CHAPTER - ONE

SOUTH ASIA : A REGION

South Asia has been one of the great cradles of human civilisation. It has also been the battle ground for enormous conflicts and struggles of a large mass of humanity. This sub-continent is massive in its area and population, prominent in geographical position and overwhelming in its problems. The concept of South Asia has changed from time to time. By the time the British consolidated their hold in this region, South Asia's importance had only become multi-dimensional political, economic and strategic. South Asia is the best defined sub-system of the post-war international system. As far as concept of region

is there, T.B. Miller writes, 'Like beauty, the region tends to be in the minds of the beholder, or perhaps of the participant'. Traditionally, the South Asian sub-system includes countries of the Indian sub-continent, from Afghanistan in west to Myanmar in the east and south of former Soviet Union's Asian expanse and China. Both Afghanistan and Myanmar individually, are 'border line' cases because they belong equally to South-West Asia and South-east Asia respectively. But now with the formation of South Asian Association for Regional cooperation (SAARC) in 1985, the problem of identifying the countries of South Asia has become simpler. The countries of the SAARC, viz., Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka constitute the area of this research work, along with India's border dispute with China.

South Asia, as a region has some important characteristics. One of them is its Indo-Centric character, both geographically and in terms of socio-cultural continuities and in economic infrastructure. The British exit in 1947 did two things for South Asia: Firstly, it left India divided into two countries, i.e. India and Pakistan; and secondly, it also left India as the strongest power in South Asia. The power status India had in 1947 made the South Asian balance of power revolve around it. The other

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countries of the region, like Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Sri Lanka have individually and separately more in common with India than with each other. Conversely, there is a bit of India in every other country of South Asia. As against this, there is hardly anything of significance which is common among India's neighbours. If anything, it is India, that is common between them. Pointing out the Indo-Centric character of the region, Nehru once said, "India is very curiously placed in Asia, and her history has been influenced a great deal by geographical factor plus other factors. Whichever problem in Asia you may take up, somehow or the other India comes into the picture - she can not be ignored also because of her actual or potential power and resources." The situational distribution of 1947 along with the rationale of non-alignment helped India to evolve a concept of 'order' for South Asia. This order was based on one essential principle - that South Asia must be kept free of extra-regional intervention. But this characteristic makes India the proverbial Big Brother in South Asia with all its negative connotations. A Pakistani author writes, "The South Asian states accept India's dominant position in the region, but are not enthusiastic about a domineering India. Perhaps it would be useful for India to refrain from oft - repeated reminder of its size and power

4. Ibid.

5. Rajni, B. (Dr.) 'India and South Asianism' in Third Concept, vol. 4, No. 58, December 1991, p. 31.

potential and instead prove its claim to big power status by exhibiting more magnanimous behaviour towards its neighbours."

India is a sub-continent stretching from the Himalayas to the Indian Ocean, with the second largest population and the seventh largest territory in the world. Pakistan and Bangladesh are tenth and eighth in world population rank, with high density and large territory. Nepal and Bhutan are landlocked Himalayan states, and Sri Lanka and the Maldives are island communities in the Indian Ocean. India constitutes about 75 per cent of South Asia in terms of demography territory and natural resources. It is the only state in the region, whose boundaries touch, by land or water, the territories of all the other six states in the region - four by common land borders and two by common maritime borders. It has also close physical proximity to Afghanistan in South-West Asia, to three Central Asian Republics, and China in the East Asia, Myanmar in South-east Asia, as well as Indonesia by adjoining territorial waters. Pakistan in the east is flanked by India while its western border runs parallel to Afghanistan and partly with Iran in South-West Asia, then in the north it has proximity both with China and the Central Asian Republics, and its maritime borders meet those of Oman, not far from the Strait of Hormuz. Bangladesh's border touch only India, on all its sides.

though part of it in the east also touches Myanmar. Both Nepal and Bhutan in the Himalayan ranges have India in the South and China in the North. Another characteristic of South Asian region is its hierarchical power structure. The break up of Pakistan enhanced India's position within the region and made the system more hierarchical in terms of relative levels of power. Cohen Park writes, "A state such as India, by virtue of its size, resources and geographical location, finds itself a great power in regional terms, whether it seeks or not that label."

To make this study understandable, it will be better to present a brief introduction of all the countries in the region.

