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# **Rise of Extremism in South Asia**

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## **SECTION I**

### **South Asia's General Scenario**

## **Introduction**

The South Asian region currently faces grave security threats due to the increasing extremism and terrorist activities within its states. The politics of violence and extremist trends in South Asia can be linked to the contradictions arising out of faulty national policies. In each case, the nature and the political economy of the state have been instrumental in one way or another in the creation of current crisis. The South Asian states tend to function in the interests of a coalition of classes and ethnic groups or the military-bureaucratic oligarchy, which directly influence national development policies and the distribution of resources. The dynamics of the uneven development patterns in South Asia has been among the predominant causes of violence in the region.[1] Interference from the external powers, from neighbouring and extra-regional elements (both as official sponsorship and by independent groups) has given a dangerous tilt to the existing volatile situation.

South Asia accounts for one fifth of the world population in seven distinctive states, housing around 43 per cent of the global poverty. The per capita GNP of the region is around \$440, which is among the lowest in the world and its share in global income remains less than 2 per cent.[2] Even though it is a resource-rich region, whose potential has yet to be fully tapped, the human development sector remains a low priority, and according to a survey approximately 46 per cent of world's illiterate population lives in South Asia.[3] With such a human development index, the region remains one of the most explosive regions of the world.

Presently, South Asia is facing multi-faceted challenges, both as a region and as inter-state relations. Apart from the dominant Indo-Pak conflictual relationship, the region remains trapped in a mosaic of crisis ranging from the quest for autonomy, terrorism, conflicting political interests, ethnic and sectarian conflicts. The region's vast potential is hostage to unresolved inter-state and intra-state conflicts. In addition to such conflicts, the states of the region are also locked in a host of bilateral territorial disputes, as well as disputes over water sharing of common rivers, refugee and migration problems.[4] In most of the states, democracy and democratic institutions have failed to strengthen and other social problems such as unemployment, social injustice, poverty along with self-interest politics have obstructed socio-economic development of the region. Besides, the slow transition to modernity, among these South Asian states, political culture has also led to ethnic solidarities and identification with religion and culture.[5]

The most potent threat to security of the region emanates from the complex interplay of domestic, regional and international factors. These factors deepen the crisis in the region, where societies are already fragmented along with caste and community; and with linguistic, regional and cultural differences. Many of the internal security crisis that plague South Asian states, have cross-border implications and are inter-related with ramifications for regional security.[6] The worsening of the security situation and the rise in extremism in many of South Asian states is also related to the outside interference. The recent years have also witnessed marked rise of extremist elements and terrorist activities in most of the regional states. The spread of the 'spheres of extremism' in South Asia has created an immensely complicated situation in an already turmoil-ridden environment. The rise of extremism has led to greater terrorist incidents, and terrorism, as broadly understood, has been playing a critical role in influencing the current thrust of bilateral relations in the region.[7]

Before analysing the on-ground realities of the region, it will be pertinent to define and identify the types of extremism prevalent in the region, while also trying to understand the concept of terrorism in the context of South Asia and its ramifications on the regional security. "Extremism", as defined in Merriam Webster dictionary, "is a quality or state of being extreme, especially advocacy of extreme political measures". It can also be described as a, "political theory savouring immoderate, uncompromising policies".[8] Extremism is closely associated with terrorism, as the rise of extremism can also lead to increase in terrorist agendas. Terrorism can be understood, as "a series of acts intended to spread intimidation, panic, and destruction in a population".[9] It can also be defined as "threat or use of violence, often against civilian population and social ends to intimidate opponents or to publicize grievances".[10]

Rise of extremism and terrorism has taken place in South Asia for a variety of reasons, like political and social perpetration by tyrannical and aggressive governments and groups of rebels, within a socio-political environment of oppressive cultural norms, social injustice, ideological contradictions, rigid religious beliefs and foreign interference. While, socio-economic factors like poverty, unequal job opportunities, hunger, backwardness and unemployment have added in the worsening of situation.[11] However, the contributory factors of terrorism have roots in the socio-economic inequalities and politically manipulative processes.[12]

Terrorism and its political consequences have directly and visibly affected interstate relations in South Asia and have also led to destabilization in the region. With marked rise of extremism and increasing terrorist activities, particularly in the past decade, the South Asian region has the highest annual number of fatalities as a result of acts of terrorist violence in the world. Ethnic, ideological and political conflicts, which are consolidating along with the worsening socio-economic conditions, pose a serious threat to internal stability and interstate relations. [13]

Since the early 1990s, ideology-based violence has increased all over the region. This entails religious dimensions such as the 'Hindutva' ideology of the RSS and its Sangh Parivar in India, as well as political ideologies such as the Maoist movement in Nepal, with its cross-border linkages to the Naxalite movement in India. Hindu nationalism, in India, has given rise to its brand of politico-religious fundamentalism and this has been exploited by the 'political entrepreneurs' to gain political mileage.[14] However, this Hindu 'nationalism' has been religious only in the sense that Hindu 'nationalists' have made use of religion for their political ends. The role of religion-based organizations such as Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has been pre-dominant one in inciting the religious confrontation in the Indian political scene. This religion-based politics helped Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in getting more votes from the Hindu majority,[15] and it enabled BJP and its parent organization - RSS[16]- to use extremism to further their political interests. The rise of the Hindutva ideological political party to power has not only promoted violence against minorities but also set an agenda for the re-conversion of Muslims and Christians.[17]

In Pakistan, the roots for 'Islamic Fundamentalism' were laid during Zia's rule, when the government funds collected as 'zakat' were provided for establishing madrassas (religious schools), leading to rapid growth of

militant religious organizations. During the same period foreign funded sectarian madrassas also grew all around the country. This process was catalysed by the Afghan war and the US support for Jihad.[18] Zia also initiated the process of Islamisation of society and his policies encouraged the formation of militant groups to fight Afghan war, against Soviets. After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the shift in US interests left Pakistan's government alone to deal with the increased militancy in the country.

The subsequent governments in the post-Zia period did not have means or the political will to curtail the activities of and deweaponize the militant outfits. Later the influence of the religious parties and militant organizations was further accelerated by the US led war on terrorism and Pakistan's decision of joining it. This also politically favoured religious parties, which had earlier remained in background and had failed to achieve any prominent political position, to come into power as a result of October 2002 elections. They are main opposition in centre and have formed governments in North West Frontier province (NWFP) and Baluchistan. These parties have capitalised on anti-Americanism, particularly in NWFP and Baluchistan, and have pursued a radical political, social and cultural agenda.[19]

This ideological extremism and use of religion in politics has created a very dangerous situation for the region. The extremist parties are using religion and ideology to ignite public sentiments and are creating instability within societies. This has also led to rise of sectarianism in Pakistan and communalism in India. The unprecedented sectarian violence against the Sikhs in Delhi and other parts of India, following the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards in October 1984, resulted in killing of 2,000 people.[20] Later following the Godhra train incident, the communal riots in Indian Gujarat in 2002 left almost 2,000 Muslims dead, at the hands of right wing Hindus. The Gujarat state government was accused of complicity in the program by the appointed investigation tribunal, but BJP reaped the benefit of stirring extremist Hindu passion in a huge win in state elections in mid-December 2002.[21] The political parties for their vested interests utilized these events.

In the early years, there had been clashes between Ahmadiyya community and other politico-religious groups in Pakistan, especially in 1953 most violent confrontation among Ahmadies and other sects took place,[22] which was mainly the result of political manipulation of different political agents. The formation and consolidation of Shia and Sunni militant organizations in 1980s has intensified the sectarian clashes, which began as a result of Zia's Islamic policies and Iranian revolution of 1979. With Pakistan's participation in US led war on terrorism since September 2001, these sectarian clashes have regained momentum, while the madrasa culture has also accentuated existing sectarian cleavages.[23] Since 9/11, there had been violent attacks against the Shia community in different parts of the country, particularly in Baluchistan, which had been relatively peaceful, as far as sectarian harmony is concerned.

In Bangladesh too, Islamic elements are on the rise in Bangladesh and extremist influence is growing, especially in the countryside[24] and 'political Islam', envisaged by General Zia in late 1970s, seems to be paying rich dividends. With the influx of alumni from the estimated 64,000 madrassas in Bangladesh, and lesser opportunities available in employment sector, militant Islam is on increase.[25] As a result of the October 2001 elections, religious parties have come into power. Bangladesh National Party (BNP) has formed government in coalition with Jamaat-e-Islami (Jel). Although these religious militants are not as strong as in Pakistan or in India, but their inclusion in government is certainly a change in the traditional government formation style. This has indirectly strengthened the radical groups, which now act as if they have gained impunity to operate.[26]

In Nepal the Maoist uprising, which began in 1996, is now the major security challenge for Nepal, having affected most of the 75 districts of the state. In November 2001, the government imposed emergency in the country.[27] The Maoist insurgency is an outcome of political instability and socio-economic backwardness. The increasing violence has led to killing of more than 7,800 people since 1996 and devastated the Nepalese

economy, which was heavily dependent on tourism.[28] The Maoist guerrillas have been successful in attracting the frustrated rural poor, and have become a major challenge to the present government.

Another type of extremism plaguing South Asia is of ethnic dimension. The worst victim of ethnic violence has been Sri Lanka, where since 1983 ethnic clashes among Sinhalese and Tamil, has grown in ferocity, leading to Indian interference in the island through Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) in 1987. The Liberation of Tamil Tigers Eelam (LTTE) has strengthened since then and the ethnic clash has claimed over 60,000 civilian lives.[29] Despite several rounds of talks between government and the Tamil guerrillas, no compromise could be reached and with the current political crisis in the island, even the renewed peace talks have again come to a halt. No chances apparently exist to resolve the issue in near future.

