

**CHAPTER 1**  
**INTRODUCTION**  
**Contemporary Challenges and Civilizational Wellsprings**

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**1. The Context of the Challenges**

South Asia is at a conjunctural moment in its history. The people as well as governments are addressing three inter related challenges: consolidating democracy, overcoming mass poverty and confronting violent extremism. These political and economic problems are occurring at a time when the emerging environmental crisis threatens the stability of economies and societies in South Asia.

The challenges of democracy, poverty, peace and the environment are being confronted in South Asia in the context of a seismic shift, occurring for the first time in three centuries, in the centre of gravity of the global economy from the West to Asia. This change has been brought about mainly by the sustained high rates of growth in the economies of China and India, but at the same time other countries of Asia, including South Asia as a whole, have been a part of this process. Moreover, South Asian countries by and large were able to weather the severe effect of the global economic and financial crisis with minimum impact on their economies. In the process, they contributed to the ongoing recovery in the rest of the world. At present trends, by the year 2034, China will emerge as the world's largest economy and India as the third largest after the United States. If, however, South Asia achieves an economic union the countries of this region could together constitute the second largest economy in the world by 2034. Thus China together with South Asia could become the greatest economic power house in human history.

The South Asian region has not entirely ruptured the connection with its tradition of humane core values of sharing and caring within the community, of harmony with nature and seeking a transcendent unity in the diversity of religions and cultures. The way these traditions are brought to bear in establishing new institutional structures, will shape the process of democracy, economic growth and environmental protection in the region. Institutional

changes along these lines could also have a profound impact on the global economy, international relations and the natural environment.

The challenges of achieving peace through an inclusive democracy and economy and of conserving the integrated life support systems of South Asia, should be underpinned by the norms and core values of society. This will involve nurturing the consciousness of unity in diversity through the rediscovery of South Asia's civilizational well springs.

## **2. The Thematic Connections**

Understanding the nature of and connections between the issues of democracy, sustainable development and peace are essential to addressing the challenges that confront the state, society and economy of South Asian countries. It is obvious that progress in any of these areas is contingent upon our moving forward in each of the remaining areas. The countries of this region are embarked on building and strengthening democratic structures. Yet these are threatened by violence associated with persistent mass poverty, regional economic disparities and a sense of exclusion of a large mass of the people from the institutional structures within which the processes of governance and growth are conducted. Similarly development itself is dependent on the quality and robustness of democracy. At the same time, the ongoing environmental degradation can place an acute stress on economic, social and political structures. If political democracy is to be sustained, it must be underpinned by economic democracy through which the people as a whole rather than merely the elite can become both the drivers and beneficiaries of the growth process. This would require a change in the development paradigm to design policies for inclusive growth, as much as a change towards developing participatory democracy.

The violence by non state actors that threatens state and society in South Asia may arise in many cases from the sense of exclusion from governance and economic growth. Yet this violence itself is fueled by the construction of exclusivist and narrow identities. The tendencies towards militant extremism by non state actors are exacerbated by intra-state and sometimes inter-state power dynamics in South Asia. Therefore, the challenge of building structures for sustainable democracy and development is integrally linked with the challenge of building new structures of peace. In this context, the challenge is to ensure that security apparatuses are institutionally subordinated to elected civil authority and undertake security operations within the framework of law and in line with the policies formulated by elected democratic governments.

In the process of building sustainable structures of democracy, development and peace, an emerging threat is the environmental crisis. In the riverine plains of South Asia, the prospect of severe water shortages and sharp decline in yield per acre of food crops associated with global warming can become a new source of intra-state and inter-state tensions in the region. Equally important is the melting of Himalayan glaciers with the associated destabilization of society and economy in the mountain areas, and the rising sea water levels which could cause large scale dislocations of mainland coastal populations and more particularly of island populations in the Indian Ocean.

The ecology of South Asia is highly integrated across national boundaries, yet fragile. The crises of destabilized hydrologic systems, soil depletion and constriction of biodiversity threaten not just one state but the whole of South Asia. Therefore conserving the environmental life support systems of the region through cooperation is necessary for democracy, development and peace. Indeed it is vital for sustaining life itself in South Asia. Therefore a new approach of establishing institutional links between democratic structures, development initiatives, managing violence and conserving the environment is required to build a better future for the people of this region.

### 3. **Democracy by the People**

Amartya Sen established the linkage between democracy and inclusive growth with his new insight that “an increase in inanimate objects of convenience is not what growth is about”. This proposition, so relevant for our time carries forward the argument of Aristotle that goods cannot be of value since they are merely functional. What is of value, he thought, is *human functioning*<sup>1</sup>. This idea is also in line with the cultural tradition in South Asia in which it is not commodities that are of value but human relationships. It is not goods that replenish life in the South Asian tradition, but human contact. “In meeting you, I am replenished” (Tain milyaan, maendhi taazgi wo), says the Punjabi Sufi poet Shah Hussain.<sup>2</sup> This theme runs through the whole of Tagore’s “Religion of Man” and Gitanjali.<sup>3</sup> Amartya Sen in the same tradition raises the issue that it is not so much the increase in goods and services that is important. but rather what “growth (is doing) to the lives of the people”. For Sen, it is health

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle: The Nicomachean ethics, Book 1, Section 5, D. Roos (ed.), Oxford University Press, 1980.

