STATE, MILITARY AND MODERNITY: THE EXPERIENCE OF SOUTH ASIA

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Few would deny the all-pervasiveness of modernity in South Asia. It has, indeed, come to dominate not only the state of a (modern) South Asian mind but also the mind of a (modern) South Asian state. There is hardly any sector (from transport to tourism, from planning to policing, from defense to development) which has not been informed by modernity. We all have been conditioned, some way or other, to speak in and through a language which is thoroughly modern. Mod, modern, modernity have become part of our daily discourse. In the light of this contention, the present paper intends to put forward the view that, while security breakdowns in South Asian countries are largely the result of the hegemonic construction of the modern state, the military, which is frequently used to tackle the security breakdowns, is itself the product of modernity and, as such, is a contributing factor to the security breakdowns. This will become clear in our discussion.

But first, what is modernity? What does it signify intellectually and politically? Modernity in essence is the wisdom of the West, conductive to the organization and reproduction of hegemony and the power of dominant social forces. Having its roots in the European Enlightenment, modernity nurtures, what Oswald Spengler [1917] once referred to as, the Ptolemaic system of history. Two inter-related features are, in fact, central to modernity:

First is the unique position of the West. That is, the West standing as the central sun represents the model of development, while non-western, non-modern societies orbiting like the planets are pulled towards the West. In this scheme of history, the histories of non-western, non-modern
societies are Orientalized or Africanized, their importance and prospect judged not on their own accounts but rather in the light of Western experience.

The second feature of modernity is its unilinear vision of progress — from tradition to modern, from tribalism to nationhood, from rural to urban, from agricultural to industrial, from horses to horse-power, from Third World to First World, and so on. Progress, in fact, is measured by the extent to which the non-western, non-modern societies have succeeded in replicating, the experience of the modern ‘Western’ state politically, economically, technologically as well as militarily.

Put in the South Asian context, we have come to believe (thanks partly to our colonial heritage and post-colonial intellect) that if we could replicate the history of the West we could develop and prosper like them too. The consequence of such a mode of thinking as well as its implementation has been disastrous for us. I will try to explain this briefly with particular reference to the hegemonic construction of the modern state in South Asia.

There is no denying the fact that the state that we have created (and this includes all the South Asian states) is modern, very much in the image of the modern ‘Western’ state. The central core of this image is the hegemonic organisation of the South Asian people into Nations. The social and historical distinctiveness of the Idea of the Nation, not to mention of its pathetic intrusion into South Asia, has been highlighted by critics for some time— Rabindranath Tagore being one of the earliest ones. Tagore, in a speech on Nationalism in 1916, described how the ‘Nation of the West’ is different from India’s experience:

Through all the fights and intrigues and deceptions of her earlier history India had remained aloof. Because her homes, her fields, her temples of worship, her schools,... her village self-government ... all these truly belonged to her. But her thrones were not her concern. They passed over her head like clouds, now tinged with purple gorgeousness, now black with the heart of thunder. Often they brought devastation in their wake, but they were like catastrophes of nature whose traces are soon forgotten. But this time it was different. It was not a mere drift over her surface of life- drift of cavalry and foot soldiers, richly caparisoned elephants, white tents and canopies,... marble domes of mosques, palaces and tombs .... This time it was the Nation of the West
driving its tentacles of machinery deep down into the soil. Therefore I say to you, it is we who are called as witness to give evidence as to what our Nation has been to humanity. We had known the hordes of Moghals and Pathans who invaded India, but we had known them as human races, with their own religions and customs, like and dislikes, - we had never known them as a nation. We loved and hated them as occasions arose; we fought for them and against them, talked with them in a language which was theirs as well as our own, and guided the destiny of the Empire in which we had our active share. But this time we had to deal, not with kings, not with human races, but with a nation - we, who are no nation ourselves.

Now let us from our own experience answer the question, what is this Nation?

A nation, in the sense of the political and economic union of a people, is that aspect which a whole population assumes when organized for a mechanical purpose ...

Indeed when we speak today of an Indian or a Pakistani nation or a Sri Lankan nation or even a Bangalee or Bangladeshi nation we are referring merely to the ‘mechanical’ organization of people. What havoc it created in our minds and activities we will now briefly outline.