Ethnic violence has also been a feature in the politics of other South Asian countries. There had been from time to time clashes in both states on ethnic differences. In Pakistan, Karachi has been the main target of ethnic clashes. Particularly in early 1990s, with Muhajir Quami Movement (MQM), (which was created by the intelligence agencies during Gen. Zia's period, to counter Bhutto's political hold in Sindh), taking up violent means, the law and order situation worsened. The ethnic divide also sharply exists among the smaller provinces over the share Punjab province enjoys in governance and resources. India, has also, from time to time, faced ethnic violence in different areas, such as, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Assam. There had been widespread riots in Assam in 1983 against the 'aliens' (the Bangladeshi migrants), in which 1,200 were killed. Bangladesh has also been facing problems in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and also in other parts of the country. The issue of Rohingyas community has also created ethnic problem for the state. In Bhutan, the illegal immigration from Nepal has also become a thorny issue and Bhutanese government is making efforts along with the Nepalese government to resolve the issue peacefully.[30]

The next section discusses the causes and the factors that have led to the rise of extremism in South Asia.

### **Rise of Extremism: The leading factors in South Asia**

The governments of South Asian states have not been able to provide their people with the basic, minimum human security since these states became independent. Governments and ruling classes, instead of focusing on dealing with the issues of human survival and development, embarked upon perpetuating their power and influence. Subsequently, no South Asian country has been able to free itself from discriminatory and exploitative policies, which increased insecurity and led to the rising number of communal and terrorist outfits. Despite the problems these outfits have created, no serious government efforts were made to curtail the rise in extremist trends.

In the post-independence decades no South Asian state has been able to resolve the dilemma in the relationship between religion and politics.[31] Rather the crisis is getting severe because of the inability of states to establish stable governance, and create sustainable economic conditions, giving the extremist elements chance of taking advantage of the situation. The break up of colonial empire has also left these multi-ethnic states with the legacy unnatural boundaries resulting in intensified ethnic disturbances. This ethnic diversity that characterizes South Asian states, also at times translated into conflict as the result of manipulation by different groups for their own interest.[32]

There exists a clear linkage between the lack of security and the phenomenon of terrorism in South Asian states. All of the regional states are facing the menace of terrorism in one or another form. The state actors in South Asia have been unable to deal with pending issues in a just, fair and professional manner, which has translated into frustration and anger among certain section of societies, leading to various acts of terrorism. In addition to these, exploitation and persecution of minorities and other weaker sections of society by the majority and the state forces for political gains, also creates conditions for growth of terrorism.[33]

Indian social scientist, Rajni Kothari identifies three factors, which consolidated the process of tyranny in Indian state, in 1970s. These are: the equation of electoral process with democratic politics, the decline of state from an adjudicator of national interests to a criminal persona, and the perception that development is a techno-bureaucratic enterprise. Basic to all these aspects is the marked decline in the importance and authenticity of institutions. This also reflects the inability of politics to translate the diversity of interests. Although, he looks at this issue in the context of the pluralism of Indian society, it has relevance to other South Asian countries, where diversity exists in a different way. This phenomena has led to rise of communalism in India, while, its manifestation in Pakistan has been sectarian and ethnic in nature. In Sri Lanka, language as an issue has reflected into ethnic-based differences in Sinhala-Tamil confrontation beside economic inequality. Bangla nationalism has given rise to political factionalism and now the threat of religious extremism is also gaining momentum. In all these countries, these issues have created a serious situation because of rising violent movements and terrorist incidents.[34]

The violent campaigns in the South Asian countries today, led by a variety of parties and organizations appear to enjoy ideological sanctions. This has facilitated the political parties and the ruling elite to take advantage of the situation, for their vested political interests. Along with religion, politics and ethnicity another element that has played an important role in the mix of religion and politics in South Asia is ethnicity. Although the ethnic and religious nationalist movements have been powerful throughout South Asia's history but the governments of these states too have failed to envisage policies to curtail the momentum of these movements.[35]

Another dimension of the internal security problems of the regional states is that of illegal immigration, the proliferation of small arms alongside the menace of drug trafficking and narco-terrorism. Each of these issues has significant trans-national dimensions. This feature not only complicates the situation for the respective countries but also negatively affects the inter-state relations.

There are similarities in the domestic and external dimensions of terrorism, threatening the South Asian states. Internally suppression of political rights, poverty, economic backwardness, use of religion and ethnicity in politics and poor governance on the part of the state regarding the issues of human security has led to an increase in violence. The external dimension has been foreign patronage to local organizations training and supporting the terrorist groups, and also their indirect support to terrorist groups by using non-governmental groups and media.[36] Many of the South Asian countries blame each other for supporting the terrorist groups within their territories. Unresolved domestic issues create a fertile ground for terrorism to take root, while the external interference and support has further strengthened the terrorist networks. This phenomenon is true for all the states in South Asia and is explained in details in the subsequent sections.

Three main factors can be identified as being responsible for the growth of extremism in the region. The worsening economic conditions, with a very high population, which is around 1366 million, growing at the rate of 1.7 per cent[37], is creating frustration and insecurity among the masses. Poor governance and foreign interference have added to the instability and insecurity of the region. This is happening through out South Asia, although the time periods, dynamics and importance of these factors may vary, but these basic factors are present in all of the countries. These aspects are discussed in details below:

### ***Deteriorating Economic Conditions***

During 1990s, South Asia has witnessed a marked rise in poverty because of deteriorating economic conditions. The region is home to the poorest with 43 per cent of the worlds' poor surviving with less than a dollar a day and the rapid urbanization is giving an explosive dimension to the widespread poverty and human deprivation. With rapidly growing population, the governments have failed to develop the social sectors and in providing basic human security to their populations. Although the estimates of the incidence of poverty vary widely in the region, however, the basic fact remains that all the South Asian countries are deeply entrenched

in increasing poverty. According to UNDP's report for year 2000, there has been an increase in number of poor during the 1990s, with the exception of Sri Lanka.[38]

Although there has been an overall annual average GDP growth rate of 5.7 per cent, in the region during 1990-96, but this was not very different from the one experienced during 1980-90. Except in Pakistan, where GDP growth has been lower in 1990s compared to 1980s, other South Asian countries experienced gains in their GDP growth rates during 1990s. However, the rate of GDP growth since 1997 has shown deceleration in overall growth in the region.[39] Hence even after more than a decade not much substantial economic development took place in the region, while the economic disparity widened.

Poor economic growth in the region, led to the problems of mass unemployment, hunger and malnutrition, health problems and income inequality all of which are growing and alongside the increase in population growth. The key human development indicators show a dismal picture of the region.[40] South Asia's share in world's adult population in year 2001 was 22 per cent, while its share in world's adult illiteracy by year 2000 was 50 per cent.[41] The region is among the most illiterate regions with over 614 million illiterate adults, and also most malnourished with around 50 per cent of the region's children under the age of 5 years are malnourished.[42] During the period of 1990-2001, 32.2 per cent of the total population of the region lives under poverty line with less than \$1 a day.[43]

The multi-dimensional profile of poverty and human development index had a far-reaching impact on the society and its behaviour. South Asia has become a breeding ground of crime and violence[44] and with increasing insecurity and vulnerability; the competing interests have pitted caste and communal groups against each other. The economic inequalities and deprivation has created frustration and insecurity among the masses, leading to an increasing criminalisation of society in which there are available targets for exploitation by the extremist elements in and outside governments.

## **Government Policies**

Along with the deteriorating economies of South Asia, governmental policies have accentuated the extremist trend in all these states. Governments, in these countries, whether civil or military, have used the religion and ethnic card, in order to prolong and strengthen their rule, further strengthening the fundamentalists and extremists in the society. Many of the ruling parties are known to have links with the extremist elements and have covertly supported them, as well as used them to create violence for conducting manipulative politics. Each South Asian state manifests the impact of mal-governance in one way or another.

India, hailed as the largest democracy of the world, is like other South Asian states facing the frightening trend of criminalisation of its modern state. Indian social scientists have pointed to the inequalities in the society and the developmental divide, which has provided the environment for the criminalisation of politics and the resultant terrorism within sections of Indian society. The decades of unending inequality, misery and poverty has created a feeling of deprivation among the masses, leading to the communally-based or regionally-based demands.[45] The political process instead of dealing with the inequality has further widened the gap and the political parties have exploited the situation for their political ends.

Pakistan till today is facing the crisis of determining a relationship between the state and the religion, often leading to crisis of governance. This confusion has helped political parties to take advantage of the situation according to their respective interests. The use of religion in national politics was present since the independence, as the partition of sub-continent was on the basis of a religious identity. Though over the following decades, the role of religion remained ever-present, however, the politicisation of religion was inducted in Zia's period, when in order to legitimise and prolong his rule, Zia introduced Islamic laws, such as Hudood ordinance, Shariat Act and established Islamic courts with powers to declare any law repugnant to the injunctions of Islam. Later during the government sponsored madrassas, this later became a training ground of

religious militants. Subsequent governments also used religion to varying degrees, and with the deteriorating human, economic and security conditions, fundamentalism grew often translating into terrorist activities.

Bangladesh is also witnessing the consequences of the Gen. Zia-ur-Rehman's politicisation of religion, which eventually led to the surfacing of the Jamat-i-Islami. Religion as a political weapon is becoming more and more influential in politics as well as in society. Most of the political parties, whether in power or not, despite their commitment to the secular nature of the State, use the religion card in electoral politics.[46] Similar trends are visible in Sri Lanka and Nepal, where government policies instead of dealing with the lack of human security have used the deprived class, using religion and ethnic identities to consolidate their hold and same card is used by the opponent political forces.

## **External Interference**

The extremist trends have been boosted in the South Asian countries due to the interference by the extra-regional and neighbouring countries in the internal affairs of the states. The outside powers have either supported the governments or a particular communal or ethnic group or extremist elements, in pursuit of their interests. And this has been a major factor affecting South Asian politics since the early years of these states. The impact of the colonial masters, the British Empire's policies on the political and social dynamics of the region are still very much evident. The partition of the states without giving due consideration to the ethnic and communal diversification, which being an indigenous character existed even at the district level, sharpened the ethnic divisions and is to a great extent responsible for the separatist movements and the ethnic crisis, which the region is facing today. The present day South Asia is also facing the interference from the external powers, which has accelerated the process of radicalisation of the societies and politics.