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Asif Khan (ed), Kafian Shah Hussain, Pakistan Punjabi Adabi Board, Lahore, 1987

<sup>3</sup> Rabindranath Tagore; The Religion of Man, first published in 1931, published by Unwin Books, London, in 1961.

Rabindranath Tagore, Gitanjali, Visvabharati Granthalaya, Calcutta, 1954.

care, education, gender equality and the institutions through which people can express their freedom and creativity that is important.

Another new insight Amartya Sen has provided is that democracy can essentially be seen as “government by discussion”. This discussion is to be conducted for arriving through a participatory process at decisions that shape the social, political and environmental conditions of society. Thus to arrive at a viable treaty on green house gas emissions, according to Sen, requires a global discussion to achieve a fair balance.

Deepak Nayyar in his paper explores the conceptual basis of the relationship between development and democracy. He analyzes the phenomena of exclusion and inclusion in markets as well as in political processes. Markets include buyers with purchasing power and sellers who have productive assets including saleable skills. Therefore, those who are at a disadvantage in terms of purchasing power and productive assets, have unequal market access or may even be systematically excluded from livelihoods within the market mechanism. Examples of those excluded are groups such as the landless, lower castes, women, religious minorities or ethnic groups. Adverse geographic location could also exclude persons from “infrastructure, from public goods and services, or from economic and social opportunities”.

Deepak Nayyar brings out the linkage between exclusion located in the economic sphere and that arising from social and political circumstances. While economic exclusion may accentuate social exclusion, yet even where underprivileged social groups are better endowed in economic terms, there may be a persistence of social and political exclusion. He argues that the “marketisation” and the associated reduced role of the state has restricted public sector provision of social security, and at the same time has weakened the institutions of the community which had traditionally provided safety nets to the vulnerable.

He argues that the persistence of mass poverty in spite of rapid economic growth in South Asia, suggests the importance of improving the distribution of income and increasing employment along with growth. Accordingly, it is important to integrate economic and social policies and develop institutional mechanisms that would improve the distributional and employment outcomes of economic growth.

Deepak Nayyar examines the relationship between growth, poverty and inequality. The greater the inequality of income distribution, the smaller is the poverty reduction effect of growth. He suggests that the reasons for the persistence of mass poverty in spite of high economic growth are persisting and possibly increasing income inequality together with a low employment elasticity of growth, insufficiency of anti poverty programmes and inadequacy of the public sector provision of social services such as education and health as well as drinking water and sanitation facilities. He argues that the “private consumption of the poor is squeezed because a significant proportion of private household expenditure of the poor is absorbed by education for children in private schools and health care for the family in the private sector”.

Deepak Nayyar provides an important insight into the relationship between markets and democracy. He criticizes the orthodox view that democracy provides political freedom for individuals and markets engender economic freedom. He argues that in countries where there are acute social and economic inequalities, universal adult franchise alone cannot create political equality: just as unequal distribution of productive assets will result in unequal economic opportunities within the market system. He argues that just as markets are responsive to the demands of the rich people rather than needs of the poor, democracies are more responsive to people with political power “rather than to people at large”.

South Asia is characterized by hierarchical societies. Therefore a central issue in deepening democracy is whether adequate safeguards exist to prevent minorities from being insecure under majority rule. Beyond this, is the question of whether the institutional structure of democracy gives minorities a voice in governance. T.K. Oommen in his contribution argues that the strength of democracy must be seen as the integration of minorities into the democratic process. For democracy to be meaningful, it must be representative, participatory and inclusive. This has important implications for the process of the devolution of power which is underway in many South Asian countries.

Vital to building a structure for sustaining democracy is the institutionalized subordination of the military and security services to elected civil authority both at the formal level of the Constitution as well as in the actual practice of governance. Apart from India (which has a relatively mature democracy), each of the countries of South Asia have nascent democracies which are struggling to achieve the pre-eminence of elected civil authority in the power

structure. This problem may be relatively more acute in the case of Pakistan where direct or indirect military rule has prevailed much longer in its history compared to elected democratic governments.

3 Rounaq Jahan and Rehman Sobhan in their paper on Reconstructing Democracy in South Asia begin by tracing the origins of the democratic tradition in South Asia in the nationalist movements for independence and democratic struggles. They argue that in the post independence period there is a discontent with electoral democracy largely because of its failure to live up to the popular aspiration for social and economic development. This underlines the importance of addressing the problem of mass poverty and economic inequalities

In discussing the evolution of democratic politics in South Asia, Jahan and Sobhan identify the central issue: the need to democratize election based political practice which has autocratic tendencies. The gap between the principle and practice of democratic governance has engendered the emergence of undemocratic political forces which are threatening electoral democracy.

