impetus as a result of ill gotten money and market economy tends to only augment the plight of the poor and dampen hope for ensuring human security in the days to come.

Akmal Hussain, a renowned Pakistani economist defined human security in the South Asian context by stating, “Human security in terms of its economic, political and legal dimensions is essentially an element in the institutional framework of society where human functioning becomes possible. It is in the creative expression of their sociality and in the apprehending of their spiritual and aesthetic dimensions that human beings fulfill themselves. In this context, the challenge in South Asia is to seek peace for sustainable economic growth on the one hand and pursuing a new perspective on economic growth on the other.”\textsuperscript{9}

Rajesh Basrur, an Indian security affairs expert while examining the concept of human security argues, “The concept
of security has evolved from a narrow focus on military-strategic security centered on the state to a broad and multidimensional understanding of human security. The latter encompasses basic economic needs, environmental equilibrium, cultural identity and political liberty."

Close to the framework of idealism, human security seeks to ensure good governance, rule of law, sustainable development, economic and social equality. Threats to human security are poverty, illiteracy, environmental degradation, population explosion, displacement of people, water, energy and food crisis, ethnic and religious conflicts. Given the fault lines at the state and societal paradigms of South Asia, is it possible to ensure human security? When the vast majority of the people of South Asia still suffer from issues which directly threaten their survival, how can the concept of human security make a difference? Human security can be a hope for the millions of people of South Asia for a better future but given the prevailing circumstances in the region, the progress in the direction of empowering people and a qualitative socio-economic improvement in their lives is still very slow. In societies where the leadership is able to set priorities for human development and follows a practical approach for changing the conditions of people for better, human security is achievable in one’s lifetime. When there is political will and determination among the governments and people of a particular region to resolve contentious issues and focus on improving socio-economic conditions of people by investing on education, health, environment, housing, transport, employment and improving the status of women and minorities, the goal of providing human security is achievable.

The report on *Human Development in South Asia, 2005* gives a detailed account of human security by arguing that, "human security has acquired increasing centrality and urgency
for South Asia.” Two recent massive disasters have brought home the need to look deeply into this concept and to connect its relevance to South Asia’s socio-economic and political issues. The tsunami that hit parts of East Asia and South Asia in early 2005 and the massive earthquake in Kashmir and North West Frontier Province (NWFP), Pakistan, in late 2005, reportedly killed 100,000 people, injured many, destroyed property making millions of people homeless, and disrupted the life, livelihood and existence of the people of the entire region. The immediate aftermath of the disasters highlighted the need for according primacy to human security that Mahbub-ul-Haq talked about. There were no weapons that could save people from the initial disaster, and there are no weapons that can protect people from hunger, disease, poverty, destitution, and homelessness. It is another matter that the natural disasters which South Asia experienced in 2004 and 2005 for the time being caused some thinking for dealing with the human security aspect but with the passage of time, same old practices of neglecting the plight of people gained ground. It means that human security cannot be artificially created by some man-made or natural disaster but should have genuine roots in a society.

While mapping human security in South Asia it also appears that lack of proper discourse on security, particularly in the academic institutions and research think tanks tend to widen the void which one can see as far as intellectual capacity of educated people to understand security dynamics is concerned. Population explosion is one area which should no doubt be a serious concern for those who consider human security as a major challenge. In her article “Redefining Security” published in the Spring 1989 issue of Foreign Affairs, Jessica Tuchman Mathews argues that “it took 130 years for world population to grow from one billion to two
billions. It will take just a decade to climb from today’s five to six billion. More than 90 percent of the added billion will live in the developing world. Here one should be mindful of the fact that around 20 percent of world’s population live in South Asia which is also world’s poorest region. According to Akmal Hussain, “South Asia today stands suspended between the hope of a better life and a fear of cataclysmic destruction. The hope emanates from the tremendous human and natural resource potential, the rich diversity of its cultures that flourish within the unifying humanity of its civilization. The fear arises from the fact that South Asia is not only the poorest region in the world but also one in which its citizens live in constant danger of a nuclear holocaust. It can be argued, therefore, that interstate peace in the region rather than enhanced military capability is the key to national security, indeed human survival.”