Most of the ethnic movements in South Asia are cross-border and inter-related, exacerbating the intensity of these movements. The inter-state demographic migration and displacement intensified the ethnic identities within these states. The separatist and ethnic movements have also been supported from across the border, by the governments or any particular group, for its interests. Like the Tamil rebels group in Sri Lanka, is known to have links and has received support and been sponsored by the Indian government and the ethnic Tamil population in India. Similarly the Maoist in Nepal is known to have collaboration and sponsorship from India. The Kashmiri separatist movement in India has received support from the Pakistan. And the Bangla national movement, which, resulted in partition of Pakistan and formation of Bangladesh, was also strongly aided by Indian government.

Extra-regional actors have also played an important role in accelerating extremism in the region. To counter Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979, the United States supported and sponsored the Pakistani government and also the Jihadi groups during the period 1979-1989, which in post-1990 period became a threat for the security and stability of Pakistan. Similarly Iran after Iranian revolution of 1979 has openly been supporting the elements in Pakistan and also in Bangladesh to promote their version of Islam. Saudi Arabia has also been involved in similar activities. This led to strengthening of religious parties with extremist leaning and boosted the madrassa culture in Pakistan. After Soviet withdrawal and diminishing of US interests in the region, Pakistan was left in a complete lurch for dealing with the menace of terrorism and extremism spread over the decade of its war against Soviets. With the 9/11 incident, Pakistan once again became a frontline state in the war against terrorism. The renewed interference by US in Pakistan, and Pakistan's support against Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan once again aggravated the extremist and anti-US elements, having extensive implications on internal security situation.

Although the foreign interference in each of the South Asian countries varies in intensity, nevertheless, this has been a strong factor in creating and strengthening of the problem. Direct and indirect external support to the separatist and extremist groups, and also to governments in their policies has prolonged these movements and has created instability in the region, as a whole.

Hence, the economic conditions, government policies and outside interference (along with supplementary domestic factors such as poor governance and lack of human security) have led to the rise of extremism in South Asia and terrorism as a result, has become a menace for the region. Although these have been the basic factors behind the rise of extremism in South Asia but the role played by these factors varies in importance in all the regional countries. Therefore it would be helpful to hold a comparative analysis in the following section to give a comprehensive illustration of the extremism phenomena and the reasons for the rise, in the individual country.

## SECTION II

### Country-Wise Scenario

#### India

India, despite its global image of the world's largest democracy and a secular constitution, is marked by extreme social backwardness with the sizeable segments of population excluded from the economic, political and social mainstream. The untouchables and religious minorities, along with certain underdeveloped regions remain deprived of the economic and social opportunities and benefits, resulting in social friction and disparity, with around 34.7 per cent of the population living below the income poverty line. The GNP per capita remains US\$460 and unemployment level at 7.3 per cent of the labour force.[47] Such economic situation has resulted in social and political deterioration of society, which consequently has led to repeated crisis.

Sharp regional disparities also exist in the country, for instance, Punjab, the richest Indian state, has a per capita income 4.3 times that of Bihar, the poorest state. What is creating resentment among the masses is the increase in economic disparity, since independence. Such economic variations also results in inter-state labour migration, which not only burdens the recipient state but also creates political and social friction between the locals and migrants and in long run results in ethnic friction and violence.

There has also been a process of steady communalisation of Indian state ever since the Hindutva forces have come to the fore, particularly since the 1980s. According to a scholar, "What is particularly striking about the present phase is the role of state in communalising the political process in overt and covert ways".[48] However, this trend of state-sponsored communalism is hardly a new factor in India, as it was true even during the British colonial rule. The situation has worsened since 1947, with the communal forces occupying a central place with more and more political parties veering around one form of communalism or another. There has been a sustained political mobilization by religion-based groups regarding communal issues over an expanding geographical area.[49] Increasing communalism has led to the emergence of extremist, militant organizations, enjoying close relations with governments in power at Central and Provincial levels, who use their clout, adding to the deteriorating situation.

Political conflicts in India today wrap around religion, caste and regional identities and have multiplied in number. Communalism, which had traditionally been associated with Hindu-Muslim relations, has since 1980s become wider phenomena including other religious communities, castes and classes. There have been widespread clashes between Hindus and Christians and also the bloody clashes between Sikhs and Hindus in Punjab,[50] further exacerbated by the political parties in power or in opposition. The multiplicity of crisis in India has created a situation in which overall human rights are threatened and the neglect by the state, of its basic political and economic tasks, has led to increased polarization among the masses resulting in increasing secessionist and sectarian demands. Some key issues and developments that have emerged in the recent decades are discussed below:



## **Rise of Communal Violence in India**

The religious and caste-based violence is increasing at an alarming rate in India. Particularly, since the 1980s and 1990s, as a result of changing electoral strategies by parties, with an increasing emphasis on religion and caste in politics, greater sense of insecurity has arisen among the various classes and the minorities.[51]

However, communalism has wider connotations than just politics, and also refers to the perception of mutual differences among the members of different religious communities, which give rise to conflict situations from time to time. The historically -inherited perceptions of mutual conflict has sometimes played a role in sustaining and consolidating differences within religious communities. This is particularly true about Hindus and Muslims.[52] The historical roots of the Hindu Muslim animosities can be traced back to the Mughal rule, which the traditional Hindu nationalists regard as a period of Hindu decline, ruthless Muslim political domination, and the acceptance of Islam by the low caste Hindus and demolition of sacred Hindu places.[53] Such views are often used by the extremist organizations for mobilizing public support for their respective political interests. For instance, during the Babri Masjid conflict, the Hindu nationalists were able to transform the site, into a symbol of Muslim military invasion and aggression against Hindus.

An objective view of Indian politics today, suggests that it is becoming more and more Hinduised at the cost of other minorities and this rise of Hindu chauvinism is far more dangerous than the extremism of other minorities. This is because of the fact that Hindus constitute the majority of the population, whereas the ethnic groups, which demand right of self-determination, form minorities within the national context.[54]

The Hindu-Muslim conflict in India has now become a weapon of political engineering wielded by the Hindu militant leaders bent on transforming India into a Hindu religious state.[55] Today the magnitude of inter-religious and inter-ethnic clashes is staggering: there are Hindu-Muslim, Hindu-Sikh, Hindu-Christian confrontations and also many sub-nationalist movements for greater autonomy. Whereas, the militant Hindutva forces have played a significant role in fuelling these conflicts, political parties in power have used their position in the government to play the religion card for their particular ends. The rise in violence has also helped the government in acquiring greater emergency powers for itself, and an increased use of force and intimidation,[56] thus perpetuating a climate of violence. Adding to these is the declining socio-economic conditions, which provides a breeding ground for the frustrated youth to be transformed into recruits for militant organizations. The steady rise of the Hindutva ideology, sponsored and protected by the state itself, has created an unprecedented environment of violence in India.

## **The Hindutva Ideology**

The rise of Hindutva forces as a political phenomenon in India was initially a north Indian manifestation, based in the Hindi-speaking areas, which later spread throughout the country with the help of the extremist forces.[57] Hindutva is the basic ideology of Sangh Parivar headed by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and includes organizations like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bajrang Dal and the former ruling party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP); has grown rapidly over the period of time. The basic aim of Hindutva is to unify India's Hindus into a dominant political force.[58] This movement is based on the premise that Hindus alone constitute the Indian nation as they are the original inhabitants of this land and have created this society and its culture. The Hindu nation has been repeatedly conquered by aliens, particularly the Muslims and then the Christian British and must acquire strength through RSS Sangathan to counter all present and future threats.[59]

The basis of the Sangh Parivar was laid in 1925, with the foundation of the RSS, which had its antecedents in the earlier Hindu Mahasabha. It was established as a paramilitary Hindu organization emphasising discipline and education, which caught the imagination of the Hindu masses. Between 1931 and 1933 the membership of the RSS rose to 12, 000 and by the time of partition it had grown to 600,000.[60] Although, the organization

was banned in 1948, when one of its members assassinated Gandhi in January 1948, however, the organization continued to promote the Hindutva ideology by establishing many other subsidiary wings. VHP was established by an RSS conference in 1964 as a vehicle for religious propagation. Bajrang Dal, another militant wing came into the forefront during the anti-Sikh violence wave of 1983-84. Later it also played a key role in demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. [61] The BJP was founded in 1980s as the electoral wing of the RSS, which was to serve as a Hindu nationalist alternative to India's major secular nationalist party, the Congress party. The establishment of the political wing was a part of RSS strategy for coming into state power. With the rise of BJP into political prominence, RSS has been able to expand the locus of its activities from civil society to the state structure.[62]

The Sangh Parivar has an impressive network of affiliated organizations including cultural and educational institutions. It also publishes a large number of publications in vernacular languages, thus influencing a large segment of society.[63] It has also established an extended overseas network, which derives significant revenue for its propaganda from the expatriate communities. As the population of Indian emigrants settled in United States, Britain, and elsewhere has grown significantly, especially during the last decade, so has the flow of money to Hindu extremist causes in India.[64] Shev Sena has been working as an active wing of Sangh Parivar since its inception in 1966, while being based at Maharashtra province, has also participated in nation-wide militant activities. Its members are also known to have actively participated in the demolition of Babri Masjid.[65]

The spread of such religious and regionally-based militant organizations has not only led to rise of communal extremism but has also provoked ethnic clashes amongst different ethnic groups. Hence, it can be asserted that this current rise in Hindu-Muslim violence is directly proportional to the rise of the Sangh Parivar mentality, advocating the ideology of Hindutva.

The ongoing process of socio-political change in India and the increased competition for scarce resources are placing enormous pressure on the existing social relations and the political system. Communal and caste-based violence has become more frequent, as well as erupting into incidents of ghastly violence as well. India has witnessed a gory history of Hindu-Muslim riots since independence. Around 6,000 such incidents have taken place over the past five decades.[66] Religious fundamentalism has intensified with the introduction of criminal elements in politics, providing the politicians with an opportunity to manipulate existing communal and class divisions for their vested political interests.[67] Politics today is in the grip of politically-motivated violence led by opposing factions.