BANGLADESH:

Bangladesh is a country in the Indian sub-continent in the delta of the Rivers Ganga and Brahmaputra. It is bounded on three sides by India. Myanmar lies to the South east and constitutes the only non-Indian boundary. It covers an area of 143,996 sq. km. Bangladesh emerged as an independent sovereign Republic in December 1971 after the discontent under a government centred in West Pakistan led to the outbreak of civil war. Sheikh

Mujibur Rahman became the first President of Bangladesh. In August 1975, he was gunned down in a military coup. Gen. Zia-ur-Rahman assumed power in 1976 and was elected President in 1978 in the first Presidential elections. He was also assassinated in 1981. The military, led by Lt. Gen. Hussain Mohammed Ershad, took power in March 1982. He became President in 1983. But political unrest led to his resignation in 1990. General Election were held in 1991 and Begum Khalida Zia of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) became the Prime Minister.

About 98 per cent of the population of Bangladesh is Bengali. The remainder consist of Biharis, an Urdu-speaking people, and tribal groups of various origins. More than four-fifths of population are Muslims. The people are largely occupied in agriculture, rice being by far the most important crop. Bangladesh produces 50% of the world's raw jute, its main export. Fishing is also important.

Bangladesh has played a very important role towards regional cooperation. It was the country which initiated the process which resulted into the formation of South Asian Association for Regional

cooperation (SAARC). The relations between India and Bangladesh have at times been characterised by confrontation, although this confrontation did not assume serious dimension at any stage. With all other countries of the region, Bangladesh enjoys good relations.

BHUTAN:

Bhutan is situated in the eastern Himalayas, between the parallels 26°41' and 28°7' of north latitude and 88°54' and 91°54' of east longitude. In the north it is bordered by Tibet, all other sides are bounded by Indian territory. The kingdom possesses high and rugged mountains, abrupt and lofty heights, dark and deep gorges and beautiful hills and valleys of great scenic magnificence. It covers an area of 47,000 sq. km. Bhutan's geography has influenced its history, culture and the life of its inhabitants. Its inaccessible mountainous terrain and thick forest growth has for centuries endowed it with an isolation from the outer world. At the same time, lack of contact with outside world has allowed it to evolve through centuries a distinct pattern of civilisation, social and economic life, religious and political institutions. Bhutan is a hereditary constitutional monarchy with one legislative house. The King is the fountain of all state

17. Sukhwal, B.L., op.cit., p. 182.
power in the country. One of the remarkable facts about Bhutan is that despite its small size and population, it has always remained a sovereign independent country throughout its recorded history which goes back to the 7th century A.D. This was due partly to the inaccessibility of its terrain but to a greater measure it was the result of its policy of self-imposed isolationism. Now this age-long old policy of isolation has been completely given up. In search of material prosperity Bhutan still retains a pastoral economy, which its geographical location and historical tradition forced on it, but the country is now on a march of socio-economic progress. It has now adopted a policy of participation in international affairs and socio-economic fields. The common man in Bhutan has a new social and economic awareness.

Agriculture is the chief occupation of the people. The principal products are rice, corn, millet, wheat, barley, maize and forest produce like wax, lac musk etc. The country has a great potential for economic development. The principal resources are the forests, the rivers and the mineral deposits. These are quite substantial from the point of view of commercial and industrial exploitation. The majority of people in Bhutan

are Bhotias of Tibetan origin. Also present are Gurung and Assamese. Most are Buddhists. Buddhism has always played an important role both in the history of Bhutan and in the way of life of its people. There are also Hindus and Muslims.

Bhutan has had a high level of continuity in its political system and elite since 1947. Thus, the changes that have taken place in its foreign policy are changes in perception of the country's geo-political environment. Under the terms of a treaty with India, Bhutan is guided by India in its foreign policy. It is interesting to note that historically Bhutan has never had any disputes or problems with any of its South Asian neighbours. As a result, Bhutan today enjoys very close and friendly relations with all its neighbours in South Asia.

**INDIA:**

India is one of the oldest civilizations with a rich cultural heritage. It has achieved multi-faceted socio-economic progress during last 45 years of independence. It covers an area of 32,87,263 sq. km. extending from the snow-covered Himalayan heights to tropical rain forests of the South. As seventh largest country in the world, India is well-marked off from the rest of Asia by mountains and the sea, which give the country a distinct

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geographical entity. Lying entirely in the northern hemisphere, the mainland extends between latitude $80^\circ 4'$ and $37^\circ 6'$ north, longitudes $68^\circ 7'$ and $97^\circ 15'$ east and measures about 3,214 km. from North to South between the extreme latitudes and about 2,933 km. from East to West between the extreme longitudes. It has a land frontier of about 15,200 km., and a coastline of 25,751.5 km. The countries having a common border with India are Afghanistan and Pakistan to north-west, China, Bhutan and Nepal to north, Burma and Bangladesh to east, Sri Lanka is separated from India by a narrow channel of sea formed by the Palk Strait and the Gulf of Mannar.