The case of the Indian Sikhs

Historically “Hindus tended to look upon Sikhism as one of its own sects” 5. But with the communal partition of India, where the political projection of a ‘Hindu majority’ became decisive in the organization of the modern Indian state, the Sikhs found themselves alienated and reduced to a minority. At the same time, the Sikh rural Kulaks, prospering through the Green Revolution, began supporting the fundamentalist campaign to preserve the sanctity of Sikhism. This involved mainly the task of freeing Sikhism from the pernicious influence of the Nirankaris (a heretical sect of Sikhs who are very influential in the Punjabi community). The Sikh rural Kulaks (mostly Jat Sikhs) evidently understood the potentiality of Sikhism for organising the Sikh agrarian workers (mostly scheduled caste Sikhs - the Mazhabis, Rais, Lohars and Cheembas). It is against this background that the Akali Dal championed the cause of the rural Kulaks with demands for greater autonomy for Panjab, which soon, with support form Sikh fundamentalists and militants, fused with the demand for a Sikh homeland in the name of ‘Khalistan’.

Indira Gandhi, after returning to power in 1980, largely
to rid herself of the criticism of encouraging the militant leadership of Sant Bhindranwale against the moderate Akali Dal, launched a military operation against the Sikh militants. The operation, among its various coercive measures, included a massive military attack on the Golden Temple and the akal Takht (the two most sacred shrines of the Sikh community) in June 1984 to flush out Bhindranwale and his militant group. Bhindranwale was killed during the operation. The Sikhs were dismayed at the Indian Army’s forceful and violent entry into their holy shrines. In less than six months, in October 1984, presumably to avenge the attack on the Sikh sacred shrines, Indira Gandhi was gunned down by two of her Sikh bodyguards (interestingly, not once did the national media say Indian bodyguards). India, as we all know, immediately plunged into a series of massive riots between the Hindu and Sikh communities (or should we now say, ‘nationalities’?). The successive Indian governments, virtually transformed the Sikh question into a ‘law and order’ situation, hoping that the security forces would be able to perform the ‘miracle’ (establishing peace, that is) which the politicians failed.

The case of the Pakistani Mujahirs

It is often said that without the Muhajirs (the refugees coming from India at the time of partition) there would have been no Pakistan. The Muhajirs, who now number about 8 million, in fact, were at the forefront of the Pakistan movement. Except for the Bangalee contingent, almost all of the top leaders of the Pakistan movement came from India’s ‘Urdu-speaking regions’. Growing up in the midst of communal animosity and having a bitter memory of the past, they became particularly protective of their position in the new state of Pakistan (incidentally, the entire bulk of the Muhajir population settled in the port city of Karachi). Indeed, at the time of partition, the power of the urban Muhajirs was quite formidable, a factor which, no doubt, contributed to the making of Urdu (originally the language of the Moghul armies, spoken mainly in northern India) the national language of Pakistan.

It did not take long for the Muhajirs, however, to be resented by the local population, including the local landed aristocracy and religious leaders (mainly Sindhis but followed
by the Punjabis and Pathans) Apart from the factor of language, the local population resented the power and wealth of the Muhajirs many of whom became successful businessmen and industrialists in post-independence Pakistan.  

The position of the Muhajirs, however, became more critical, indeed to the point of becoming panic-stricken, in post-1971 Pakistan, when under Zulfikher Bhutto’s patronage, the provincial government promulgated Sindhi as the official language of the province. This sparked a series of riots between the Urdu-speaking Muhajirs and the Sindhis. But this is only one aspect of the conflict in Sindh. In Karachi particularly, apart from the Muhajir-Sindhi conflict, the poor Muhajirs battle against the poor Pathans (who now number around 1.5 million), the rich Muhajirs battle against the rising power of the Punjabis, and as if this is not enough, the Muhajirs and Sindhis together battle against the recent immigrants, that is, the Biharis from former East Pakistan now Bangladesh. Indeed, in the state for which they fought so much and where Urdu is still the national language, the Urdu-speaking Muhajirs must battle the Sindhis, the Pathans, the Punjabis, and now the Biharis. History has few ironies like this.

Schooled thoroughly in modernity, the successive Pakistani governments (predominantly massed by the Punjabis and the military) could only blame the ‘parochialism’ of the various communities (or should we now say, ‘nationalist forces’?) and not see the limits of modern nation-building in Pakistan. If any group that has gained from all the ‘battles’ in Karachi and elsewhere, it is the military which now has a ‘permanent role’ role to play in the matter.