Inter-communal and inter-classes clashes and, the intensification of religious extremism in current day India was a phenomenon introduced in 1960s with the creation of Sangh Parivar. Hindu fundamentalism became a challenge for secular order of Indian state. With the increase in communal and caste violence in 1980s, the Hindu revivalist ideology had spread throughout North India and was no longer limited to the Sangh Parivar and Arya Samaj circles.[68]

The government policies also resulted in the intensification of communal and religion-based conflicts. Many governments have either indirectly supported the extremist groups or have been unable to take any action against these groups. And at times government has tried to benefit from the use of religion for political purposes. The Congress party in 1980s, to win over extremist Hindu votes, established covert relations with the RSS. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi refused to condemn the Shiv Sena for its role in provoking the Bhiwandi riots and even stated that the minorities should "learn to adjust in India". RSS also supported Indira Gandhi in Delhi and Kerala state elections. A leading Congress spokesman even refused to recognise the RSS as a communal organization. Through indirect alliance, the RSS was able to diversify its activities and establish a variety of front organizations in various regions, where earlier it did not have a presence. When the assault on the Sikh community took place, it also fanned extremism among the Sikhs.[69] To understand the different

reasons and dimensions of the rise of religion and ethnic-based violence and extremism, it would be helpful to study a few cases of communal and ethno-centred movements.

### **The Punjab Crisis: Sikh Nationalism and Hindu Extremism**

Punjab politics had a marginal communal dimension even before independence. Certain Sikh leaders raised voices for a separate state for Sikhs in the pre-partition period. Even after independence, there was demand for an autonomous Sikh state within the Indian Union. However, Punjab province till the 1960s was marked by the absence of hardened religious identities. Since the 1970s, the situation began to change considerably. Religion became politicised and politics was communalised to an extent never witnessed before. The major political parties reflected the communalisation of Punjab politics in the increasing use of religion as a medium of mobilization.[70] Sikh nationalism became a powerful political force in the state throughout 1980s, with the demands of various Sikh groups varying ranging from greater political and economic control within the Indian federation, to secession from India and the creation of a sovereign state.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, especially during 1980s actively sought to divide and rule the Sikhs. The strategy backfired and some Sikh groups turned sharply militant, and in turn, the central government responded with force. Militant nationalists and a repressive state thus confronted each other in a vicious cycle of growing violence. The Akali Dal - the dominant political party representing Sikhs - also pursued militant politics for its interests. The Akali militancy was aimed at mobilizing as many Sikhs as possible around the platform of Sikh Nationalism. Being closely associated with the Sikh religious organizations, it periodically utilized religious organizations to use the influence of the Sikh laity for political ends. It had also become a constituent of the government, in coalition with the Jan Sangh, the predecessor of BJP. In retrospect, it is clear how Indira Gandhi's commitment to dominate Punjab politics pushed Akalis into an aggressive mobilization. Over the next several years, the militancy took on a political life of its own and increasingly went out of control of both the central government and the Akalis. As the cycle of militancy and repression set in, Punjab, one of India's most prosperous states became engulfed in violence for a decade. [71]

While, the Congress government and Akalis created a vicious circle expanding considerably the importance of religious idiom in Punjab politics, they also indirectly strengthened the forces of counter-communalism, leading to parties like the BJP tightening its grip over the Hindu community. With the storming of Golden temple in 1984, followed by the assassination in reprisal of Indira Gandhi and then by the slaughtering of Sikhs in its aftermath, communal estrangement widened while the militant wings of Sangh Parivar, such as Bajrang Dal, further strengthened their hold. Militant organizations mushroomed with Punjab and other states. It is estimated that nearly 1000 people died every year, through out 1980s, peaking the toll in 1990 when some 4000 people were killed.[72]

While such political communalisation capitalized on already existing cleavages between Hindus and Sikhs, the process of its intensification hardened such identities, enlarging considerable alienation between the two communities. Although over time, militants were suppressed and certain concessions were granted by the central government, but the handling of the political situation by the national government and the local political parties, certainly worsened the situation and gave rise to militant Sikh nationalism.

### **Kashmir: Crisis of Governance**

The unresolved nature of settlement at the time of partition and the ongoing Indo-Pak rivalry over the territory explains to a great extent the nature of conflict in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). However, the spread of communal violence and separatist movement in Kashmir is largely a result of the power struggle between the state and the central government, while the socio-economic conditions have also played a part. Kashmir is a case of horizontal spread of communalism, both social and geographical. Communalism has not been a violent phenomenon in Kashmir, even till 1980s. The penetration of communalism in Kashmir politics can be

attributed to the policies pursued by Congress. The poor record of democracy in J&K, characterized by the constant rigging of elections and by various forms of intervention by the central government, prevented the development of fair and autonomous political competition between the parties.[73]

The wars with Pakistan in 1947, 1965 and 1971 made the J&K a sensitive border state in India. As a result, the Congress-led central government viewed any political opposition in the state with increasing suspicion and used various means to curtail the freedom movement. Democracy and state institutions were never allowed to work and corrupt electoral processes plagued the state-building process. The cycle of repression in Kashmir mainly began with the power conflict when Indira Gandhi dislodged the elected government of Farooq Abdullah, precipitating a legitimacy crisis. Religion and region, as a result of the power struggle between the state and central governments, began to play a bigger part in attracting political support. By 1987, the political situation so deteriorated that political allegiances were defined and expressed in religious terms.[74]

Hence, the power struggle that began in 1980s led to such internal conditions, which motivated and created conditions which led to massive uprising in the Valley in 1990s. In addition to the political instability, the economic stagnation fuelled the grievances of the educated unemployed youth. The armed insurgency which, gathered momentum after the 1987 elections was given impetus by the exiled Kashmiri nationalists.[75]

With the popular Muslim uprising, the Hindu minority, which had earlier been living peacefully in the valley, began to feel threatened and many migrated to Jammu and Delhi. These Hindu migrants huddled in the refugee camps fell straight into the lap of RSS-VHP who, in the course of conducting relief work, also initiated a Muslim-hate campaign.[76] Although it was evident later, that the departure of Hindus from Kashmir was not necessary and the government attempted to give the Kashmir problem a communal profile by facilitating and encouraging the departure of Hindus, even by providing government transport.[77] Such governmental policies exacerbated the law and order situation and intensified the freedom struggle.

The Government instead of redressing the grievances opted for the militant technique of tackling with the problem. It deployed over half a million army and paramilitary troops, which got involved in violence and government resorted to massive human rights violations to terrorize the population into submission.[78] A fact-finding mission of the Indian People's Front (IPF) visited Kashmir in June 1990 and reported very serious violations and found the conditions nearing a point of no return.[79] Amnesty International has voiced serious concerns regarding the human rights situation in Indian held Kashmir. According to the Amnesty international Testimony of Human Rights in Kashmir and Disputed territory, presented on 12 May 2004, total casualties since 1989 are believed to be around 38,000. In 2001 an average of 100 civilians died every month as a result of either targeted or indiscriminate violence.[80] Human rights abuses in the state are facilitated by laws, which provide the security forces with virtual immunity from prosecution for acts done in good faith. These include the Disturbed Areas Act and the Armed Forces (J&K) Special powers Act, which also allow the security forces to shoot and kill. Such laws have allowed the police and security forces to use force excessively.[81]

Indian government accused Pakistan for supporting and sponsoring these freedom fighters. Although the Pakistani and the Azad Kashmir governments denied that they were providing any material support to the militants, nevertheless the activities of the exiled Kashmiris and their (militant) sympathisers can not be firmly restricted.[82] Despite Indian government's assertions of Pakistani involvement, it can be asserted that the primary cause of the Kashmir insurgency must be found in India's domestic failures and Pakistani support for the militants can only be viewed as a secondary factor in the Kashmir imbroglio.[83]

### **Ayodhya - The Babri Masjid Affair**

Ayodhya, in Uttar Pradesh was the site of sixteenth century Babri Mosque erected during Mughal rule, under Emperor Babar. It was believed by Hindus that the site is also the place where the god Ram was born. From the

mid-1980s, the site of Ayodhya became controversial on these conflicting claims and dominated relations between Hindus and Muslims in the public sphere. In 1984, the VHP started an agitation campaign for the 'liberation' of Ramjanmabhoomi (birthplace of Ram), as claimed by Hindu nationalists.[84] Vested groups like the BJP, RSS (etc) ensured through their political campaigns that the site soon became a symbol of Hindu identity, and stood for the suppression of Hindus under the Muslim rule in India. The Sangh Parivar took the opportunity and aggressively propagated the theory that the destruction of the mosque and the construction of Ram temple would avenge the historical indignity related to the Hindus.[85] The Babri mosque became a strategic site for political conflicts for the Sangh Parivar, which it used to draw attention to itself, in order to expand its membership for its militant activities and also to gain votes for its political party, the BJP. Babri mosque was a convenient target because it was located in an RSS bastion, centrally located in India itself and had a history, which became controversial enough to bring some political gains for the organization.[86]

The agitation attained its peak in 1989, when the number of riot victims reached levels unprecedented in India since 1947. The religious processions organized by the VHP on the occasion of Ram Shilan Puja (literally, Ram brick's worship), led to major riots. Even though the BJP was not directly in the forefront, its leaders, especially at the local levels, took an active part in the processions, to gain political advantage from these popular mobilizations before the Lok Sabha elections, which were then for late 1989. The wave of rioting in the autumn of 1989 was provoked by militant Hindu nationalists employing processions to mobilize their community and instigate communal violence.[87] The communal riots also polarized the electorates along religious lines with the Hindu majority more inclined to vote for the BJP. The campaign waged by the Hindu militants reached its climax in 1991, with the rath yatra led by L K. Advani. The impact of Hindu extremism on Indian society was clearly illustrated when in December 1992 the destruction of Babri Mosque was followed by countrywide Hindu-Muslim riots that left at least 2,000 people dead.[88]

As Muslims in various parts of India demonstrated against the destruction of the historic mosque and the killings of Muslims, the Hindu extremists went on the rampage, especially in Bombay, leading to further large-scale riots. The Hindu nationalist crusade to demolish the Babri mosque had a significant impact on both internal and regional changes, for it polarized the Indian society, intensified animosity between of Hindus and Muslims within India and also contributed to the rise of a 'militaristic-inclined' government, hostile to Muslims.[89] Communal violence also instigated violent confrontations in different regions around local issues such as economic rivalries and political differences over local matters. During the election campaign for general elections 2004, the BJP adopted the construction of Ram Temple in Ayodhya, as an election slogan,[90] which unlike past did not picked up well among the voters.