India attained independence on 15th August 1947 after a prolonged struggle against the colonial rule. On January 26, 1950, India adopted its own Constitution, proclaiming India as a sovereign democratic Republic. Jawahar Lal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, enunciated the adoption of basic principles of democracy, secularism, socialism and planned economic development at home and the practice of non-violence and non-participation in military blocs as the fundamentals of foreign policy. Nehru was succeeded by Lal Bahadur Shastri under whose leadership India fought a war with Pakistan in 1965. Shastri died in January 1966, and was succeeded by Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Under Mrs. Gandhi's leadership, India faced another war with Pakistan in 1971 which resulted in the dismemberment of erstwhile East Pakistan and emergence of

Bangladesh. In June 1975 Internal emergency was promulgated in India till March, 1977, when fresh elections were conducted which resulted in the defeat of the Congress and the Janta Party, a conglomeration of five parties was voted in power. In 1980, Congress came back into power with Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister. She was assassinated by her security guards in 1984 and Rajiv Gandhi became Prime Minister. In 1989 General Election, again a coalition government led by V.P. Singh came into power. He was succeeded by Chandrashekhar. In 1991 election the Congress came to power with P.V. Narsimha Rao as Prime Minister.

No society is as heterogeneous as India. It is an amalgam of diverse races, ethnic groups, religions and languages. The major religious communities of India are the Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain and Parsi. India's large population is occupied in Agriculture. One of the biggest sources of its wealth is its produce from land. There is hardly any crop of the tropical, sub-tropical or temperate zone which is not grown in this country. The mineral and power resources in India are also considerable. There are plentiful reserve of high grade iron ore, manganese, chromite, lime-stone and many others. Yet India is industrially under-developed and is miles behind the advanced countries. As far as South Asian region is concerned, it


27. Sukhwal, B.J., op.cit., p. 408.
has the biggest and the most advanced economy. A pioneer in non-alignment, a crusader of Third World interests, a believer in disarmament, India has stressed regional co-operation and co-existence in its policies with the desire to solve regional disputes bilaterally and establish peace and stability. However, its interest in South-Asian affairs has been dubbed by its neighbours as political interference and its intentions as those of an emerging power.

MALDIVES:

Maldives is the least known and least developed country in South Asia. It is an archipelago country in the Indian Ocean, 400 miles to the South-west of India and Sri Lanka. It consists of some 1,200 low-lying coral islands (only 220 inhabited) grouped into 12 clearly defined clusters of atolls but divided into 19 districts for administrative purposes. It extends for about 300 miles north to south. Major assets of Maldives are its natural beauty marine resources. The islands are covered with coconut and palms and yield millet and fruit as well as coconut produce.

Till 1965, Maldives was under British protectorate. It attained independence on July 26, 1965. It became a republic in November 1968. It has a congruous ethnic, religious and linguistic configuration. The people are a mixture of Dravidian, Sinhalese

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29. Ibid.
and Arab stock. Most of the people are seafarers. Coconuts, fruits and millet are the main crops. The Chief occupation is fishing and processing the fish is the main industry. Bonito (Maldive fish) is main export commodity and Japan is main buyer. Tourism - a burgeoning industry started in the 1970s, is expanding day by day. Both tourism and fishing which account for a major share in the GDP and more than 314 share of its foreign exchange earnings are very much dependent on the vagaries of external environment. Incidentally, with the smallest population among the SAARC countries, Maldives happens to have the highest per capita income (about $400). But there are many constraints in the way of Maldives. The impending environmental disaster and consequent sea-level rise has put a danger to the very existence of Maldives. As the Maldives is at a mean altitude of less than two kilometers above the sea level, even a small rise in sea-level threatens the physical survival of the atoll state. This also necessitates further, economic cushioning from the world around and beyond it.

NEPAL:

Nepal is the small mountainous country with a total land area of about 147,000 sq. kilometers. It is totally land locked.

32. Ibid.
country. It is bounded on north by Tibet and on other three sides by India - in the east by Sikkim and West Bengal, on the South and West by Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Nepal has no easy outlet to the outside world except through the Indian territory. India and Nepal are close neighbours. Their common bonds cover a wide variety of factors including geography, economy, history, culture, traditions, religion, race and even close political association. Casual acquaintance with the geography and history of this region would suffice to indicate that India's security and stability are extricably tied up with the security and stability of Nepal, in view of the Chinese occupation of Tibet.