Jahan and Sobhan show how in various South Asian countries the perceptions of unjust governance and the persistence of mass poverty and inequality have led to the electoral defeat of incumbent governments. However change of government through elections has not redressed the sense of deprivation.

Jahan and Sobhan argue that one of the most serious challenges to democracy in South Asia is the undemocratic culture of political parties. Political contestation is in many cases not based on policy agendas but is designed to capture political power and use public office for private gain.

The authors of the paper argue that while each of the states of South Asia “has multiple ethnic, religious and caste groups, none has accommodated this diversity”.

Jahan and Sobhan have noted that civil society has developed agendas of reform aimed at ensuring transparency and accountability in governance. However they argue that the capacity of civil society activists to implement such reforms depends on their interface with political parties.

Jahan and Sobhan conclude by suggesting the need to strengthen electoral democracy through measures aimed at achieving social and economic democracy. They argue the need to address the structural injustices in South Asian societies. Only then will the citizens have a stake in defending democracy against extra democratic challenges.

3 Hasan Askari Rizvi in his paper has identified the wide gap between the professed democratic principles as embodied in the Constitution and the operational realities of authoritarianism during both periods of military rule and some periods of elected civilian government in Pakistan. He argues that the current democratic dispensation may not be irreversible because of three challenges. First, the repeated military rule has created a constituency of stakeholders who have benefited economically and socially from military rule and constitute a significant political force that attempts to destabilize democracy when the “elected government falters on performance”. Second, Islamic political parties take part in elections and sit in Parliament not out of a commitment to democracy but as a means to gain political legitimacy for the purpose of establishing a theocratic Islamic political and economic system. And, third, the militant Islamic groups, which systematically use violence and intimidation, aim at overthrowing the existing political order for establishing an Islamic Caliphate.

3 Subhash Kashyap in his paper has argued that a vibrant democracy functions in India where since independence in 1947, the judiciary has remained independent, the press has continued to remain free and where the military and security apparatus remains subordinate to elected civil authority. Democracy based on a pluralist society is the most appropriate polity for India with its wide social and cultural diversity. However, democracy is now under severe strain because of a growing cynicism in society towards democratically elected governments and an erosion of respect for politicians, legislators and civil servants. He argues that democratic processes in India are, “still largely dependent on caste and communal vote banks and criminals”, who contribute black money for the election campaigns of candidates. Subhash Kashyap calls for a ‘citizens’ movement against “corruption, criminalization and concentration of power”.

3 Imtiaz Ahmed in his paper on democracy in Bangladesh observes that while the country is embarked on the quest for democracy, structural features of political parties, various organs of the state and political cultures, create a tendency for political upheavals and sliding into authoritarian regimes. An important factor in this tendency is the polarization of political

parties and the tendency of the incumbent government to use non-democratic or even totalitarian modes of governance, and of the parties in opposition to use violence and *hartals* (work stoppage) in protest. This creates a space for the military to intervene in politics. Ahmed says: “ the civil military conflict in Bangladesh, indeed, since the time of the military intervention in 1975, is in many ways an extension of intra-civil conflict.”

3 Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu in his paper on Democracy in Sri Lanka examines the emerging configuration of the political structure in the post civil war period. He argues that there has been an erosion of the political subordination of the military to elected civil authority, because of the important role played by the military during the war and in the subsequent resettlement of refugees. He argues that the post civil war paradigm of governance gives priority to economic development and shifts focus away from giving political rights. He suggests that the Rajapaksha government is in the process of changing the political culture from a pluralistic one with energetic contention of opposed view points in the democratic process, towards “a more disciplined East Asian model set on achieving material targets and goals”. He concludes that the challenge in Sri Lanka lies in ensuring that the economic growth process involves the non discriminatory participation of citizens with different ethnic identities. He emphasizes that deepening the democratic structure in Sri Lanka requires not the erasing of multiple identities but the nurturing of pluralism.

#### 4. **Inclusive Growth: Growth for the People, by the People**

Central to development is the transition of South Asian countries from what Douglass North et.al call rent based limited access social orders, to open access social orders that allow open competition, merit based selection, efficiency and innovation that underlie sustained economic growth<sup>4</sup>. Equally important is the need to reduce the growing economic inequalities and to achieve a more rapid poverty reduction. This also has implications for the problem of violence and social cohesion which we discuss in the next section.

Inclusive Growth would involve broad basing the growth process by giving access to the middle class and the poor over productive assets, high quality skills and equitable access over the markets for capital, high wage employment and markets for goods and services. Such an inclusive growth process by involving a larger number of people in the process of investment,

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<sup>4</sup> Douglass C. North, John Joseph Wallis and Barry R. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History*, Cambridge University Press, New York, NY, 2009.

competition, efficiency increase and innovation would enable both a higher and more equitable economic growth. It would be growth for the people and by the people: This would establish the foundations of economic democracy that could sustain political democracy<sup>5</sup>.