The case of the Sri Lankan Tamils

The Tamil population in Sri Lanka remains divided into two one, Sri Lankan Tamils; and two, Tamils of Indian origin. While the former have been living on the island, particularly in the northern and eastern region, for a couple of thousand years and also ruled large parts of it before the arrival of the Europeans in the 16th century, the latter were mainly brought to Sri Lanka from southern India during the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries to work as labourers in
rubber, tea and coffee plantations situated in the central highlands of the island. In this respect, Tamils of Indian origin differed from the Sri Lankan Tamils not only in their place of residence but also in occupation. The former, in fact, were more impoverished and less educated than the Sri Lankan Tamils, a factor which alienated them even from the Sri Lankan Tamils.

Following Sri Lanka’s independence, however, Tamils of Indian origin became the first victims of the organization of the modern state of Sri Lanka. In 1948 and 1949, the Sri Lankan Government enacted the Ceylon Citizenship Act and the Indian and Pakistani Residents’ (Citizenship) Act respectively, both of which formally denied citizenship and voting rights to Tamils of Indian origin. This made them practically stateless. Nearly all the Sinhalese Members of Parliament, together with a majority of Sri Lankan Tamil MPs, voted in 1948 and 1949 for the political deprivation of the Tamils of Indian origin.11 In fact, there existed a broad consensus at the time of independence to deport these Tamils back to India.

If there was a broad consensus within Sri Lanka to deport the Tamils of Indian origin, India in the beginning was outrightly reluctant to take them back. The failure to resolve this issue poisoned not only the relationship between the Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka but also between India and Sri Lanka. The matter was finally resolved after 38 years of negotiations, which included three major ministerial agreement (1964, 1974 and 1986). Both India and Sri Lanka, amidst accusation by critics, mainly Sri Lankan, of a governmental sell-out in the face of India’s pressure, shared the last of the 975,000 Tamils of Indian origin between them in an agreement signed in January 1986.

What about the struggle of the Sri Lankan Tamils then? The latter also had become the victims of the organization of the modern state of Sri Lanka, which by way of undermining the interests of the predominantly Hindu Tamil minority came to be identified with the ‘Buddhist-Sinhala majority’ of the island.12 In the absence of a well-developed counter-hegemony favourable to all religio-ethnic groups as well as to the members of the ruled class, the Sri Lankan ruling class
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successfully organized hegemony over the majority of the people of Sri Lanka by appealing to their Buddhist-Sinhala identity. The latter’s success, however, alienated the Hindu Tamils for it undermined their interests – from language to landholdings, from commercial enterprises to military services.\(^{13}\) it was not long before that the Sri Lankan Tamils found themselves persecuted in an organized manner.

While anti-Tamil riots occurred periodically and more frequently since independence, it reached a situation of utmost gravity, primarily due to the direct participation of the Sri Lankan police and military, in July-August 1981. Following this riot, many Tamil ‘militants’.\(^{14}\) left Sri Lanka for Tamil Nadu (India), where within a year of their arrival they began recruiting Tamil refugees (numbering 100,000 in the aftermath of the July 1983 riot) for military operations to free northern and eastern regions of Sri Lanka and establish an independent state of Eelam.\(^{15}\) That struggle, despite India’s intervention[1987-990] in favour of Sri Lankan unity, is still continuing. The only strategy the Sri Lankan Government could think about (apart from the occasional modernist tactics of divide and rule and carrot and stick) is technologically intensive and territorially extensive military operations, failing to understand, however, that such military operations, far from creating conditions for peace, only help the Tamil Tigers to consolidate their position among the Tamil population.

The case of the Bangalee/Bangladeshi Hill Peoples

We—the pre-1975 Bangalees and post-1975 Bangla-deshis - are also busy trying to replicate the history of the modern state. The form that has now mesmerized us all consists of one nation (Bangalee), one language (Bangla), and increasingly, one religion (in the form of a ‘Muslim nation’). Whatever is outside this form we call either ‘alien’ or something ‘other’ or something that must for its own sake catch up with the wisdom of Bangalee or Bangladeshi Nationalism. We are, moreover, constantly being informed about the ‘naturalness’ of this wisdom.

This, indeed, has brought us to the tragic situation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The people living there has always
been a source of seasonal or academic pleasure. I still remember that in my childhood I was introduced to the people of that region in the form of calendar photos made to beautify our sitting rooms. That projection has now been taken over with the same simplicity by the Ministry of Tourism. At one stage, students tutored in modernity became well-versed 'scholars' by referring to such people as 'tribals'. That is, as 'tribals' they have a long way to go before arriving at the all-coveted stage of 'civilization'. As for us, the Bangalees, we are already civilized. It is the so-called 'tribals' that constitute the other, one that must 'catch up' with the civilized Bangalees.