How far the South Asian governments are mindful to multiple threats which impede the process of human development in the region? Why not much policy oriented research has been done to understand the changing dynamics of human security at the international level and its implications for South Asia?

Four reasons could be given to explain why the concept of human security is still in its formative phase in South Asia. First, the dominant paradigm of security in South Asia is still state centric in which military security is perceived as an essential requirement. Unresolved inter and intra-state conflicts tend to sustain the traditional paradigm of security in which coercion, use of force and suppression shape state policies. Security is not understood or analyzed from the people’s point of view but is seen from a parochial approach. Second, human security is not elite centric as the privileged sections of society do not share predicament faced by majority of people on basic
issues. Huge asymmetry in terms of elite and popular perceptions on security is the root cause of messing up of issues which should have been resolved long time ago. Lack of interest and commitment on the part of those who wield power at different levels caused no breakthrough for taking practical steps for achieving the goal of human security. As a result, one can observe deepening of issues which accentuates human insecurity and augments the plight of common people. Third, the role of mafias and the underworld in South Asia is a cause of enormous insecurity to the people of the region. The nexus between terrorist groups, mafias and the underworld means that the environment of fear, disorder and panic would not only challenge the writ of the state but would also deepen a sense of insecurity among the vast majority of people. Human security is an illusion if people are taken as a hostage by a group of criminals, mafias, militants and terrorists. Likewise, human security is at stake when security forces while conducting counter terrorism operations do not spare innocent people as it has happened in many conflict zones in South Asia. Therefore, till the time violence, terrorism and bloodshed continues one cannot see the possibility of human security becoming part of the culture of the region.

Finally, there is no strong constituency of human security in South Asia despite some obvious justifications for giving a serious and practical thought to this concept. In fact, there also exists lack of consensus in South Asia as far as security is concerned because still no coherent approach is practiced in the region which can effectively deal with issues concerning the very survival of human being. Should military security be pursued to deal with matters which endanger sovereignty of a state or national security is followed in order to address issues which are causes of serious concern? Then there is no consensus among the major stakeholders of South Asia on other important types of security like comprehensive,
cooperative and human security. Neither South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) nor various non-governmental organizations are able to ponder on ways and means to pursue a unified approach on security so that millions of people of South Asia who are facing severe threats affecting their lives are able to better their present and future. Some of the reasons which explain the lack of proper discourse on security in South Asia relate to the colonial past of the region, indifferent approach of the governing elites to understand the need for human security, the role of those non-state actors who failed to mobilize civil society for countering those forces who on account of enemy images and unresolved conflicts induct a narrow perspective on security. The dearth of indigenous literature providing innovative and creative ideas of security in South Asia also make things difficult for seeking a coherent approach on security. Had there been normal travel and trade relations among the SAARC member countries, particularly India and Pakistan, it would have been better to share common perceptions on security and come up with a comprehensive approach on human security paradigm. It is primarily because of foreign input and contribution that most of the concepts which form the part of grand security approach found their way in South Asia.

It is not only the West which significantly contributed to the security discourse in South Asia; the role of Japan is also quite obvious in this regard. Experiencing the destruction of the Second World War and transforming their war torn country as the world’s second largest economy, the people of Japan and their leadership knew the worth of human security. Not only in South Asia but also in Central Asia, Japan played an important role in promoting the concept of human security as a major approach to deal with issues faced by the people of Central Asia in the post-Soviet disunion period. For example, the commission on human security, an independent body was
created in 2001 in Central Asia with the support of Japan, and endorsed by the United Nations. The commission identified Central Asia as a region where a combination of internal and external factors generated problems of concerns to the international community and problems that deserved to be examined from the human security perspective. The deliberations of commission’s report on Central Asia can be useful for South Asia because of close geographical, historical and cultural linkages between the two regions. After all, the two regions come under the framework of SAARC and Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). Afghanistan and Pakistan are simultaneously in SAARC and ECO.