### **The Gujarat Holocaust of 2002**

Gujarat carries a history of communal and caste-based violence. Religious festivals involving Hindus and Muslims particularly in the state's largest city, Ahmedabad, usually precipitated riots. During 1980s, with the implementation of the state government's policy for 'Other Backward Classes', the thrust of violence was mainly inter-caste. However, Hindu-Muslim violence also grew out of the conflict over reservation and was incited by the political actors who used the initial tension over reservations to rekindle dormant religious disputes.

Later, in 1992, with the demolition of Babri mosque, religion-based conflicts also erupted in Gujarat, raising memory of partition.[91] Earlier Hindus had been more powerful in the state than Muslims, but over the preceding decades, the Muslim situation improved economically, in turn creating suspicions and mistrust amongst Hindus. In this climate the Sangh Parivar's Hindutva ideology touched a chord in the Hindu community and generated incidents of Hindu-Muslim conflicts. In February 2002, in response to the incident at Godhra railway station when a group of Hindu militants coming back from a trip to Ayodhya were killed by Muslim mob over the abduction of a Muslim girl, a pogrom of terror was unleashed against the Muslim

population.[92] The spread of violence carried clear signs of premeditation and appeared to be part of a methodical effort to demonise and ghettoise Muslims.

According to an estimate more than a thousand Muslims were murdered during the last days of February and the first ten days of March 2002. The violence continued for months and left more than 2,000 Muslims dead, over 100,000 made homeless and more than 600,000 were estimated to have left Gujarat.[93] The terror was heightened by the fact that the BJP-dominated government of Gujarat state demonstrably failed to restrain this deadly, days-long pogrom and was in fact spreading the violence. And even as the killings continued, the central government did not take any concrete steps to stop the violence.[94] Though the government claimed that ten columns of the army were moved out of the 7th Corps headquarters in Ahmadabad and positioned to prevent further deterioration of situation, but army sources were quoted in the Indian media, revealing that the army deployment was confined to flag marches and were given no orders to intervene in the rioting.[95]

The Gujarat carnage was especially notable for the extent and the nature of state complicity in the violence, as premeditated planning against the lives, dignity, livelihood, businesses and properties of Gujarati Muslims through a selective assault on their religious and cultural places of worship as well as homes and businesses. Economic and social boycott of the Muslim community was openly encouraged and continued in many parts of Gujarat. The Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi was held by the investigation tribunal, as directly responsible, along with his other cabinet members and the organizations that he belongs to namely - the BJP, RSS, and VHP.[96] According to a rough estimate at least 270 Muslim religious and cultural monuments were razed to ground, during the riots with the active support of the administration practically supported the destruction of the historical sites.[97]

### **Inter-caste and Ethnic Violence in India**

Under the impact of the centuries old caste system, Indian political system has also followed caste based imperatives. The majority of the Hindu society comprises of 'backward classes', and with the passage of time, the number of these backward categories grew, from 39 in 1875 to 128 in 1950, and 175 by 1960.[98] As the Hindu nationalism grew, the Hindu elite class focused increasing attention to religious revival. This led to increase in inter-caste discrimination and this often erupted into violence.

The main theatre of conflict between higher castes and scheduled castes has followed different patterns in different states. In the state of Bihar, there has been confrontation between landless scheduled class and left-wing activists (Maoist). In Tamil Nadu, caste and class conflicts have spread over economic disparities between those who have grown richer and the many that have become poorer.[99] Caste riots in urban areas have mainly been directed against the quota system in government jobs and against the practise of reserving seats in professional colleges for the members of backward castes.

There have been efforts to redress the lower caste grievances, through important steps such as the Mandal Commission Report presented in 1980, reserving quotas for lower castes in the government jobs. Because of its symbolic importance to the critical middle class vote blocs, every major political party acknowledged it and supported its implementation. But the political interests of the parties and the vote bloc of high caste did not let them carry out their promise of implementing this Report. The V. P. Singh government in 1989 announced that it would implement the Mandal Commission recommendations. This announcement led to a major crisis resulting in downfall of the Singh's government. Later, the Supreme Court of India upheld the constitutionality of the report in 1992 and the Congress government announced that it would abide by the court's decision. To date, it has not been implemented.[100]

Over the years, numerous ethnic movements have confronted the central state with issues of ethnicity. The study of these ethnic movements indicates that these ethno-centred movements subside once their objective is achieved and some meaningful concessions are achieved. Most of the ethnic movements demanding self-

determination, define their distinctiveness along criteria of language or region. However, it may also be added that, 'ethnicity and nationality is in large part the study of politically induced cultural change'.<sup>[101]</sup> These movements are also stirred up by economic inequalities (against any particular region or linguistic group)

The ethnic unrest in India earlier used to be marginally relevant to the national politics. However, such groups are becoming increasingly fearful of losing their subgroup identity which has forced them to use violent methods to protect themselves. The continuation of ethnic and tribal unrest in the northeastern hill states of Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Tripura, is a testament to the unresolved issue of sub national and regional autonomy in that area.<sup>[102]</sup> The same is true for the separatist movements elsewhere in India.

### **Tamil Nadu**

Tamil movement was a part of the broader self-determination movements for greater power and control, which over time came to include a separatist movement demanding a 'Dravidistan', a land for the Dravidian people. A number of Indian states in early 1950s, argued for the reorganization of the Indian federation along linguistic lines. Tamil nationalists and their mobilized supporters pressed their identity politics hard through demonstrations that occasionally turned violent. The linguistic and ethnic movements forced the central government to reorganize the federal system into linguistic states in 1956.<sup>[103]</sup> However, imposition of Hindi as a compulsory subject remained a source of agitation.

Having achieved their separate state, the Tamil nationalists shifted their struggle towards ousting Congress from power, which was based on Brahmin caste. It was also failure on the part of Congress, to take into account the traditional social differences and social oppression prevailing in Tamil Nadu. The Dravidian movement emerged as an expression of the socio-cultural grievances of some sections of society. This expression was fully politicised with the emergence of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK).<sup>[104]</sup> The grievances in the region were the result of the caste inequalities, and these were not given economic orientation in as much as they were given a political direction. Owing to inability of the leadership (even the popular DMK leadership), to forge a political-economic outlook, the resentment deepened among the masses, particularly the lower castes.

### **The Northeastern States**

The seven states of northeast, known as the seven sisters, comprises of Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. The region is home to over 200 tribal groups and sub-groups, many of whose historical rivalries continue today. Historically, tribal populations were divided between states. The extensive fragmentation of ethnic communities and their internal divisions, along with the scarcity of resources, led to resentment and resistance among the tribes. The political environment was further effected by the influx of people from other regions as well as neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar.<sup>[105]</sup>

The conflict in Assam has become complicated by the conflict between local Assamese (mostly Hindu) and immigrants (mainly Muslim) from across the state boundary with West Bengal and the international frontier with Bangladesh. The fear among the local Assamese of being out-numbered and scarce resources has resulted into serious friction among the settlers and local population. The effect has been increase in violence on massive scale in Assam leading to massacres of thousands of people over the years.<sup>[106]</sup> Different political agents and parties have effectively manipulated the situation for their respective interests, and issues like 'outsiders' and 'foreigners' gained much importance. A sense of alarm was created among the local population, which continues even today and erupts into occasional incidents of violence among the Assamese and the Hindi-speaking settlers.<sup>[107]</sup> Along with the outsiders, there also exist issues of tribal empowerment and rights in majority non-tribal states. For instance, the Bodos movement was mobilized in 1987, with the demand of a separate state of Bodoland out of Assam. But such tribal movements have been dealt with

predominantly military means. The resentment among the linguistic and tribal groups continues, even after getting certain concessions.

Another continuing conflict in northeast is between Nagas and the government of India. Of all the ethno-national conflicts, the Naga politics of recognition for their independence is the most serious and sustained. Nagaland was carved out of Assam in 1963, comprising the Naga Hills District of Assam and Tuensang area of the North East Frontier Agency. The Naga problem persists even today.[108] A cease-fire has been reached between the Central government and Naga leaders; however the Nagas' demand remains for a homeland, bringing all the Nagas into one political unit, (The demand includes Nagas in the States of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh). In other words, the rebel group wants New Delhi to concede a 'greater Nagaland' as an acceptable solution to bring the curtain down on this decades-old Naga insurrection.

The Naga demand has rocked the State of Manipur, as the majority Meitei community is gripped by apprehensions that New Delhi may push ahead with a secret plan to slice off the Naga inhabited areas of their State, and merge them with the adjoining Nagaland State as part of a possible deal with the separatist National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah faction, NSCN-IM). In the troubled Northeast, public sentiments and influential groups who seek to pursue sub-nationalistic aspirations have the potential to bring down elected governments. The Manipur Government, like that of Assam, is against conceding their territory to Nagaland. Now, gauging the public mood, the Government in Manipur is likely to increasingly adopt the same language as the Meitei groups, and lobby for the State's cause in New Delhi, creating a new problem for the Union Government, which has generally shown itself incapable of efficiently handling those already on its plate.[109]

### **Implications of Extremism for the Indian Scene**

With the existing trends of Indian politics and availability of scarce political power and economic resources, it appears inevitable that such movements will continue to emerge. The study of communal and ethnic extremism in India indicates that the leadership strategy and the institutionalisation of state power are the major determinants of the causes and outcomes of self-determination movements. While the policies of government are important with respect to these movements, the role played by the organizations and activities of the ethnic and communal parties and movements, cannot be overlooked. For instance, Hindu nationalists' ability to engage in mass mobilization by appealing to anti-Muslim sentiments reveals the power of cultural symbols, ideas and networks to generate hatred and anger among the ordinary people.