The same logic, in fact, is nurtured when Washington D.C. becomes the First World and we the 100 million 'skinny bones' become the Third World. A Westerner (whose interests the logic of modernity has served so well) would say that the Bangladeshis have a long way to go before arriving at the all-coveted stage of the First World. In their eyes, we are only in the stage, so to say, of tribalism. When dealing with the Hill peoples, however we tend to forget this part of the modernist scheme of history.

Here I must refer to an interesting historical paradox. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, The Friend of Bengal and the Father of the nation, fought much of his life for the emancipation of the Bangalees against Punjabi or Pakistani domination. But as a modernist, he could not rid himself of the vices that accompanied his call for 'Joy Bangla' or 'Bangalee Nationalism'. Indeed after independence, the same Mujib, who until 1971 fought against Punjabi domination, told the Hill Peoples 'no, we are all Bengalis, we cannot have two systems of government. Forget your ethnic identity, be Bengalis'.\(^{16}\) Amnesty International later reported that soon after this meeting the Bangladeshi military 'attacked villages in the tribal areas' to put down the demands of the Hill Peoples.\(^{17}\)

The case of Ziaur Rahman was no better. He only replaced 'Bangalee nationalism' with 'Bangladeshi Nationalism' and sent the military to hunt out the *Shanti Bahinis*. Zia also resettled a large number of Muslim peasants and landless labourers in the hill tracts, largely to change the demographic composition there, if not to create fresh animosities between
the Bangalees and Hill Peoples. Even today, a combination of political and military campaign is going on to transform the Hill Peoples into Bangalees or its variant, Bangladeshis. In fact, the Hill Peoples are caught up in a similar situation to that of the Bangalees in pre-1971 Pakistan.

The current fate of the Indian Sikhs, Pakistani Muhajir, Sri Lankan Tamils, not to mention of Bangalee of Bangladeshi Hill Peoples, however, is only a partial account of the deep-seeded problems related to the organization of the modern state in South Asia. Indeed, the record of modern nation-building in each of the four states is even more pathetic. In Pakistan, for example, the majority Punjabis are pitted against the minority Pathans, the minority Baluchis are pitted against the minority Panjabis, the majority Sunnis are pitted against the majority Qadianis, while the minority Sindhis are pitted against the majority Punjabis, the minority Muhajir, the minority Pathans and now the minority Biharis; in Sri Lanka, apart from the more serious conflict between the majority Buddhist-Sinhalese and the minority Hindu Tamils, the Hindu Tamils are sometimes pitted against the Muslim Tamils; in Bangladesh, more recently, there has been instances where the minority Hindus were attacked by the majority Muslims; and in India, the consequence of modern nation-building, despite its democratic and secular institutions, has been equally ominous — the Hindu majority against the Muslim minority, the Kashmiris against the Indians, Indians against the Nagas, Assamese against the non-Assamese, the Gurkhas against the Bangalees, the Dalits against caste-conscious Hindus, the Hindu non-tribals against the non-Hindu tribals, and so on. The idea of the nation, indeed, has created havoc in our minds and activities - 'we, who are no nation ourselves'.

But unmindful of the pitfalls of modernity, not to mention of the failure to provide lasting solutions, the respective governments of each of these countries, almost in the manner of imperial tradition, depict such intra-state ruptures as matters of internal security breakdowns. While blaming such ruptures on the problems of regionalism or ethnicity or want of modernization, they ask for time and more time, keeping themselves deluded with the thought that given more time
the South Asian states will be able to overcome such ruptures and emerge like the experience of the states. They tend to forget, however, that the experience of the West, particularly with respect to the question of nations and nationalities, has not been a noble and happier one either. Three great wars (one Napoleonic, two 'World Wars'), including the tragic feat of dropping the atomic bombs, were all actually European or Western, fought on the basis of nations and nationalities. Tolstoy, if I recollect correctly, lamented at the end of his novel, War and Peace, that the tragedy of the whole episode was that 'Napoleon never understood the significance of his action'. Indeed, equally true today is the fact that those who killed 6 million Jews and 22 million Soviets and bombed Nagasaki and Hiroshima are yet to understand the significance of their actions!