**Extremism and Human Security**

Extremism is not a phenomenon of post-9/11 happenings but has deep roots in human society. Intolerance, hate and bigotry breed extremism and fanaticism. It is not only illiteracy and poverty which are the causes of extremism, even people with affluent background and sound educational credentials follow an extremist approach on various issues because their mindset lacks reasoning and objectivity. The problem is human security is such a neglected field in South Asia that other practices like intolerance and militancy overshadow genuine security considerations of people in the region. When a society is vulnerable to intolerant and extremist practices and the saner segment of population is fragile, one can only expect the deepening of insecurity. One can figure out three important linkages between extremism and human security:

i. Extremist and militant groups in South Asia have taken vast segments of society as a hostage, thus augmenting insecurity among people. One can debate on the causes of extremism and militancy which have permeated in South Asia for the last several decades, but the fact is, periodic
outbreak of violence, terrorist and suicide attacks tend to destabilize the society and destroy hope for a normal way of life. The manner in which extremist and militant groups have played havoc with the lives of people in parts of North Western Frontier Province of Pakistan, tribal areas, parts of Balochistan, the Naxalites in India, the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka and Maoists in Nepal prove how vulnerable people are not only at the hands of such groups but also because of the operations conducted by the security forces. As long as extremism and militancy, on the one hand, and the highhandedness of security forces, on the other hand continue, there is no question of ensuring human security.

ii. Whether it is ethnic or religious extremism and militancy, it means there is lack of tolerance in society. If human security is the priority on the part of state, the issues which promote hate, chauvinism and intolerance cannot get any viable support from any section of society. If people are economically and socially better off, extremism and militancy cannot have a constituency. Since vast sections of society in South Asia lack basic necessities of life and are vulnerable to fatal diseases, hunger, malnutrition and displacement, the culture of extremism gains ground. Had this not been the case particularly in parts of Pakistan, religious militancy would not have permeated in society. Human security is the best way to eliminate intolerance, extremism, militancy and terrorism. When people are educated, express political wisdom and are economically stable, neither the suicide bombers nor the terrorist groups can take people as a hostage and destabilize a society. Food shortages, high energy prices, unemployment, inflation and vast economic disparities no doubt provide a fertile ground to those elements who possess the agenda of perpetuating fear, chaos and disorder.
iii. The younger generation is highly vulnerable to extremism and militancy because it feels insecure and susceptible to multiple threats like unemployment, displacement and violence. It is the younger generation which should be a strong supporter of human security because in the absence of a respectable way of life it has no hope for a better future. The bitter fact that the bulk of suicide bombers in Pakistan and the cadre belonging to various Jihadi groups are from the young segment of society, prove the failure of state and society to provide better education and job opportunities so that they are not exploited by the extremist groups and can contribute productively. Same applies in case of other militant and terrorist groups in South Asia where one can find large number of teenagers, child soldiers and those who belong to the younger generation.

The linkage between extremism and human security also brings into light the marginalization of those groups who could have strengthened moderation and sanity in society. The criminalization of politics and the proliferation of weapons create conducive environment for forces who are against providing basic security to people. A stable and normal society which ensures human security is certainly a hope for the people of South Asia.

Conflicts and Human Security

The absence of armed conflicts at the inter and intra-state level provides an opportunity for accomplishing the goal of human security. Dr. Mahbub-ul-Haq talked about linkage between conflict and human security by stating, “The world can never be at peace unless people have security in their daily lives. Future conflicts may often be within nations rather than between them – with their origins buried deep in growing
socio-economic deprivations and disparities. The search for security in such a milieu lies in development, not arms.”

Conflicts at the non-traditional level primarily relate to conflict over resources, environment, race and gender. The more the society is prone to multiple conflicts, there is less likelihood of people living a stable, peaceful and secure lives. Conflict is thus a major challenge and an opportunity as far as the concept of human security is concerned. Asymmetrical nature of society in which enormous socio-economic stratification is quite obvious provides justification for seeking human security. Whether the conflict is rooted in history, geography, culture or race, it augments threats to human security and also causes enormous diversion of resources from human development to militarization. Conflicts cannot be eliminated but what is possible is in order to achieve the goal of human security, one can pursue the management and then the resolution of conflicts.