The paper by Thangavel Palanivel and Fatma Gul Unal on Inclusive Growth in Asia argues that the policy framework in South Asia needs to shift from an exclusive focus on growth to changing its structure so as to increase the capacity of growth for poverty reduction. The authors begin by defining an inclusive growth process as one which includes all segments of society, creating opportunities for “poor women and men through active participation in markets, communities and states”. They refer to empirical studies which show that inclusive growth occurs when there is growth in sectors where the poor work, in areas where they live and which is associated with a reduction in the prices of goods that the poor consume. It is clear from the paper that the exclusive focus on a high *level* of economic growth in the last two decades has resulted in increasing inequality which has not only reduced the pace of poverty reduction but has also created an economic and social polarization between the rich and the poor.

4 Akmal Hussain in his paper postulates that sustained economic growth in Pakistan requires a change in the institutional structure whereby the middle classes and the poor can participate as subjects of the growth process rather than merely the recipients of an uncertain ‘trickle down’ effect. He argues that in such a growth process equity becomes a *means* of a higher and sustained growth. This new trajectory of growth requires that broad sections of the population rather than merely the elite be given access over productive assets, quality training for high wage employment, quality health care and equitable access over markets. He argues that when a larger number of people engage in the process of investment there is greater competition, efficiency, innovation and thereby sustained growth with equity.

Hussain argues that the poor in Pakistan cannot be simply seen as individuals with certain adverse ‘resource endowments’, making choices in free markets. Poverty occurs when the individual in a fragmented community is locked into a nexus of power which deprives the poor of their actual and potential income. The poor face markets, state institutions and local power structures, which discriminate against their access to productive assets, financial resources, public services and governance decisions which affect their immediate existence.

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<sup>5</sup> Akmal Hussain: Strengthening Democracy through Inclusive Growth, Paper presented at the SACEPS/RIS World Conference on Recreating South Asia: Democracy, Social Justice and Sustainable Development, New Delhi 24-26, February 2011.

Hussain proposes a new approach to inclusive growth through establishing an institutional framework for the provision of productive assets to the poor as well as the capacity to utilize these assets efficiently. He formulates a strategy of inclusive growth for Pakistan and specifies the policy proposals to achieve it. He argues that his proposed new institutional structure to achieve sustained growth through equity could play an important role in countering terrorism by giving economic opportunities and hence a stake in democracy to the deprived sections of the population.

4 Muchkund Dubey and Biswajit Dhar in their paper analyze the economic growth process in India to show its lack of inclusiveness, then identify the various economic and social dimensions of exclusion and suggest policy measures that could be taken for achieving inclusive growth.

The authors observe at the outset that India has made a successful transition to a sustained high growth economy, with accelerating growth over the last decade being underpinned by increasing investment and savings rates. However they provide evidence to show that this growth has been accompanied by increasing inter-personal and inter-regional income disparities with poverty levels being considerably higher than was suggested by earlier estimates.

Dubey and Dhar analyze various aspects of social exclusion in India. They draw upon Amartya Sen's work to distinguish between what he calls 'constitutive' and 'instrumental' social exclusion. The inability to take part in the life of the community is an example of constitutive social exclusion, which impoverishes public life. Instrumental social exclusion is one that can lead to deprivation, an example of which is, lack of access to the credit market.

Dubey and Dhar provide an insight into another important dimension of social exclusion, namely the market. They argue that while social exclusion has long been practised in India on the basis of religion, caste, ethnicity and gender, yet a new form is, what they call, "market exclusion" which they argue has been exacerbated with the adoption of policies of liberalization and globalization. The degree of access to the market is determined by the initial distribution of productive resources and income. Consequently, the market excludes a large proportion of the deprived population across caste, religion, class and gender.

Dubey and Dhar examine the Constitution of India and various legislative measures targeted against specific types of discrimination and exclusion. They also identify some of the

affirmative action undertaken in this regard, such as reservations in posts in government services and in public educational institutions as well as special measures for the uplift of weaker sections of society. However, the Five Year Plan initiatives for addressing the problem, such as Special Component Plans and separate Finance and Development Corporations for the unprivileged, have “suffered from inadequacy of resources and poor implementation”.

4 Saman Kalegama, in his paper on inclusive growth in Sri Lanka, identifies three elements of an effective inclusive growth strategy in Sri Lanka:

- (i) High end sustained growth to create productive employment opportunities:- In this context, he suggests integration with the regional and global economy. He proposes that this should be combined with government initiatives for investment in physical infrastructure and human capital and building institutional capacities, maintaining macroeconomic stability, market friendly policies, protection of property rights and the rule of law.
- (ii) Social inclusion to ensure equal access to opportunities:- Government intervention in this context should include expansion of human capacities, especially for the disadvantaged through investment in education, health and social services such as drinking water and sanitation.
- (iii) Addressing structural injustice in terms of unequal access to assets, unequal participation in the market, unequal access to human development and unjust governments. Here the policy agenda would be predicated on enabling the excluded to become principals (rather than agents), by “repositioning them within the process of production, distribution and governance”.