Hindu nationalist mobilization, the major form of religious politics that India has experienced, has undermined democratic processes to a great extent. The movements such as the destruction of Babri mosque in Ayodhya have fostered extensive Hindu-Muslim violence, which, in turn, weakened the already frayed institutions, deepened biases of the civil society and accentuated a leadership crisis. Most importantly, Hindu nationalism seeks objectives that are inimical to democracy, above all in seeking to undermine minority rights. However the fact is that the Hindu nationalism is religious only in the sense that Hindu nationalists make use of religious signifiers for political ends.[110]

There has also existed relationship of the government with the Hindu nationalists which facilitates these parties to mobilize masses on religious bases and has also led to their successful intertwining of riots with elections. It was adopted as an important means, by the former BJP government, to make inroads into new regions and constituencies. Even more dangerous is the recent trend towards state complicity in communal violence. Indeed the key ingredient for the growth of religious nationalism has been an accommodating state.[111] The ongoing ethnic movements in India are also likely to continue, as the state, has yet not been able to overcome the historical legacies of partition, which continue to challenge the Indian federation in the form of different secessionist movements.



The rise of extremism has provided the government with the opportunity to enact laws granting it emergency powers. Over the years, the Indian government has passed a series of anti-terrorism bills. These include the Armed Forces Act, the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Act (TADA), and most recently, Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA). The central government reserves the right to declare emergency and curtail rights and liberties during emergency period. It may also suspend state governments under Article 356 of the Constitution. These Acts give the government means to silence any opposition, including summary arrest and the right to detain those arrested indefinitely.[112] Such counter-terrorism acts have harmed the cause of democracy with increasing impunity and immunity of the state.

However, the outcome of the recent Indian elections manifests the disapproval of the masses of the extremist politics played by the governments. Even though, the Indian constitution clearly mentions the secular character of India, the governments still promoted such extremist trends.[113] Indian people seem to have rejected the Hindu fundamentalism promoted during the BJP government by organizations known to have links with BJP - Sangh Parivar's subsidiary organizations. According to a senior Indian political analyst, "there is a fundamental sanity, a certain balance in the Hindu mind that rejects this sort of extremism. And in the very areas where the riots took place, the Hindu voters voted the BJP out".[114]

## **Pakistan**

In Pakistan's case, the socio-political roots of terrorism as well as those of current economic crisis can be traced back to the political turmoil created after the death of Quaid-e-Azam, who had clearly stated since the beginning that religion and politics were to be kept apart. However, the subsequent governments started with the use of religion in politics for their political gains. Nonetheless the problem intensified during the Zia regime, in the period 1977 to 1988 under his Islamisation policies. These tendencies were further developed in the decade of 1990s, when a historically unprecedented growth in poverty combined with an undermining of democratic institutions. Although there had been religious and ethnically based extremist demands in the early years too, however, the interplay between the rise of militant religious groups, government policies, and growing poverty has unprecedented in the two decades spanning Zia's military regime and even in the subsequent years of 'democracy'.[115] This period also witnessed rise of sectarian and ethnic violence in Pakistan on a scale never seen before.

Along with the government's short-sighted and self-serving policies, Islamic activists took hold of the opportunity by sensing public frustration with stagnant economies, disillusionment with incompetent and unstable governments, thus succeeding in preaching their own version of superiority of Islamic system and values.[116] However, until recently, despite the decades of military patronage, flow of governmental and international funding, and a political discourse dominated by Islam, the constituency of militant Islam has been smaller. This trend had borne out in the elections, and the electoral performance of religious political parties had remained dismal.[117] However with the Pakistan's involvement in US military offensive against Afghanistan in 2001, these political parties have been able to mobilize support for their political agendas and have even succeeded in coming to power.

Among the prime factors in the rise of extremism in Pakistan has been the failure of governments to address the overwhelming challenges of development arising from rapid social, demographic, and economic changes.[118] Failure of successive regimes in the fulfilment of stated developmental agendas led to a crisis of legitimacy restored and all to regimes promoting Islam in the affairs of the state. The process of Islamisation of the state and the Afghan war proved to be the turning points as far as the role of Islam in Pakistan is concerned. This not only encouraged the rise of ethnic and religious parties on sectarian lines under varying interpretations of Islam, but also ultimately gave rise to many Sunni-Shia confrontations that further divided the society. As another consequence of the Islamisation process, a network of madrassas (religious schools) emerged and flourished through out the country, providing a breeding ground for the jihadi elements, under the patronage of the leading fiqh (or school of Islamic thought).

The ability of the extremist groups was enhanced by the deteriorating social and economic conditions, easy access to weapons on account of the Afghan war, support by the government and intelligence agencies to different groups for their own political goals, including the use of media to promote their causes.[119] The religious and ethnic organisations representing their respective causes begun, increasingly to use violent methods, including acts of terrorism to achieve their ends, thereby resulting in increasing incidents of violence and worsening law and order situation. The period of the 80s and 90s was marked by bomb blasts in public places in Pakistan, including wanton shooting incidents. The considerable confusion over the role of Islam in politics and different Islamic ideologies also made it difficult for governments to formulate a definitive role of Islam, resulting in crisis of governance.[120]

A multitude of circumstances and actors have contributed to religious militancy being in force today. An examination of the rise of religious extremism in Pakistan, uncovers many of the factors that have raised sectarianism to its present virulence and spread. This includes: ineffectual political parties, military rulers seeking to secure their grip over power, obscurantist religious parties, and civilian rulers trying to appease religious elements for expedient political and personal reasons, along with foreign interference.[121] Similar reasons also led to the increased ethnicity and regionalism in country. Also, since the late 1970s, with the inflow of Afghan refugees into Pakistan, powerful mafia-type syndicates have emerged that have boosted the illegal arms market and led to rapid growth of the narcotics trade in an already ethnic and sectarian strife in already polarised society.

### **Religious Extremism**

Religious extremism is a relatively new phenomenon in Pakistan. The religious dimension in politics never had its present day significant prominence, till the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and Pakistan's involvement in the US-sponsored 'jihad'. This also gave rise to madrasa culture, producing new recruits for the religious and jihadi organizations. Later, the subsequent governments, both civil and military, aided and encouraged the religious groups in the pursuit of their narrow agendas. The international factors further accentuated the sectarian divide within the country.

The current ideological crisis in Pakistan is a direct consequence of failure of the state to clearly define the role of Islam in state affairs. Ironically, Pakistan was born as the embodiment of Islamic ideology, but now even more than five decades later, Pakistan is still struggling with the definition of what that legacy entails.[122] Despite the halfhearted efforts by various governments, to settle the issue of relationship between Islam and Pakistan's political system, the crisis continues, strengthening ideological extremism in the country.

In Pakistan, with a majority Muslim population, the violence among communities take the form of sectarianism. During the Islamisation of the legal system, and particularly following the Zia regime enacting discriminatory laws against minorities, inter-faith clashes have surfaced and increased in number. Since then this discriminatory legislation has been used as an excuse to harass non-Muslims. There have been attempts of forcible conversion of Hindus of Sindh and the Kalash animists around Chitral, in the Northern Areas.[123] However, the thrust of ideological/religious violence in Pakistan remains sectarian, along with the occasional inter-communal violent incidents.

Confrontation between adherents of various sects has become bloodier and more violent with the passage of time. The fanatic violence reached its peak in late 80s and early 90s. The emergence of Islamic militant organisations, along sectarian lines, calling themselves sipahs and lashkars (armed formations) assumed importance in Pakistan in the post-Cold war period as a social and political phenomenon. These widened the sectarian divide. However, the early inter-sect clashes have not been among the dominant factions of Shia and Sunni, but against Ahmadiyya community.

## **Ahmadiyya Community**

Ahmadiyya are the members of the religious sect who follow the teachings of the late nineteenth-century religious leader and self-proclaimed prophet Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and rose as a sect during the period of the British rule. Clashes between the Ahmadiyya community and the politico-religious groups of ulemas have existed since 1947. The anti-Ahmadiyya issue was used by the ulema politically to embarrass government as well as to push themselves into active politics. The first large-scale agitation was launched in 1953, demanding that the Ahmadiyya community be declared a minority. The agitation eventually went against the ulemas, who were severely criticized by the judicial enquiry commission, on both, political and religious grounds. One of the outcomes of those disturbances was the discrediting of ulemas for launching a politically inspired agitation against Ahmadis.[124]

In 1973, the issue was resurrected and in the aftermath of the resultant violence, an amendment was made in the constitution declaring the Ahmadiyyas as a non-Muslim community. Later in 1984, President Zia, reacting to the threats of potential violence against the Ahmadiyya by the ulemas, placed further legal restrictions on the community as an appeasement policy. The major reasons for the anti-Ahmadiyya feelings appears to have based in their relatively higher position and prominence in Pakistan's civil, military and diplomatic services, arousing envy and fear among the ulema and the lower middle class conservative urbanites, who are the main followers of the ulemas.[125]

The anti-Ahmadiyya riots are a stern reminder of the devastating effects of doctrinal differences on urban society. Pakistan's urban centres instead of becoming a 'melting pot for popular and doctrinal Islam' have been turned by the fundamentalist groups into 'powder-kegs' of religious extremism. Religion, instead of acting as a uniting factor, has become a tool for cultural fragmentation.[126]

## **Islamisation of Politics: Zia's Legacies as a Factor**

In the 1980s, for the first time in history of Pakistan, terror through intimidating policies was used as a conscious policy of government, to legitimise the rule of General Zia-ul-Haq. In the pursuit of such policies, the democratic constitution of 1973 was set aside, religion politicized and steps were taken to restructure the state on theocratic lines. The religion card was used as one of the main weapons to pressurize the opposition and to justify the holding of non-party based elections. This period also witnessed the undermining of state institutions by introducing measures to subordinate the judiciary, press and other civil society institutions, under executive.[127]

The institutional roots of Islamic fundamentalism were laid when government funds were provided for establishing mosques and madrassas, particularly in small towns and rural areas, which also led to the rapid growth of militant religious organizations who found a ready-made platform of madrassas. His regime also encouraged the rise of ethnic groups and religious parties on sectarian lines, and ultimately strengthened sectarian divide in the society with the emergence of many Sunni and Sha'ia groups.[128] These groups were also backed and financed by a couple of foreign countries following the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, particularly the Muslim countries as well as the US government. The Shia communities after the Iranian revolution started organizing themselves in the neighbouring countries, with the support of the new revolutionary Iranian government. On the other hand Saudi Arabia started supporting Sunni groups against the 'Iranian-inspired' activism. Hence, the rivalry between two Islamic countries led to the emergence of militant religious organisations along sectarian lines.[129] Unfortunately the government of Zia-ul-Haq fully in knowledge remained a silent spectator during its entire period. This social and political deterioration process was catalysed by the Afghan war.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 was a watershed development that brought the superpower rivalry into Pakistan's neighbourhood. In great powers' proxy conflict, US sought to enlist Pakistan

in strengthening Afghan resistance to the Soviets. Zia regime offered to play role of a front-line state in the Afghan guerrilla war, and sought political, economic and military support from US. It was considered necessary to mobilize religious feelings and jihadi spirit for Afghan resistance. Consequently extremist elements were encouraged and jihadi sentiments were supported, along with liberal funds provided to groups and institutions for training Afghan and other Muslim nationals from a host of countries to wage war against Soviets.[130] Religious schools multiplied in Pakistan during this period and by the time Afghan war ended in 1989, jihadist culture had acquired deep roots in Pakistani society. The militant religious groups, by this time also succeeded in enlarging the political space for themselves, which later aided the mushrooming of sectarian and religion-based violence across the country.

