Chapter 1

Introduction

A stark reality of South Asian politics and social relations is that it is characterised by increasing violence and terrorism. In the little more than fifty years of post-colonial existence there has been a weakening of social and political cohesion and South Asian societies are progressively moving towards a violent socio-political order. In many cases, the relationship between the state and society is exemplified by violence, exhibiting a lack of faith in the normative mode of political bargaining. Increasingly, many ethnic groups and social classes are negotiating with the state in the idiom of violence to articulate their demands. Ironically, colonial rule in the subcontinent was not subjected to so much violence as is the case today with post-colonial states.

Soon after independence, most South Asian states were faced with various domestic conflicts. Some of them were resolved and some lost momentum, but some took the shape of insurgent movements, which predominantly made use of violence to articulate their demands. Sporadic outbursts of violence by peasants, tribemen, religious groups or guerrilla movements took place. Communist-led peasant insurgency was initiated shortly before and after independence in North Bengal (the Tebhaga uprising), and in Telengana, in the former princely state of Hyderabad, during the uncertainties of the transition of power. These were, however, localised actions, confined largely to particular tribal or low caste groups or to a narrow range of peasant classes. Over the years, violence arising from ethnicity and sub-nationalism has become the main challenge to the creation of a national identity in these states and has dominated political space. Post-colonial history is replete with violent movements arising from the demands of secession by Bengalis, Baluchis, Nagas, Mizos, Assamese, Sikhs, Kashmiris and Tamils. Insurgencies charged by ideological fervour have been far more infrequent but have gained in intensity in the recent past.
Since the 1990s, there has been a marked rise in terrorism in general in South Asia. This is evident from the increasing number of civilian and security forces deaths in the ensuing conflicts. Many civilian lives have been lost in terrorist and counter-terrorist violence and many more have been displaced. This is also reflected in the number of assassinations of prominent individuals and the increasing attacks against strategic and commercial targets. In Sri Lanka, an entire level of political leadership at various levels has been exterminated due to targeted killings by both the LTTE and the JVP. Sectarian killings by hit-and-run gunmen and bomb attacks have been a frequent occurrence in Punjab and Sindh and more recently Baluchistan in Pakistan. Terrorism by secessionist movements in India’s northeast and Jammu & Kashmir keeps simmering. Dormant Sikh militants groups have tried to carry out terrorist attacks. Terrorism by left-wing extremists continues unabated in central India and now pose a serious challenge in Nepal. Religious extremists gained strength day-by-day and have spread out within South Asia.

Till the 1990s, the number of groups and their ability to engage in terrorism was limited. Acts of terrorism itself and their intensity and lethality were also limited in scale. However, since the 1990s there has been a significant change in this pattern. The number of groups that resort to terrorism now has increased and their ability to resort to terrorism has been enhanced. Acts of terrorism have become more widespread and their lethality has also increased in terms of the number of civilian and security personnel casualties and the high levels of physical destruction that they can cause. This pattern of the everyday life experiences of the people of South Asia where endemic political violence, threat of surprise terrorist attacks and the resultant instability have become common occurrences and has an impact on the lives of ordinary people. It makes their lives insecure. The predicament of violence and terrorism in the lives of the people is an issue that needs to be addressed. This study is about people’s security arising from these concerns.

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For long the state-centric paradigm of security has dominated security discourse. In this paradigm, the security of civil society groups and individuals was subordinate to state security. But under conditions of modernity and the impact of globalisation, whether security can be wholly or primarily national, even for the most powerful state in the
world is a question that needs to be considered. The discourse around people's security or human security challenges the state-centric paradigm. It makes the individual the primary referent objective of the security discourse rather than the state. While there is a broad consensus within the advocates of human security on this point, there are differing approaches to the focus of security. Whether our developmental needs or the threat of violence should be the primary focus of the study is a debate that still continues. While the concept of human security has been in usage for some time, it was the UNDP, which added vigour to the conception by highlighting it. Countries like Canada have subsequently made it part of their foreign policy objectives and contributed much to shift the state-centric security discourse. While the UNDP argued that it was the lack of development that was the primary threat to human beings, the Canadian formulation views violence as the primary threat to people's security. Both the UNDP and the Canadian formulation have stressed the question of physical or personal security. Personal security is conceived as an individual's freedom from violent threats and assaults to physical integrity. In this formulation, violence against people is sought to be made the core variable.