Kalegama observes that while successive governments have undertaken policies for inclusive growth, these have been neutralized by the protracted Civil War. He argues that conflicts affect poverty through entitlement failures such as loss of public entitlements, loss of market/livelihood entitlements, loss of civil/social entitlements and reverse entitlements resulting from population displacement and asset transfers. He argues that the major challenge for inclusive growth in the post conflict period in Sri Lanka is to address these entitlement failures, particularly in the war affected areas.

## 5. **Violence and Peace: Identity, Exclusion and the Narratives of Deprivation**

The violence that threatens democracy as much as state structures in South Asia, in many cases originates in a sense of exclusion from the political and economic growth processes. The growth of inter personal and inter regional economic disparities within a particular nation state tend to fuel violence. This is particularly so when the inequality corresponds to particular social, ethnic, linguistic, regional or religious groups, and where these groups have unequal access over the processes of political participation and public policy.

Kamal Hossain in his paper, argues that violence needs to be addressed and enduring peace achieved if the people of South Asian countries are to pursue their shared aspiration of strengthening democracy through sustainable human development. He analyzes the political, social, and psychological factors underlying various forms of violence, and shows how “engineered violence” can be resisted through a process of changing the psycho-social conditions which generate anger and hatred.

Hossain argues that violence is often a mode of contention for political and economic power, whether at the level of an excluded social group, city gangs which are competing for resources, or communities asserting linguistic or regional nationalism in a civil war. He suggests that at a psychological level, violence has a symbolic dimension: it is “not just a physical attack aimed to cause hurt or pain”, by a person or group, but it is also an attack on the identity in terms of which the other is defined. Violence is also an attack on “the humanness of others”. In the case of the terrorist group, the target is the authority of the state, though the victim of the attack may be the terrorist’s own society or even his or her own body.

According to Hossain, the problem of violence arises when human relations are undermined as a result of contestations for power or a sense of injustice experienced as a result of the asserting of a singular identity to the exclusion of the other identities.

Hossain draws from Sarah Ladbury to argue that stereotyping can occur with respect to other communities in a particular country and also at the global level. Such stereotyping imputes characteristics and historical actions to the other community which induces antagonism against it. Hossain argues that there is such a tendency in the case of Islam as a monolithic bloc and a major threat, particularly after 9/11. The western press and many ordinary citizens

for example associate the word “terrorism” with “Islam” rather than actions of a criminal minority which could belong to any religion.

Hossain argues that militarization and the arms race between India and Pakistan, which are undertaken in the name of national security, are a major threat to peace and also obstacles to development. Achieving inter-state peace is necessary for human security: Peace would release the people of the region from the threat of devastation from nuclear war and also release the resources required to improve their material conditions.

5 Khaled Ahmed in his discourse on peace, presents a stylized construct of the India-Pakistan problematique to create a conceptual framework within which to understand the problems of peace and the dynamics of the peace process. He argues that peace is made difficult by two pathologies of the nation state: a) The pathology of sovereignty which gives rise to a conflictual narrative of nationalism based on designating an external ‘enemy’ and then calling upon the various social groups and identities within the state to unite in order to prevent the external enemy from enslaving them. b) The pathology of ‘security’ which is defined in terms of achieving military power, and is supposed to be pursued by military professionals. Peace is regarded, in this narrative, to be unstable and therefore a constant fear of war is created, by the nation state.

Ahmed argues that initiatives to achieve peace within the context of the nation state narrative, come up against the problem of the status quo state versus the revisionist state. If the status quo power is the larger power and the revisionist state is the smaller one, then the nationalism of the latter will be expressed in the form of attempts to force the status quo power to change the status quo. Accordingly the approach to peace in this case, can be characterized as: ‘first we remove the “core” disputes and then we will have peace’. Ahmed postulates that if both countries adopt this approach for dispute resolution on the basis of inflexible national grand narratives, they cannot resolve the disputes that trigger war.

5 Sumanasiri Liyanage in his paper on the peace process in Sri Lanka, examines the nature of the conflict in Sri Lanka in terms of the conceptual issues involved, the dynamics of the peace process and the government’s approach to sustainable peace. Liyanage argues that the peace process has two distinct phases: The first phase involves the ending of an armed conflict and the second phase is defined by the process of addressing the deep rooted issues related with the genesis of the conflict. Phase one is the first moment of peace when violent

conflict ends. However, in the second phase, the root causes related with attitudes, grievances and the aspirations associated with identity formation, need to be addressed. This stage requires catering to the “basic needs” of the community in question, in terms of recognition of identity, security, and the opportunity of political, economic and social participation in the process of fulfilling those needs. Liyanage suggests that unless these basic needs and root causes of the conflict are addressed during the peace process in Sri Lanka, the peace achieved in phase one would remain unstable.