Must South Asia replicate such horrific deeds? Or, has it already replicated the horror of nation-building in its own little way, that is, as far as its military technology would permit? I would definitely answer in the affirmative. In this context, noteworthy is the fact that in 1971 during the nine month Pakistani military occupation the number of people killed in Bangladesh was higher than the casualty-figures of the whole of Western Europe during the Second World War in the same span of time. The genocide that occurred in 1971 is still fresh in our memories, standing as a testimony to the ruthlessness engineered by one section of people against another section of people in the name of saving and building a Nation. The current South Asian leaders and intellectuals, including those who fought so bravely for Bangladesh, fail to understand that the Liberation War of Bangladesh, apart from being a heroic struggle of the masses against brute military force, is a tragic reminder of the limits of modern nation-building in South Asia. Like the Myth of Sisyphus, however, the South Asian states, including Bangladesh, slip back and roll again, blindly organizing troops and armouries to save the 'Nation' from the curse of modernity. It is this I will now refer to in some detail.

The military of the South Asian states

The military that the South Asian states have in order to cope with the security breakdowns, whether arising from
internal or external conditions, is hegemonic and modern. The former relates to the success of the dominant social forces in organizing consent with respect to the use of the military in the event of a security breakdown, while the latter indicates that the military of the South Asian states is very much fashioned after the modern ‘Western’ states. Both of them, however, are intrinsically related, one reproducing the other. More on the modernist aspect of the military first.

Barring one or two ‘noble’ entities, all countries have structured their defence strategy around the triadic representation of forces – army, navy, airforce (of course, the landlocked countries are exceptions only by default). Developing in the West and essentially shaping the European modern state, the pattern of triadic representation of forces has been followed without much thinking in all the so-called post-colonial states. The pattern has become so natural that without it one could hardly conceptualize a state’s defence strategy. In fact, immediately after attaining independence (whether through negotiation or armed struggle) the so-called state-in-transition rushes to defend itself (and publicly so) by pumping resources into a triadic representation of forces. As a result, the military in the post-colonial period had a quantitative and qualitative growth, but the majority of the people suffered in return.

Indeed, the organization and development of the ‘modern military’ is horrific and self-contradictory. Few civilizations in history could boast such drainage of wealth to unproductive sectors’ during times of relative peace. One, in fact, gets tired of hearing the military prowess, dependent though it is on Western technology, of the South Asian states. Time and again India, for example, is heroically projected as the fourth largest military of the world (in 1986 it included 1,260,000 armed forces with defence expenditures reaching nearly 20 per cent of the government’s spending), without seriously taking note of the fact that it also included the largest number of poor people of the world. Moreover, India did not limit the development of its military to conventional forces. Indeed several critics have pointed out that its nuclear policy bears testimony to an attempt on the part of India to emerge as a great power or even equal to Superpower’ in the image of
the modern 'Western' state by the end of this century. There is, however, something of a morbid delight in India's development into a high-tech, industrialized nuclear weapon state, while having over 400 million people below the poverty line. I will return to this shortly.

The lesser powers are also 'powers' informed by modernity and as such feel no qualms in inviting the extra-regional powers to beef up their position vis-a-vis 'modern India'. In addition to having nearly half a million troops and the military consuming nearly 40 per cent of government spending (1984-1986 figures), Pakistan is aligned to the United States avowedly to meet its 'security needs' in the region. To sustain this military development, however, the ruling class in Pakistan consistently organized and reproduced the 'enemy-image' of its neighbours, particularly that of India. Of course, mere enemy-image was not enough to build the military, it had the support of handsome wages, ready-made privileges, long-term benefits, not to mention tamghas and sitaras! The consequence of such a development, however, was somewhat ironic. As the 'fruits' were mainly limited to the Punjabis (around 80 per cent of the army is Punjabi), the poor–non Punjabi communities (Beluchis, Pathans, Sindhis) openly resented them. The development of the military otherwise became a source of national unrest for Pakistan.

Sri Lanka's case is equally depressing. The country which used to pride its relatively lower number of troops and government military spending (12,500 armed forces in 1973, now 65,100) is desperately seeking funds and materials abroad to build its military [Manchanda, 1988]. Not knowing how to resolve the demands of the Tamil nationalists, it settled for a military solution to the problem of nation-building. One highly placed Sri Lankan government source told me that in order to confront the Tamil Tigers the military is now consuming around 40 per cent of government's spending. Here I would like to stress one point. The Sri Lankan government, not to mention the Buddhist-Sinhala majority, must understand that the military operations against the Tamil Tigers, however technologically intensive and terrain extensive they may be, simply will not work. Such military operations, as I have mentioned earlier, only help the
Tigers to consolidate their position among the Tamil population. Not even the infamous Western policies of ‘divide and rule’ and ‘carrot and stick’ will work. If anything that will work now is the policy of carrot, carrot and more carrots, ones that are grown in the Sri Lankan soil of course.