This study is an interrogation of the concept of human security and makes an attempt to understand the linkages between violence, terrorism and the concept of security. While it draws heavily on the debate on human security and the primacy that violence has been given in this conception, it tries to further the debate by contextualising the role of violence in a socio-political order and its linkages to the state. The study argues that human security cannot be completely disassociated from state security. The underlying reasons for violence and terrorism cannot be understood without understanding the nature and political economy of states. Ultimately, it is the state that ought to be the guarantor of human security. This study contributes to the debate without claiming to have the last word on the issue. What is security is a debate that is going to be of academic concern for decades.

Similarly, what is terrorism is a debate that also does not seem to reach any finality. Though there is still no commonly accepted definition of terrorism, whatever may be its cause, the strategy of killing innocent civilians for political demands has become unacceptable. There are

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significant shifts in the understanding of terrorism. The old dictum that one man's terrorist is the other's freedom fighter has become clichéd. Terrorism may have political goals, but invariably innocent people end up as victims of terrorist violence. Terrorist violence has become difficult to justify. Groups resorting to force and terrorist violence have come under severe pressure. With the end of the Cold War the concept of self-determination and the use of violence in furthering the cause of ethnic communities no longer receives much political support. The Human Rights Conference held in Geneva in March 1997 recognised the violent methods used by insurgent groups as a violation of human rights and an undermining of the security of states and civil society. The international community recognises that the methods and practices of terrorism, regardless of their motivation, in all its forms and manifestations, are acts of aggression aimed at the destruction of human rights, fundamental freedoms and democracy. It threatens the territorial integrity and security of states, destabilises legitimately constituted governments, undermines pluralistic civil society and has adverse consequences for economic and social development of states. The terrorist attacks of September 11 have only reinforced this emerging discourse on terrorism.

The form of violence in regard to terrorism is much easier to comprehend but other forms of violence can take complex forms. Some of the historically identifiable forms are riots—whether communal, ethnic or sectarian. The other forms are caste violence, and peasant and tribal uprisings. Most of these riots or uprisings have involved violence, homicide, arson and destruction of property. Stanley Tambiah views these as forms of collective violence where collectivities of people, or crowds, engage in violent acts such as arson, destruction of property, and physical injury to human beings that are directed against a designated enemy, whether it is a social group or category or the state or political administration. There are many other emerging forms of violence defying nomenclature. But for the purposes of this study only those instances of violence will be considered which are group phenomena.

The objectives of this study are to further the debate on people's insecurity arising from armed conflict and violence, and to find out how to enhance security by reducing people's vulnerability. Human security is concerned primarily with intra-state violence because it is this that poses the greatest threat to people everywhere. Proponents of human

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security suggest that the root causes of violence, whether political or criminal, are located within the realms of development and governance. This study seeks to make the central focus of human security policy the nexus between violence, development and governance. The focus of this study is to ameliorate the risks of violence. Therefore, it is not only important to understand how violence and terrorism impact on people's insecurity but also to come to terms with the causes of violence. With better structural explanations for the causes of violence in the South Asian context it is possible to mainstream violence in the human security discourse. The objective of this study is to give salience to political and socio-economic explanations in understanding the causes and nature of violent political action. In this study an attempt has been made to analyse whether the roots of such actions can be located in the nature of the state and the economy.

Being post-colonial states, South Asian states are still trying to adjust to new political institutions and socio-economic structures. In a situation of scarce resources the state becomes the principal means of access to and control of resources. In such societies politicised social groups arrive at the view that their everyday struggles for livelihood have to be fought not only in the market and within civil society but also in the arena of the control of the state. The state and its resources thus become objects of considerable political attention. It is only when politicised social groups fail to manoeuvre, negotiate and bargain within the political space that they resort to violence.

Thus, the process of identity formation and assertion are enmeshed in secular economic interests. The demands for political autonomy to fulfil developmental aspirations are being articulated in the language of ethnicity. While most separatist violence in South Asia is based on the assertion of a distinctive identity, the question that needs to be addressed is whether the underlying causes are economic exploitation and neglect, or relative deprivation. The objectives of this study are to establish linkages between the developmental processes and political violence. How has uneven development and underdevelopment resulted in the increasing use of violence in the articulation of demands?