5 Imran Ali analyzes in historical perspective, the internal and external dimensions of the processes that threaten peace in Pakistan, the dynamics behind its multiple crises and some of the fundamental governance reforms required to manage these crises.

The author postulates that persistent inequalities and mass poverty constitute an important factor in generating conflict, eroding internal peace and undermining the legitimacy of the state with respect to the deprived sections of society. The destabilizing effect of inequality and poverty is reinforced by rapid population growth and the age structure. The rising militant extremism is fed by grievances associated with economic deprivation and the evident inability of public management systems to meet even the subsistence needs, let alone the aspirations of the young.

Imran Ali argues that since caste remains an integral part of South Asian society, inequality in the distribution of wealth and income is reinforced by embedded hierarchical identities. While the introduction of Islam in South Asia might have diluted the rigidities of caste, it is unlikely that caste based identities were substantively replaced by an alternative form of social ordering. Even in those Muslim majority areas which later became Pakistan, many Muslims either “subscribed to the same castes as non-Muslims or evolved a distinct status nomenclature to identify their own upper castes”.

Imran Ali shows how the structure of inequality shaped by history in the pre-partition period was reinforced by the policies of various political regimes in the post independence period (1947-2010). He argues that the neglect of education, health and social services, the recourse to authoritarianism by successive regimes (whether military or civilian) and widespread corruption, have seriously undermined the legitimacy of Pakistan’s ruling elite. Regaining legitimacy will require wide ranging reforms in the economic, social and political spheres.

## 6. A Threatened Environment: Sources of Sustainability in the South Asian Tradition

Underlying the diverse cultures of South Asia is a unity of consciousness with respect to the relationship between humans and nature, which has sustained social and economic life over the millennia. The mountains, the rivers, the forests and the soils in the South Asian tradition are apprehended as sacred. They are part of a mysterious unity that combines the material and the spiritual. Therefore, the value framework of South Asian communities, enjoins that the ecological system must be nurtured and revered, rather than exploited and degraded. Nature is regarded as part of human nature, since the physical environment not only sustains human life but is a reference point in terms of which humans experience their sense of beauty and truth. It is this consciousness and the associated value system of South Asian society that needs to be rediscovered. It could constitute the underpinning of a new institutional framework for addressing the impending crisis of the environment, economy, and state in South Asia.

6 Dr. Leena Srivastava, in her paper on the theme of the environment in South Asia, identifies three key environmental challenges in the region: land degradation, water stress, and the impact of climate change. She examines each of these challenges with respect to the major socio-economic sectors in South Asia and indicates some of the adaptation strategies required to face the challenges at both the sectoral and aggregate levels.

The pressure on the limited land resources of South Asia can be gauged by the fact that the region occupies 4.8% of the world's total land mass but is inhabited by more than 20% of the world's population. The majority of this population (60% of the labor force) depends on agriculture. Rising food demands and the use of unsustainable land use practices have played an important role in soil depletion. She provides evidence to show that 16.6% of the land mass of South Asia has been degraded affecting almost half of the population of Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Nepal. The overuse of water in agriculture due to low application efficiencies of irrigation leads to salinity and water logging in the downstream region.

Even though the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region is one of the largest fresh water sources in the world, yet the availability of clean water remains one of the key issues for the region. Srivastava identifies some of the water related challenges as: increasing water demand of development activities and growing population; intrusion of salinity into ground water, and inland water systems; contamination of aquifers with fluoride and arsenic due to excessive

extraction; and water pollution due to lack of an institutional framework for environmentally safe disposal of urban and industrial waste.

The problem of water scarcity is expected to become more acute in the future due to the impact of climate change. The gross per capita water availability is expected to decline and apart from Pakistan, India is expected to reach a water stress situation before 2025.

Srivastava examines the impact of climate change on South Asia based on the latest scientific evidence and projections. She argues that high population density, degrading natural resources, high levels of poverty and food insecurity make South Asia one of the most vulnerable regions with respect to the impact of climate change.

Srivastava provides evidence to show that air temperature in some parts of South Asia has increased significantly in recent decades. This is part of the global warming process, which according to the IPCC 4<sup>th</sup> Assessment Report is likely to increase the frequency and intensity of extreme climatic events. She provides evidence of this in terms of the increased frequency of heat waves, cyclones and intense rains with associated floods in some years and droughts in others, in South Asia. She also provides evidence to show that the region is already marked by climate variability. There is also evidence of retreating Himalayan glaciers which are critical to the climate and economy of the region. She argues that the retreating glaciers could increase flood risks in the short term and increase water shortages in the long term. This could pose “an unprecedented threat to water supplies, lives and the economy of the region”.

Srivastava argues that the changes in precipitation, sea level rise, glacial cover reduction and incidence of extreme events associated with climate change, are likely to result in large scale internal migration of people and render about 125 million migrants, homeless.

Srivastava concludes by observing that in the face of the environmental crisis the States of South Asia will need to cooperate with a new commitment and sense of urgency, if the future of the people of this region is to be secured.