Pakistan, for its support obtained a package worth \$3.2 billion from US in financial loans and relatively sophisticated military hardware. As US needed Zia to fight its war in Afghanistan, it turned a blind eye to the mass corruption in distribution of weapons provided for the resistance and the sale of narcotics by various tribal chieftains and other groups, supposedly to fund Afghan jihad. The number of officially registered addicts in Pakistan rose from 130 in 1977 to 30,000 in 1988.[131] While according to Newsweek in 1987 that Pakistani high officials, both military and civilian, were skimming off 30 per cent US aid to the mujahideen, and perhaps 50 per cent of the weaponry was stolen or sold.[132]

During the Afghan war, Zia regime along with gaining political legitimacy also attracted huge amounts of foreign economic assistance. However, these funds were spent on import of consumer goods and for sponsoring jihadist culture rather than on public welfare sector, such as education, health, employment opportunities and rural development. Pakistan ended Zia period with a publicly guaranteed long-term debt of over \$16 billion, equivalent to nearly one-half of the country's GDP, and one-half times the total value of exports. There was also no improvement in social, education and health development, rather during 1982-1988, the share of expenditure on education and health development declined from 2.1 per cent of GNP to 1.5 per cent.[133] With the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, Pakistan lost its importance and was to receive severely declining funds for the future development, and was a host to more than 300 million Afghan refugees.

### **Sectarianism and Madrassa Culture**

Sectarianism was one of the inevitable outcomes of Zia's Islamisation programme and the US' encouragement of religion to counter Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. During the Afghan war US deliberately promoted religion as a weapon against Soviets and sponsored establishment of religious institutions and circulation of Jihadist literature. This was supported by the Zia regime and madrassa culture was promoted, particularly in Afghan refugee camp.[134] Since boarding and lodging were free, it attracted along with the children of Afghan refugees, the children from poor peasant families. The rise of religious influence can be understood from the number of religious schools which in 1970s were around 900 and by the end of Zia era had grown to 8,000 and around 25,000 unregistered ones, educating over half a million students.[135] These madrassas as discussed earlier, also drew foreign aid, and were sharply divided on sectarian lines. Ultimately the autonomy of traditional religious institutions, lack of unanimous regulatory policies for madrassas, and Zia's Islamisation of society, injected the poison of sectarianism, fanaticism and bigotry, pitting sect against sect and region against region.[136]

Southern Punjab with one of the lowest levels of literacy and significant number of population living on or below poverty line witnessed a rapid increase in religious institutions. In Punjab alone 7,050 madrassas are imparting militant training to their students, while NWFP has around 10,000 religious institutions.[137] Mushrooming of these militant religious institutions led to rise in sectarian violence in Punjab province and later spread across the country. While historically madrassas were associated with imparting merely religious knowledge, in 1980s these deeni madrassas got engaged in systematic indoctrination in a narrow, sectarian identity, and inculcated hatred and violence against other sects.

As poverty increased in 1990s, the burgeoning madrassas provided a growing number of unemployed and impoverished youths with the security of food, shelter and an 'emotionally charged identity'. As the number of sect-based madrassas increased during the Zia regime, the sectarian violence also grew in ferocity and number. The number of sectarian killings increased from 22 during the 1987-89, to 166 during 1993-95.[138] A marked feature was the targeting of worshippers in Mosques.

Along with the madrassas, many militant organisations also flourished during the Zia's era. Zia had given special place to Sunni version of Islam, especially where the disbursement of Zakat (compulsory alms) was concerned. This prompted the Shia community to become religiously and politically active, and in reaction Sunni community became more aggressive. It led to the formation of militant sectarian organisations, such as Tehrik-e-Jafariya-e-Pakistan and Sipah-e-Sahaba.[139] Over the last decade, armed conflicts between Shia and Sunni militants have left hundreds of innocents dead. The discriminatory institutionalisation of religion brought in its wake a politicisation and radicalisation of sectarian divides.

### **Ethnic Strife in Pakistan**

The roots of ethnic conflicts in Pakistan, as in other South Asian countries, lies in the partition and formation of new states with little concern for the ethnic groups. The subsequent governments especially in the post-70s period also failed to pay due attention to the regional inequalities and to formulate policies to deal with multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society of Pakistan. Suppression of diversity in the name of national unity by the governments not only led to violation of human rights but also was counter-productive in solidifying the sub-national images among affected regions and classes. Ethno-regional identities, with passage of time have strengthened, giving rise to ethnic discrimination and the rise of regionalism, eventually leading to ethnically and regionally-based separatist movements. Among these, the Bangla nationalism was the strongest which led to secession of East Pakistan on the basis of political grievances given an ethnic colour.

### **East Pakistan Debacle**

Secession of the Eastern wing of Pakistan in 1971 is a case in point for studying the interplay of the economic discrimination, administrative mishandling and foreign interference in the internal affairs of a country. Bangla nationalism was the consequence of economic and social structure of the region, created initially by the departing British policies but later due to mal-governance in the post-independence period, feelings of deprivation amongst the populace and political parties in East Pakistan accentuated with the passage of time. The development of jute industry in East Pakistan established with the capital or the West Pakistani capitalists led to increase in the foreign exchange earnings, since East Pakistan produced more than 80 per cent of world's jute then in great demand. In early years export of raw and processed jute accounted for 70 per cent of Pakistan's foreign earnings, but than foreign exchange was used mainly for the industrialization of West Pakistan. East Pakistan received only 25-30 per cent of the total imports. Thus the penetration of West Pakistan based capital into East Pakistan not only established an antagonistic relationship between Bengali workers and the West Pakistani capitalists, but also triggered a process of draining East Pakistan's resources, and in turn leading to political alienation.[140]

Later economic policies adopted by the central government, particularly in 1960s under American guidance, led to concentration of wealth in just 20 families and income disparity widened. These developments not only intensified class struggle but also aggravated the already existing regional strains. By the end of 'decade of development' in 1960s, West Pakistan's GDP exceeded that of East Pakistan by 34 per cent, the disparity in per capita income had become 62 per cent, and the real difference in the average standard of living had widened to 126 per cent.[141]

Along with economic discrimination, denial of accommodation of cultural differences was also a source of regional tensions. The political and economic implications of the forced imposition of Urdu as the national

language led to the first language-based disturbances in 1947-48. Eventually after the uprising of 1952, Bengali was accepted as the second national language of Pakistan. The official attempts at 'national integration' were also viewed suspiciously as attempts to manipulate the culture of the Eastern wing. Such policies by the central government, along with creating ethnic and class differences between the two wings also lead to widening political differences in East Pakistan.[142]

The general elections of 1970 proved to be watershed in the history of Pakistan. The result was the rapid rise of Bangla nationalism, which was evident from popularity of the Mujibur Rehman's six points, articulating the sense of deprivation and discrimination among the masses. More importantly, the element of hatred was dominant in the Awami League campaign, which got a sweeping victory in East Pakistan as well as a majority party status overall.[143] With the refusal of ruling Yahya regime to hand over power to Mujib and the Awami League, despite its undisputed majority, the situation led to a major political crisis that turned into a civil war for the whole of 1971. By December 1971 with India's direct involvement the crisis led to the creation of Bangladesh as a separate country.

Indian intervention played a decisive role in the separation of East Pakistan. India had played an active role in the whole crisis through years of propaganda and sabotage, to spread disaffection in East Pakistan against West Pakistan. By 1967 India was involved in planning the separation of East Pakistan and was willing to provide covert military aid to the secessionists.[144] Indian infiltrators entered East Pakistan and it was reported that India had set up supply centres in the Indian state of Tripura to help Indian infiltrators and anti-state elements in East Pakistan.[145] The collusion between the separatist elements, Indian government and the Awami League party finally led to dismemberment of Pakistan in December 1971.

### **Regional Disparity and Ethnic Nationalism**

The dominance of Punjab province in the national political scene and on the economic front since the early years has created resentment among other provinces. However, later, during the Zia's period, Sindh became the most disaffected of all provinces, with the popular perception of Zia's government being a Punjabi one.[146] With the concentration of mohajirs (refugees), primarily in Karachi and other urban regions of Sindh, language politics came to forefront and created a sense of insecurity and identity crisis especially among the Urdu-speaking mohajirs.[147] Until that time, earlier ethnic clashes in Sindh were marked by animosity between mohajirs on the one side and other ethnic minorities on other (such as Sindis and Pathans). In 1986, the Mohajir Quami Movement (MQM), with Altaf Hussain as its leader, provided a new direction to the language-based ethnicity. This ethnic divide kept the city of Karachi engulfed in bloody conflicts for almost a decade.

Along with the Sindh nationalism, there have been other regional and ethnic movements in Pakistan, such as the Pakhtoonistan issue and Baluch nationalism. The 'Pakhtunistan' demand predates the independence of Pakistan. The call for a Pathan entity stems from the shared perception of the common ethnic, cultural, and linguistic background of the Pathan communities among Pathans of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Afghan governments prior to 1979 used it to exert pressures on Pakistan. The Afghan war in 1979 further complicated issues with the influx of refugees from Afghanistan, which exacerbated sectarian clashes between Shias and Sunnis, particularly in Khurram Agency.[148] Today Pakistan has another ethnic component in its population of the Afghans.