While the development process has engendered violence, in a paradoxical way violence tends to be dysfunctional in the development process and has retarded the pace of economic growth. This has happened in two ways. Firstly, a deliberate strategy of economic disruption followed by insurgents and terrorists damages state and private property,
disrupts the public sector economy, and disorganises public transport and other essential services and targets development projects which might erode the support base of the insurgents. Secondly, affected states are compelled to divert their limited resources to counter the challenge posed by insurgents and terrorists. The environment created due to the use of violence also acts as a major constraint on the growth of the economy to enlarge the economic cake for further sharing and redistribution of resources. This process further retards socio-economic development. In a cyclical way, one process generates the other. Thus, the mutuality between violence and the development process is a major factor in undermining human security.

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The empirical focus of the present study is only on Nepal, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The reason for attempting to study the four South Asian states within a single framework is because the constituent states of this region have shared historical, cultural and economic features. Not only are India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal located in the same geographical region but also their cultural and political heritage stems from common, though quite variegated, ancient and medieval roots. Moreover, except for Nepal, they owe their origins to the processes of change and transformation—uneven but interconnected—wrought by the same colonial power.

Even within the four South Asian states, studying violence and terrorism is not without its complexities. The range of manifestations of political violence in South Asia can be wide-ranging and at times perplexing. Therefore, the scope of this study has been deliberately confined to only manifestations of political violence, which have had or have the potential to seriously affect the state structure, either by a structural transformation of the state itself or by decapacitating the territoriality of the state. The concern here is with violence that is directed against the state and central power. It does not take into consideration violence against local actors that are meant to have a localised impact. Most of the empirical cases taken into consideration in this study have taken the form of insurgencies or are close approximations of insurgencies.

This study does not include Bangladesh even though in recent years there has been a growth in incidences of violence. The number of militant outfits in Bangladesh seems to be growing. There has been a spate of attacks on religious minorities. Death threats have been issued to secular and liberal intellectuals by religious extremists. There have
been attacks on judges and government officials. On 21 May 2004, there was an attack on the High Commissioner of the United Kingdom in Sylhet. On 21 August 2004, hand grenades were lobbed on an opposition rally in Dhaka in which at least 18 people were killed and an estimated 300 or more party workers and bystanders badly injured. A former finance minister and a prominent member of the opposition Awami League was killed in a grenade attack at a public meeting in January 2005. A spate of nation-wide serial bomb blasts on 17 August 2005 has been attributed to the Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh, which was banned in February 2005. In Bangladesh’s agitational politics anti-social elements and terrorists have started entrenching themselves. However, terrorism in the context of Bangladesh is of recent origin and its sporadic character is not amenable to useful analysis. The objectives of groups behind the terrorist attacks are not clear and it is too early to say whether they pose a threat to the state structure. The only case of an insurgency in Bangladesh is in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. It had challenged the state structure at one stage, but is dormant now after the signing of an accord. Therefore, this study does not include Bangladesh.

The purpose of this study is to provide a theoretical construct to the linkages between violence, terrorism and human security. The people of South Asia have common concerns arising from terrorism. There is also a similarity in the processes that have nurtured violence. It may be worthwhile to attempt a study that can weave together a common understanding of the insecurities of South Asians arising from the problem of violence. Further, theoretical inquiry into the causes of violence in South Asia has not received adequate attention. Violence as a subject of political inquiry has been a complex issue. The treatment has been mainly normative. There cannot be a grand theory to explain the range of violence in South Asia. Such a theory has to arise from empirical generalisations and middle-ranged or partial theories. Arriving at a grand theory—one that provides a framework for a complete explanation of political reality—is an ambitious project if not a distinct possibility.

In this study, political violence and terrorism and their motivations will not be attributed to individuals or individual pathology—a view that those inclined to use violence have some personality disorder. And therefore the level of analysis in this study is not at the level of the individual but at the group level and clearly focuses on state and
society. Regarding, the state level of analysis, the contention is that there are certain characteristics inherent in the state that induces violence. The state becomes central to allocation of resources and also in the process of consensus building. Because of the realities of power and inequality, competition for and conflict over the control of resources have become perennial issues reflected in all relationships and dynamics of social change within groups within the nation-state.

However, instead of overemphasising one level of causation to the exclusion of others, it makes more sense to view collective political violence as a result of multiple causation or the combined effects of individual, social, structural and global systemic factors. Taking recognition of the fact that the various forms of conflict are significantly different, the explanations of the causes of the varied forms of violence are also many and different. This study, nevertheless, seeks a coherent analytical framework.