6 Shyam Saran, in his paper, provides an Indian perspective on the challenge of global climate change. He contextualizes the challenge of climate change, mitigation and adaptation in the perennial cultural and intellectual traditions of South Asia, according to which human existence is seen as an integral part of nature in its cycle of birth, growth, decay and regeneration and nature is the nurturer which has to be preserved rather than subdued. He

thus locates the idea of sustainability in the existential act of nurturing rather than depleting beyond its tolerable limits, the integrated life support systems of earth, water and air.

Saran argues that the nature of industrial development over the last 250 years, with its particular forms of technology and energy use, has been intensifying the use of non-renewable carbon based fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas). Ecological sustainability requires a new trajectory of technical change that shifts the pattern of energy use from non-renewable to renewable sources such as solar energy and nuclear energy.

Saran points out that in the case of India the concern for climate change is now being integrated into the process of national economic development. India has already officially committed that it will shape its economic development in such a way that it does not exceed the average per capita emissions of developed countries. Saran argues that India can set an example for the rest of the world for sustainable development by investing in leapfrog technologies using renewable and bio fuels, as it develops its energy, transport and industrial infrastructure, and builds mass transit systems for cities, based on alternative energy sources. India is also in the process of developing a new institutional structure embodying incentives for the private sector to make buildings and production processes energy efficient and to develop and adopt the least carbon intensive technologies.

## 7 **Peace, Sustainable Development and Democracy: The Civilizational Wellsprings**

In South Asia the interaction of diverse religions and cultures over millennia, has engendered a set of shared core values, attitudes and intellectual reference points that are rooted in the specific *forms* of these cultures, yet transcend them: It is the traditional South Asian sensibility that constitutes a unity in diversity<sup>6</sup>. This perennial wisdom flows in the streams of folk cultures, is evoked in poetry, music and dance and still resonates, perhaps latent and unsaid, on the margins of the consciousness of contemporary South Asians.

The unity that underlies the diversity of religions is a universal spiritualism that nurtures an experience of love, beauty and truth: an experience that refers to the material world of nature and society and at the same time, to the transcendent. That universal spiritualism shapes the traditional attitudes which regard the mountains, the rivers, the forests and the top soils as a means of sustaining physical existence and also part of a sacred unity, whose beauty

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<sup>6</sup> Akmal Hussain, Peace and Economic Cooperation in South Asia, chapter 1 in, Sadiq Ahmed, Saman Kelegama, Ejaz Ghani, Promoting Economic Cooperation in South Asia, Beyond SAFTA, SAGE Publications, New Delhi, 2010, page 7.

transports us to the transcendent. Hence nature in the South Asian tradition is to be nurtured both for material and spiritual existence.

In the South Asian tradition, just as there is a relationship between the material and the transcendent in the natural world, so it is in the social world. This is seen in the context of human relationships where the Other is not simply to be tolerated, but engaged in the dynamics of love. In this context, the Other constitutes the essential fertilizing force in the growth of the Self. Thus the meeting with the Other, whether an individual, an identity, culture, or religion, initiates a dialectic through which the Self is experienced afresh within a broader frame of reference, and thereby enhanced. A meeting with the other has the potential of dissolving narrow identities constituted within rigid hierarchies: It is like merging into the archetypal river to fertilize downstream in history, new terrains of consciousness, self discovery and creative action.

The possibility of achieving self fulfillment through a relationship with the other in society, informs the sense of social responsibility. It is in this context that the South Asian idea of the relationship between humans and commodities is constituted. Here the idea is that it is human relationships that are of value, while goods are merely useful. So the worth of an individual is determined not by how much she/he owns but rather how much he gives. In the tradition of the Muslim Sufis, the Bhakti movements, the Buddhists, the Hindus or the Christians, it is through the act of giving that the Self is fulfilled

7 In exploring the sources of wisdom, to shape South Asia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Muhammad Suheyl Umar introduces religion and spirituality to the discussion on democracy, peace and sustainable development. He argues that in a multicultural society it is important to address the plurality of faith by discovering through a spiritual perspective, the underlying unity in the diversity of religions.

The author discusses the issue of tolerance from the perspective of Islamic spirituality. He argues that Islam points to “a transcendentally ordained tolerance”. This tolerance “is not the outcome of a sentimental desire for peaceful relations between the members of different religions...but one which is deeply rooted in a recognition of, and respect for, the holiness that lies at the core of all faith and wisdom traditions...”

The author argues that throughout Islamic history, in the South Asia region, Hindus, Buddhist, Zoroastrians and other religious groups were regarded by Muslims, not as pagans or polytheists but as “followers of an authentic religion”, and hence deserving of official protection by State authorities.

Muhammad Suheyl Umar concludes that if humanity is to survive and build a better future, humans must respect each other, and at the same time respect and learn from each other’s religions. Only then (in the words of Iqbal), “man may rise to a fresh vision of his future”.