As for Bangladesh, the organization of its military reflects the obvious. In its eagerness to replicate the wisdom of the ‘modern state’, in the hope of achieving prosperity and a viable polity, the ruling class in Bangladesh readily accepted the defence strategy of modernity. Since then the triadic representation of our forces have accumulated (with certain plus and minus) 30 to 40 tanks, 20 to 30 arms boats, 20 to 30 fighter planes and, not the last important, 80 to 90 thousand troops. But against whom? Publicly, against external threats. For the moment, let us concentrate on that.

Our geopolitics in the age of post-colonialism limit such threats to India and Burma. Even if we build up the Rohingya case, it can hardly be translated into a state of acute animosity between Bangladesh and Burma. Historically, the Naf River has rightly been merely a tourist spot. But threats, if any, have always been organized and centralized in different forms by the regimes in power as emanating from the intentions of our biggest neighbour. At this stage, however, I have no intention of entering into the debate as to whether such threats are illusive or real. Rather, I want to draw your attention to our readiness in meeting such external threats. If we hold that threats primarily emanate from India, may I ask then, what purpose will our present defence strategy, with the accumulation figures that I have just mentioned, serve in the face of India’s military might?

In fact, serious military researches tell me that, given our troop and weapon accumulation, the country could be defended only for 24 hours from any large-scale attack from our biggest neighbour. Must we then channelise so much of our meagre resources (22 per cent of government spending in 1984, the unofficial account is even higher) to protect the country just for 24 hours? Put differently, given the balance (or rather the imbalance) of forces between Bangladesh and India, it remains certain for Bangladesh that its present defence strategy structured by modernity can hardly
guarantee the kind of external threat that it is supposed to deter. What is the rationale for such a military then? I honestly believe that we could have a far more effective defence strategy, not to mention cost effective and a self-reliant one too, if we could shun the path of replicating the military wisdom of the West. But so deep and entrenched is our intellectual dependency on the West that we seldom can think, let alone work, on our own. This brings us to the hegemonic aspect of the military.

It is important to rid ourselves of the common-sense notion that the military has internal and external contents, that is, some forces and materials are meant for internal use, while others are meant for external use. Although on the surface, particularly the way troops are ‘trained’ and materials are ‘collected’, this might be so, in practice it does not hold true. (Even the use of nuclear weapons is too early to be judged as having merely an external content.) Bangladeshis, for example are yet to experience their tanks rolling beyond their borders, they did experience a couple of times, however, tanks rolling across the streets of Dhaka. The case of other South Asian states, although not so fortunate as the Bangladeshis in this respect, is no different.

Indeed, the record of the South Asian states for using the military to contain internal security breakdowns is quite substantial. The horror of the Pakistani military is not limited to 1971 however, it has time and again been used, although on a limited scale, against the Beluchi, Pathan and Sindhi nationalist forces. Moreover, it now has a permanent role to play in arresting the rising violence in Karachi and elsewhere. In Sri Lanka, the entire military is fighting a war in the north. Bangladesh also is keeping up with its South Asian neighbours, it now has a permanent military force stationed in the Chittagong Hill Tracts to contain struggle of the Hill Peoples. As for India, Paul Brass’s comment is noteworthy:

The most serious problems concerning the contemporary role of the military in Indian society pertain to the increasing use of the army— on the average 40 to 50 times per year— by the political authorities in domestic disturbances of all sorts.... [The] army has also been stationed permanently or for long periods in several Indian states, continuously in Kashmir since 1947 and for long periods since 1983-1984 in the troubled states of Assam and
Puloub. One long-term danger to the Indian political system, therefore, is of a militarization of politics and a politicization and demoralization of the army arising from its widespread use as a mechanism of political control in a society tending towards anomie. 28

Brass's statement is a subtle reminder that 'democratic India' is equally vulnerable to the militarization of politics and the 'politicization of the military', which was supposed to contain primarily external threats, is increasingly being used internally.