The large-scale violence in Nepal which was the result of conflict between the Maoists and the Nepali ruling elite played havoc with the lives of ordinary people. Intra-state conflicts are thus a source of deepening insecurity among people because unlike inter-state conflicts where the threat is primarily external, intra-state conflicts deepen internal threats which subvert efforts for providing basic security to people. As long as conflicts are violent or there is a threat of the escalation of conflict, there is no way people can feel secure. This has been proved several times because a society which is violent and militarized lives in perpetual fear and panic. A regimented society may have a charismatic leader but the price it pays is enormous because it is not only insecure from within, it also lives in constant fear and insecurity with its neighbours.

In a society where conflict is positive, there is no threat to human security because the energy of people are utilized for development and healthy competition than taking steps to
eliminate each other. The moment the conflict becomes negative and violent, human beings are vulnerable to insecurity, chaos and disorder. Almost the entire developing world is conflict prone and hence insecure.

**Conclusion**

Change for the socio-economic uplift of masses would remain a dream in South Asia if serious efforts are not made for effectively dealing with issues which cause insecurity, fear, chaos, disorder, extremism and militancy. One can observe a sea change in terms of concepts, ideas, approaches and theories on different dimensions of security but what is lacking is the political will and determination on the part of people who could have empowered people and strived for human development. Going beyond the rhetoric of conceptualizing or reconceptualizing security, it is time a practical approach is pursued which can make a difference in terms of poverty alleviation, better education and health facilities and ensure just and fair distribution of resources.

South Asia provides enormous opportunities to embark on meaningful research on human security. The region is not only vulnerable to natural and man made disasters but is also a hub of inter and intra-state conflicts. Human security should also be taught in academic institutions so that a critical mass is created which can mobilize people for dealing with core security issues in a professional manner. Human development in South Asia, if pursued with proper conviction can go a long way in reducing those factors which impede the process of human security in the region. The future of South Asia may not be different if policies and actions which created conflicts are applied to provide human security. A new and proactive approach needs to be advocated and implemented at the inter and intra-state level for achieving the goal of human security.
Endnotes

1 Security is a multi-dimensional concept which is divided into several categories as: military security, economic security, environmental security, food security, energy security and so forth. Other macro terms of security are: comprehensive security, human security, state security and national security. In view of the reconceptualization of the concept of security, it is passing through a transitory phase. For a detailed account of different categories of security see, Marvin Weinbaum and Chetan Kumar (eds.), *South Asia Approaches the Millennium: Re-examining National Security*, Vanguard, Lahore, 1996; Rajesh Basrur (ed.), *Security in the New Millennium: Views from South Asia*, India Research Press, New Delhi, 2001; Dipanker Banerjee (ed.), *Security Studies in South Asia: Change and Challenges*, Regional Center for Strategic Studies (RCSS), Colombo, 2000.


3 Dr. Mahbub ul-Haq defined human security as security of people not just security of territory; security of individuals not through arms; security of all the people everywhere, in their homes, in their jobs, in their streets, in their communities and in their environment. For further information see, Mahbub ul-Haq, “New Imperatives of Human Security,” *RGICS Paper*, No. 17, New Delhi, p. 1, quoted in Dipanenker Banerjee (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 10.

However, as recognition of his life long achievements in the area of human development, the Regional Center for Strategic Studies, a leading think tank of South Asia launched a fellowship programme named "Mahbub-ul-Haq Awards."


Akmal Hussain, op.cit. He further elaborates that the dominant threat to both human security and the integrity of state structures in South Asian countries is the threat posed by internal conflict. These include conflicts arising from religious extremists and ethnic, communal, caste and linguistic sub-nationalism. These conflicts can be contained by building the institutions for a pluralistic society where not only diverse identities between individuals co-exist but where multiple identities can also be maintained by each individual.

There are various theories which are presented to link militants, terrorists, mafias and the underworld in South Asia. For instance, the logistics, sources of funding, training and weapons which these four shared where the LTTE was at war with the Sri Lankan security forces. Maoists were also blamed of using people under their control as human shields. Human security
issue in South Asia is thus assuming a new dimension in view of the notorious role played by those elements that take up arms against the state but harm people.

15 Like various militant and terrorist groups and security forces are also held responsible for augmenting the plight of people and deepening their sense of insecurity. The case studies of the Indian controlled Kashmir, Balochistan and parts of NWFP in Pakistan speak of the enormous sufferings of people at the hands of security forces.


18 Human Development in South Asia 2005, op.cit., p. 35.