7 M. Anissuzzaman in his paper on some aspects of South Asian cultural traditions postulates that given the multiplicity of cultures, languages and belief systems, it is appropriate to speak of South Asian *cultures* rather than *a* South Asian *culture*. At the same time, he acknowledges, threads of commonality have historically run through this multiplicity of cultures. He illustrates the idea of unity and diversity with a quote from Pascal, the 17<sup>th</sup> century French philosopher: “Plurality which is not reduced to unity is confusion; unity which does not depend on plurality is tyranny.”

Anissuzzaman argues that there is also a similarity across cultures in South Asia, in the literary response to the economic, political and social situation in South Asia. For example, Kabir, the 16<sup>th</sup> century Bhakti poet, rejects communal and caste discriminations and expresses a specifically South Asian universalism of love and tolerance.

Anissuzzaman concludes by indicating three elements of a cross cultural South Asian tradition which could be invoked in the struggle for achieving sustainable democracy, peace and environmental conservation: These are: respect for fellow human beings, a tolerance that rejects bigotry and militant extremism, and love of nature.

7 Kapila Vatsayayan in her paper on pluralism and diversity in South Asia draws an “eco-cultural cartography” of South Asia and discerns a pattern of inter-connectedness in the plural discourses of traditional communities relating to their experience of ecology, social life and the sacred. She argues that there is a complementarity between the geo-physical and eco-cultural zones in South Asia. The oceans and mountains are not only objectively connected in the ecosystem but there is also a subjective consciousness, articulated in various myths of the “intrinsic relationship of the vapors of the oceans with the glacial mountains”. This is also manifested in the artistic expression of communities, in which there is a complementarity between the functional and the mythical, the ephemeral and the perennial.

Vatsayayan argues that the Himalayas are not only a source of the major rivers, but are also part of the psyche of the people of South Asia. Similarly, she points out the rivers have permeated for millennia, our “cultural psyche”, and continue to ignite the consciousness...of contemporary poets of South Asia: the river lies between “promise and outcome” between the “ecstasy of pure waters and the agony of pollution”.

In exploring the connection between the imperatives of ecological conservation and culture with respect to forests, Vatsayayan refers to the myth of Shiva spreading his *jatas* to tame the Ganga and enable her to flow smoothly. She argues that the message of this myth is important for environmental conservation because the *jatas* of Shiva are the forests and the topsoil.

Vatsayayan suggests that the idea of the sacred as distinct from institutional religions was built into the cultural psyche of South Asia as a mode of reminding us that nature has to be nurtured to sustain life. She refers to the work of Seyyed Hossein Nasr who points out with reference to Islam, that “...the soul which is nourished and sustained by the Qur’an does not regard the world of nature as its enemy to be conquered and subdued, but as an integral part of its religious universe, sharing in its earthly life and in a sense even its ultimate destiny.” She argues that if this latent consciousness were to be rediscovered today, it may become a basis of consensus among the nation-states of South Asia for cooperation in environmental protection.

Vatsayayan postulates that biodiversity is linked with the cultural diversity of South Asia and its wide range of traditional communities. Each has its own unique culture, language, arts and forms of achieving in their material and spiritual lives, a balance between production and nature. She argues that these communities have developed methods of conservation of the natural environment which ought to be incorporated into sustainable development strategies.

Vatsayayan explores the relationship between the pattern of agriculture production and cultural practices which vitalize and sustain the integrity of rural communities: They come together for festivals at the time of seeding, sowing and harvesting. She argues that on these occasions, communities with different identities come together. This togetherness is a mode of “establishing cohesiveness and transcending narrow boundaries of social hierarchy...” She advises development practitioners of the need to take note of these self organized occasions which defuse social tensions and enable the achievement of new social equilibriums. They

demonstrate the capacity of the cultural psyche to enable communities with different religious or ethnic identities, to momentarily lose their specific identities to experience togetherness and reinforce the values of sharing and caring.

Vatsyayan argues that “the many genres of the musical and theatrical traditions of South Asia brought together diverse social and religious identities without conflict”. The great reservoir of oral literature, such as Bhakti poetry, Bardic traditions, Buddhist chants, minstrels, the message of the Bauls, the couplets of the Sufis and the fakirs, the music of the Qawaals, still resonate in the consciousness of people across South Asia: they provide pathways to experiencing unity in diversity across historical time and hierarchical structures. These forms of poetic and artistic expression can still be brought to bear in establishing communication between the civil societies of the nation-states of South Asia.

We could conclude by suggesting that through the interplay of the plurality of religions and cultures in South Asian history has emerged a consciousness of transcendent unity. It is this dialectic of cultures, forms of production and social life that constitutes the perennial tradition of South Asia and the traditional sensibility. It resonates in our music, poetry and dance, which together celebrate our simultaneous presence in the ephemeral and eternal. A rediscovery of the perennial wisdom of South Asia can shape a new relationship between humans, commodities and nature to sustain democracy, economy and life in the twenty first century.

Akmal Hussain  
Muchkund Dubey

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