And here we must try to understand the contradiction internal to the organization and development of the state and military in South Asia. The development of the military has been attained largely by monopolizing a substantial part of the state's resources (organized both locally and from foreign funds), which could have been utilised for social and economic upliftment. But the development of the military has its own dynamics, which tends to increase its share of the state's resources, often at the expense of non-military sectors. In the case of India, for example, by mid-1970s the annual military budget surpassed even the annual sum spent on economic development (in 1974-75, Rs. 1,679.7 crores and Rs. 1,573.1 crores respectively). 26 In fact, in all of the South Asian states, the annual budgetary allocation is tilted towards the military sector. I will take defense, education and health to illustrate my point:

(India, Pakistan and Bangladesh 1989-90 Budget: Sri Lanka 1988 Budget) 27

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<th>defense</th>
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<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
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<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
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<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
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<td>Bangladesh</td>
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Indeed, the very fact that the military, by virtue of its organization and development, acquires more and more resources, puts a limit to the task of improving the conditions of the poverty-stricken masses by way of diverting resources. In the case of India, for example, the lack of redistribution of
income in favour of underprivileged class has contributed to the deepening of the already existing level of mass poverty. According to the estimate provided by Raj Krishna, by the end of this century, 472 million people will be living below the poverty line, a considerable rise from the 1980 figure of 339 million.\textsuperscript{28} In fact, the rapid growth of the defense sector, in the name of national security, has put a heavier burden on the national economy, eroding most of the promises of the successive governments about redressing the social and economic plight of the underprivileged class.

For Bangladesh the case is even more alarming. It has been estimated that 55 per cent of rural population in 1989/90 lived in absolute poverty (income criteria figures) (incidentally 75.6 per cent of Bangladesh’s 113 million people live in rural areas). In the backdrop of this massive poverty, Mahaub Hossain and Binayak Sen in their study asked an interesting question: How long will it take for an average person of rural Bangladesh to cross the poverty line? They concluded with the following answer:

\textit{... at the current annual per capita income growth rate of 2.2 per cent it will take about 25 years for the average poor person to be lifted out of poverty. Assuming higher rates of per capita real income growth, one can arrive at alternative scenarios. The results show that even under a highly optimistic growth scenario, the crossover time for the average poor person would still be 18 years (at 3\% per capita growth rate) and 14 years (at 4\% per capita growth rate).}\textsuperscript{29}

But will a poor Bangladeshi wait that long? Indeed, in the case of Bangladesh, the living conditions of the masses have deteriorated so much it becomes almost unethical to contemplate spending even a part of the state’s scarce resources on the military, and this, particularly in light of the fact that its defence strategy is inherently weak and out of touch with reality. Given the military’s share of government spending in Sri Lanka and Pakistan (as indicated earlier), the case is no different for them either.

Indeed, such a situation of deepening poverty, coupled with the weaknesses of counter-hegemonic politics, gives rise to morbid political activities, where the masses, apart from resorting to violence, become attracted to group or communal politics (based on religious, linguistic, or ethnic grounds); no doubt, often led by the ‘richer section’ of the respective
communities. The conditions of poverty, partially sustained by the higher allocation to the military, otherwise becomes a breeding ground for the hegemonic politics of nations and nationalities, making a lasting dent in the very process of modern nation-building.

Conclusion

The central question of today is a simple one: how do we go about changing the fate of the millions of poverty-stricken masses of this region? There is, of course, no easy answer. One thing is certain, the replication of the West will not do. If the idea of the nation of the West has brought divisions among the South Asian people, the military wisdom of the West helped sustain not only inter-state and intra-state conflicts but also the miserable conditions of the masses. But grasping this issue has been as much a practical problem as it has been a theoretical one. We are so attuned towards the understanding of the world through the prism of positivism (thanks to our modern education and self-propagated specialization) that seldom do we realize that reality, far from being fragmented or isolated, remains complex and multifaceted, where phenomena are related, dialectically, socially and politically. In this light, the resolution of the chaotic situation in South Asia requires innovative modes of intervention that is not only practical but also theoretical, a combination which remains conspicuously absent from the modern political thinking on South Asia.