Nepal's southern border with India lies on the Gangetic plain, from which numerous routes lead into the hill areas which form 80% of the territory of the state. The southern rim at the foot of the hills, called the Tarai, is the focus of most of Nepal's agricultural and industrial production and provides the government with approximately 75% of its revenue, while, with a width of about 16 to 20 miles, it covers only 17% of the total land area of the territory. The hill areas of Nepal are formed by three east-west ranges, the Siwalik in the South; the Mahabharat in the centre; and the Himalaya in the North. The Mahabharat range.

34. Ibid.
Nepal's principal defence line against invasion from the South, is also India's line of defence against invasion and aggression from the north in this and other sections of the frontier with Chinese controlled Tibet.

The kingdom of Nepal was founded in 1769 by Prithvi Narayan Shah. Narayan's descendants ruled the kingdom until the 1840s when the Rana family established an autocratic system which lasted until 1950. In 1950 the power was restored to king Tribhuwan Bir Bikram Shah Deo. He ruled in a quasi-constitutional manner. This type of rule continued after him under king Mahendra. A democratic constitution promulgated in 1956 paved the way for elections which brought the Nepali Congress Party to power with B.P. Koirala as Prime Minister. In December 1960 the King dismissed the Government and the constitution and banned the political parties.

King Birendra Bikram Shah succeeded his father in January, 1972. In late 1980s, the economic hardships suffered by the masses spurred the people's discontent against the royal regime. There was upsurge for democratic rights which the King's administration failed to suppress. An interim government comprising the Nepali Congress, the Communists and the King's men came to power with Mr. K.P. Bhattarai as Prime Minister. In November 1990, new

Constitution was promulgated to bring in multiparty democratic system with the constitutional monarch on the British pattern. In May 1991, in first elections for multiparty Parliament, Nepali congress got a clear majority and Girjja Prasad Koirala became Prime Minister.

Nepal is the homeland of several ethnic groups, made up of a variety of races and tribes speaking different languages and dialects. Ancestors of most of these people migrated either from India or Tibet. In the north and east live Bhotias, Tamangs, Limbus, Rai's and Sherpas. In the centre are the Newars, in the west and along the Mahabharat ranges the Magars, the Kirats, the Gurungs and in the Tarai line the Dhunals, Jaisis, the Kshatriyas and the Brahmins. 90% people follow Hinduism. There are a number of Muslims also in the Tarai region, constituting about 5% of the total population. There are some Buddhist also.

Agriculture, supplemented by husbandry is the main occupation of the people of Nepal. It also abounds in mineral resources such as coal, cobalt, copper, iron, lead and mica. Landlocked Nepal is helplessly dependent on India for its international trade. Sixty per cent of Nepal's trade is with India.

39. Ram Rahul, op.cit., p. 35.
40. Sengupta, Bhabani, op.cit., p. 41.
Nepal has a history in the course of which different tribes attained political power and eminence and several ruling clans and dynasties changed hands and influenced the character and pattern of Nepali life and culture. Political frontier - lines shifted quite often, but Nepal has had the proud privilege of retaining her independence through the centuries despite adverse and tangled circumstances. Having common border with India and China, it has maintained good relations with both the countries. Nepal has emphasised the need to increase the regional co-operation involving Bhutan, China, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

**PAKISTAN**

Pakistan came into existence following the division of the Indian sub-continent in August, 1947. It is bordered by Afghanistan and Iran in the West, China in the north and India in the east, and the Arabian sea in South. Pakistan consists largely of high mountains, plateau and plains. Breaching the ranges are many passes, most notable of which is Khyber pass. The largest, plateau area lies in Baluchistan, in the southwest. A weak form of tropical monsoon climate occurs much of the country, with arid conditions in the north and west. Pakistan is situated between the **13 1/2°** and **35°N latitude and 6 1/2° and 75°E longitude.**

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43A. Ibid.
When Pakistan came into being in August, 1947, Jinnah became the first Governor-General and Liaquat Ali Khan, the first Prime Minister. In 1955 Sikandar Mirza was installed as the President, who declared martial law and dissolved all political parties in 1958. Then Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan took over the Presidency. In 1965 Ayub Khan was elected as President for five years. In the wake of growing political and economic discontent followed by extensive disturbances, Ayub Khan resigned on 25 March, 1969 and General Yahya Khan took over as Chief Martial Law Administrator. In 1970, normal political activity was allowed. After Indo-Pak war of December 1971, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto took over as Mr. Yahya Khan, and chief Martial Law Administrator of Pakistan.

In July, 1972 India and Pakistan concluded Simla-Agreement according to which both sides agreed to initiate negotiations by means of which the two countries could resolve their outstanding differences. In August, 1975 a new Constitution was adopted in Pakistan and Z.A. Bhutto became the Prime Minister. In March, 1977 General elections were held in Pakistan which returned Bhutto's People Party to power with overwhelming majority.