Indeed, the modernist critique of the state and military in South Asia opens up space for action, encompassing both the micro and macro levels of our society. For instance, the civil society of all the South Asian states is hardly geared towards the task of accepting the (western) democratic principle of majority rule since it remains alien to the very constitution of these societies. In post-independence South Asia, it led to a steady rise in the level of coercion since the minority communities, afraid of being alienated, failed to provide consent to the principle of majority rule. And the more the coercion the more the military ipso facto monopolized the meagre resources of the state. At this macro level, if intervention is contemplated, what is required is a total restructuring of the society in favour of a decentralized state
structure, devoid of the vices of modernity.\textsuperscript{30}

The transformations at the micro level must also be equally innovative and radical, not to mention of them being organized simultaneously. To take one instance, the triadic representation of forces has outlived its utility even from a purely strategic perspective (unless, of course, one assumes that we are still living in the age of territorial expansion and colonization of people). In fact, in the case of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal the airforce can safely be dismantled and the regular army be replaced by (three-year service) voluntary armed forces. As for India and Pakistan, given their current state of arms buildup, a more realistic approach would be to decentralize the national army and provide avenues for Non-offensive Defense to take over. But this requires new mode of thinking in defense strategy altogether, a feature which somehow is a taboo to the personnel and well-wishers of the modern military of South Asia.

The possibilities for building alternative structures of state and military are, therefore, immense. What we now require is innovations, ones that would take us away from the ill-wisdom of modernity and help organize counter-hegemonic states favourable to the masses in South Asia. In this task anyone may participate, the only requirements, I would contend, are moral strength and a commitment to lift the downtroddens.
Notes and References

1. By ‘hegemony’ I mean here the contradictory combinations of consent and coercion organized by the dominant social forces. For a closer exposition, see Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks (New York: International Publishers, 1971) and Imtiaz Ahmed, State and Foreign Policy: India’s Role in South Asia (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1993).


6. The notion of ‘Hindu majority’ has come to include only 59 per cent of India’s population, that is, those who are referred to as the ‘caste Hindus’. It excludes the Dalits and the scheduled tribes, who now together with non-Hindus (i.e. Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, and others) constitute a little over 40 per cent of the population. See C.T. Kurien, “The Cult of Centrism,” Economic and Political Weekly, July 16, 1988, p. 1471 and Francis Robinson, ed., The Cambridge Encyclopedia of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and The Maldives (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 45. Indeed, with the monolithic representation of Hinduism and the rule of the majority, the consolidation and reproduction of hegemony favourable to the ruling class became simultaneously a consolidation and reproduction of caste Hinduism.


8. Partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947 caused 4 million people to switch over their residences. Pakistan lost 7.3 million people and in return gained 7.2 million refugees from India. See Robinson, op. cit., p. 203.


12. The Sinhalese, who constitute 74.0% of the total population of Sri Lanka, are of 'Indo-Aryan origin' and mostly Buddhists (69.3%). The Tamils, on the other hand, who constitute 18.2% of the total population, are 'Dravidians' and mostly 'Hindus' (15.5%). The rest of the population are Sri Lankan Moors (7.1%), who are mostly Muslims. See Britannica World Data (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990), p. 78.


14. The Tamil 'militants' favoured armed struggle, instead of non-violent methods, to liberate their people.


16. This was, in fact, Mujib's response to the memorandum put by a 12 member- 'Hill Peoples' delegation led by the Chakma member of Parliament, Manobendra Narayan Larma. The memorandum included "autonomy for the Chittagong Hill Tracts with its own the three chiefs' offices, constitutional provisions against amendment of the regulations, and a ban on the influx of non-Hill peoples". See "Life is Not Ours', Land and Human Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh," The Report of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, Kopenhagen, IWGIA, 1991, p.14.

17. Ibid., p.19.

18. The Quadianis, who question the doctrine that Muhammad was the last of the prophets, were declared non-Muslims in 1974, and an Ordinance of 1984 made it an offence for them to call themselves Muslims and to refer to their places of worship as mosques. See Robinson, op. cit., p.379.

19. In the total population of Pakistan, only 11.8 per cent are Sindhis, that is, those whose first language is Sindhi. In the province of Sindh, however, 52 per cent of the population are Sindhis, while Muhajirs include 22 per cent of the population (1981 census). In Karachi (the capital of Sindh and a metropolis of over 8 million people), the situation is radically different. 54.3% of Karachi's population are Muhajirs, while 13.6 per cent are punjabis, 8.7 per cent are Pushto-speaking Pathans and 6.3 per cent are Sindhis. See Hamza Alavi, "Politics of Ethnicity in India and Pakistan," in Hamza Alavi and John Harriss, eds., Sociology of 'Developing Societies': South Asia (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989), p.241.


21. Dhirendra Sharma, "India's nuclear policy and the arms race in the South-East Asian region," in Peter Worsley and K.B. Hadjor,
25. Ibid., p. 183.