Following a coup in July 1977, Z.A. Bhutto was arrested (and hanged later on) and martial law was imposed. General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq became the chief Martial Law Administrator. He died in an air crash. Then Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) came to power. But her government was dismissed by President Ishaq Khan. Nawaz Sharif became Prime Minister but after sometime he was also dismissed by the President, though was reinstated by order of Pakistan Supreme Court. At present President and Prime Minister both have resigned and elections are to be held in October 1993.

Pakistan is an agricultural country with more than three quarters of its population directly dependent on agriculture. The river Indus and its supporting irrigation networks constitute the core agricultural area of Pakistan, an area with complex and extensive irrigation systems and fertile lands. Wheat is the chief crop. Others are sugarcane, rice, millet, corn, mustard and barley. Cotton is a leading crop. In the industrial field, cotton textiles is a leading industry. Others are agricultural processing such as sugar refining, paper-making etc.

Majority of population in Pakistan is Muslim. About 1.5% are Christians, another 1.5% Hindus. Punjabi, Pashto and Sindhi form the major linguistic groups. Pakistan emerged as the easternmost contiguous extension of the Islamic world. Following the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan it has forged closer links with the more conservative Islamic states and identified itself

more with the Gulf countries. Political democracy has been gradually evolving in Pakistan. A democratic and stable political system in Pakistan can be a major force in bringing peace, stability and greater cooperation in the region.

SRI LANKA:

The island of Sri Lanka lies 20 miles of the Southern coast of India, separate from it by the Indian Ocean but almost joined to it by the chain of islands called Adam's Bridge. It is situated between the northern latitudes 5°55' and 9°50' and eastern longitudes 79°42' and 81°52'. The total land area is 65,609.86 square kilometers. Besides being neighbours, there is a direct linkage between people of India and Sri Lanka. Laying some 400 miles north of the equator, the island is the detached portion

51. Sukhwat, B.L., op. cit., p. 689.
52. Ibid.
of the mainland of India, a part of its vast southern plateau. This nearness to India has affected considerably the course of her history as it has opened her for the influence of currents of thoughts and feelings from India and has provided her ruling dynasties. The beautiful island with its luxuriant vegetation and striking scenery, has rightly been called the "pearl of the Indian Ocean". Northern half is plain, south-central part is hilly. Highest peak is Pidurutalagala. There are tropical forests on the hills and tree-studded grassland on the plains. Sri Lanka became an independent state on 3 February 1948 after centuries of foreign domination. Until 1950, the country was governed by the United National Party. In 1956, Sri Lanka Freedom Party was voted to power, and stayed in office till 1965, when the UNP was again able to gain hold over government. In 1970 and 1977 election UNP retained the power. In 1977 J.R. Jayewardene became President. He was succeeded by R. Premdas, who was assassinated by a human bomb on 1st May 1993. Now Mr. Wijetunga has taken place of R. Premdas.

The economy of the country is based on agriculture. Rice is main food crop. Since tea, rubber and coconut are grown extensively. Sri Lanka is a leading exporter of these commodities.


Due to close proximity of the two nations, whereby India, being an industrialized nation among the world's developing countries, is a convenient source of supply for many of the items that Sri Lanka needs. Strategically also, Sri Lanka is very important in the South Asian region. Dr. P. Saran writes, "Ceylon is half way house between the East and the West. Its position in the Indian Ocean has proved favourable and today Colombo is an important port of call for all steamships that cross the Indian Ocean from east to west and vice versa via the Suez canal." Sri Lanka has a plural society, a blend of several communities distinguished from one another along ethnic, religious or linguistic grounds. An island-wide national sense is yet to be effectively evolved. The Sinhalese, who form the majority constituting about 75% of population are principally Buddhist and speak Sinhalese. The other community is Tamil, the besieged minority, 18.2% of population, are Hindus and speak Tamil.

South Asia as a region has its peculiarities. In several other regions, like Europe, Latin America or even South-east Asia, no regional power is so overwhelmingly dominant or central as India in South Asia. Geo-politically, India is not only the major

56. Ibid., p. 6.
power, but also constitutes the core of the region. Others are not only relatively smaller powers, but are on the periphery. This geo-political composition of the South Asian sub-system has given rise to intra-regional fears and tensions. It has led to the states in the region to search for options outside the region. Despite the presence of a number of common features the countries of South Asia have not been able to evolve cooperative relations and their relations are characterised by numerous conflicts. Of late, of course, the countries of South Asia have realised the need of cooperation and made some progress in this direction. These characteristics of the region have brought some issues on the surface which will be discussed in the following chapters.