Baloch nationalism is also a result of failure on the part of government to include the province in the mainstream national politics and developmental process leaving it in the hold of feudal sardars. The tribal areas, after the creation of Pakistan were not fully incorporated in the country and had been granted special status instead. Not many substantial economic and human development programmes were introduced to uplift the largest and poorest province. The present government has, however, introduced measures to improve the economic conditions of the province. The construction of Gwadar port and the coastal highway

with Chinese assistance, along with the Daulatabad (Turkmenistan)-Gwadar oil pipeline in the offing, as well as the intensification of oil and gas search, are among the projects which can bring about some improvement in the impoverished province.[149]

### **Implications of Extremism for Pakistan**

The implications of the policies adopted by respective governments, along with the protracted economic recession, a historically unprecedented increase in poverty especially in 1990s, has led to deteriorating law and order situation in Pakistan. The political instability, corruption of the top leadership, and rising violence in society had in turn, had a worsening impact on the economy, and accelerated extremism.

The rise in extremism in religious and ethnic terms has created a divide in the society at different levels and has deepened the identity crisis. The governments instead of formulating policies to develop the basic infrastructure for society and economy had followed policies to prolong their rule, intensifying social problems. The use of religion in politics has created a sectarian conflict in the society, along with rising intolerance. The slow economic and human development process, with the rise in population by 2.2 per cent a year[150] and the unequal distribution of resources and share in the economic growth, for certain regions and segment of society, has created a large deprived and unemployed class. The rising population and the low employment generation have led to increase in poverty from 22.1 per cent in 1990-91 to 32.6 per cent in 1998-99.[151]

The rising unemployment particularly among the students of religion is creating a dangerous situation. By their funding of traditional education in madrassas, government and foreign powers have made available a large number of young people who have acquired only religious knowledge, to the exclusion of other disciplines. This disaffected youth without jobs is readily available target to be brainwashed for political ends.[152] There are efforts to regularize and register the religious schools and mosques and many of the extremist groups have been banned and their activities suspended. The Musharraf Government enacted new laws under which, religious institutions would be required to maintain audited accounts, discourage an atmosphere of religious confrontation, sectarianism and hatred against any class, and refrain from indulging in militancy or paramilitary training.[153] At the same time government has undertaken the review of syllabi pertaining to Islamic teachings to avoid creating sectarian sentiments from the very basic education level. This policy shall help in long run to curtail extremism and sectarianism from society to quite some extent. The government has allocated US \$215 million to introduce new subjects into the syllabi of seminaries. In the future grants will be given to religious schools that get themselves registered with the government's religious education board and amend their syllabi according to the government's directives.[154] The federal government has also recently announced six billion rupees for madrasa reforms.[155]

The government has also initiated Wana operation in Southern Waziristan to eliminate the extremist and terrorist including some foreign elements, suspected to be hiding in the region. Such operations may lead to promoting dual interests of Pakistan, i.e., in addition to curtailing the extremism and eliminating extremist elements sheltered in the area, it will also the give government an opening to work for the uplift of the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA), which had earlier been under Frontier Crime Regulation (FCR) and had no government control whatsoever. The government of Pakistan has asked elements of foreign origin living in South Waziristan Agency to register themselves as required under law.[156] This policy shall be vigorously followed in adjoining tribal belts as well, to bring tribal people in mainstream of prevailing political culture in country. At the same time concrete measures are required to hasten the economic development of the entire tribal region. In this regard, the government has recently announced a development package worth Rs.7 billion, for basic infrastructure for the tribal regions.[157] It includes the financing of a network of 800 kilometres of roads in the Tribal areas, refurbishing schools, establishing health care centres, providing drinking water.[158] It is also trying to create a systematic law and order structure in for the tribal areas. Nevertheless, a lot needs to be done to limit the damages caused by the policies of past governments resulting

in economic deterioration. Particularly the State needs to increase its role in improving social services, education, and the madrassas reforms should be applied, as declared by the government, in its earnest.

## **Bangladesh**

Bangladesh is not as monolithic a society as it appears. Political differences on ideological lines have led to violent confrontations and fragmented Bangla society along a variety of allegiances of a communal kind, while appearing to be following the same nationalism and the same faith.[159]

Bangladesh is often described as the 'largest-poorest' nation in the world. The country is of course not the largest in terms of area or in population, nonetheless, in terms of population-land ratio, as it is a densely populated nation with perhaps two third of its population living below poverty line.[160] It is the least developed country in the SAARC region in terms of human development, and it stands at 72nd place in the list of 88 developing countries. The daily per capita income of 29.1 per cent of the total population in Bangladesh is one dollar only, while that of 77.8 per cent of people is two dollars. Though there has been steady improvement in per capita income, which is currently \$372, but also in terms of the basic measures of welfare, [161] as compared to past decades, however, the slow economic development and non-availability of basic facilities to the general population has created frustration leading to rise of terrorism in the country.

A recent study shows that there is a huge discrepancy in the level of development and economic growth rates across different regions in Bangladesh. Investment activities are highly concentrated in the capital city and a few other major cities in Bangladesh. One of the major reasons for the concentration of investment in the major cities is the relatively better communication infrastructure, greater security and better law and order situation. Thus the growth of terrorist activities has also contributed to the unequal regional development. Private investments have been low in areas like Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and south-western parts of the country where the terrorist groups had been active, although these areas particularly the CHT have great potentials in terms of its resource base. However, terrorism has discouraged investment in the region.[162]

With the increasing crime and violence, the law and order situation has deteriorated to lowest levels, and a 'culture of terror' has evolved in the society. The patronization by successive governments of a criminal class, who have become instrumental in the functioning of the political parties, has brought the machinery of law enforcement into contempt.[163] Although Islamist political parties have had little influence on national politics, yet the use of religion as a political weapon has existed from the early years, and is becoming more and more influential in politics and also in society. The present rise of fundamentalism in Bangladesh may be attributed to the policies, initiated by President Zia-ur-Rehamn, later endorsed and continued by subsequent governments.

Although ethnic movements have not been very strong in the country, however, there have been disturbances along regional and ethnic lines among different communities, like Beharis, Rohingyas community, Chakma tribes in the CHT. These movements were the result of the direct or indirect involvement of neighbouring India and Burma. The Indian media and government propaganda has been to involve and blame Pakistan government as sponsoring Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh, and also as backing the Islamist parties like Jamaat-e-Islami.

## **Islamic Nationalism in Secular Bangladesh**

The struggle for separation and Bangla nationalism grew out of the Bangla language movement, and not religion. At the same time, the newly-independent, secular Bangladesh became the only country in South Asia with one dominant language group and few ethnic and religious minorities. However, it is important to note that religious element has always been present, though not very dominant, in Bangla culture.[164] Islam has not played its political role because of the unique socio-political development in the Bangladesh areas, especially during the period of 1947-1971.[165]



With the military take over by General Zia-ur-Rahman in mid-1970s, the use of religion as a counterweight to the Awami League's secular and vaguely socialist ideology, was adopted as a government policy. In 1977, Zia dropped secularism as one of the four cornerstones of Bangladesh's constitution and used the Islamic ideological platform to justify the military take over and prolong his rule. The trend continued even after the assassination of Zia and grew stronger with Lt. Gen. Hossain Muhammad Ershad in power. In 1988, Ershad made Islam the state religion of Bangladesh, thus institutionalising the new brand of nationalism with an Islamic flavour introduced by Zia. To counter secular opposition the Jamaat-e-Islami was revived, and use of religion in politics increased.[166] The constitutional amendments introduced, beginning from 1977 to the Eighth amendment can be viewed as attempts by the governments to broaden their power bases as well as to maintain good relations with Muslim Middle East.[167]

With the oil crisis in 1970s and the Iranian revolution in 1979, and the Saudi Arabia's aggressive policies to counter spread of Iranian (Shia) influence, establishment of missionary programmes was financed and supported in Muslim countries. Bangladesh society was also influenced by this phenomenon. The proliferation of Islam-based institutions and organizations, mainly of charitable and missionary character, and the construction of new mosques and madrassas were the manifestation of this trend. Internal developments in Bangladesh also accelerated the growth and functioning of these institutions. With the ban on religious parties, under Awami League government for their opposition to creation of a new state based on Bangla nationalism, these parties had no alternative but to extend and intensify their religious activities. President Zia, later in order to enlist the support of the rejected rightist elements and the affluent West Asian countries helped in the rehabilitation of the religious parties and organisations. [168]

The increasing poverty, economic depression, mass unemployment, deteriorating law and order situation, restricted nature of political activities, and the consequent tension in all walks of life led to the populace viewing religious parties as an alternative. Government policies and measures also supported this phenomenon. Hence, the strengthening of religious elements in Bangladesh was not due to Islamic revivalism; rather, it was the outcome of the self-serving policies of the governments. Another factor in the proliferation of madrassas was the fact that the population reeling under poverty and unemployment could not afford any formal education, and these madrassas provided easier educational alternative to a large segment of population.

The successive democratic governments after Zia and Ershad were unable to tackle with the rising extremism and religious radicalism. The increasing number of madrassas over the period of time has encouraged the extremism and religious intolerance towards minorities. There has been, rather, an institutional growth of madrassas as an indispensable part of the national religious-educational system. Prior to partition (1971), there were 1,467 madrassas in Bangladesh, and by 2002 they were estimated to be around 64,000 madrassas with about 1.8 million students.[169] The government has no control over these madrassas and the students passing out from them are ill equipped to enter mainstream professions. They are, therefore, easily available targets for militant organizations for recruitment.[170]

The general election of 2001, brought a new right wing regime in Bangladesh, the BNP-led four party alliance won the majority and formed a coalition with the Jamaat-e-Islami. This is the first time that a religious party has been able to come in mainstream political arena and into government. This has raised the fear of Islamic resurgence in Bangladesh; although the Jamaat may not be directly involved in promoting extremism, however, its being in power has created a sense of impunity among the religious militant groups. The intimidation of minorities has worsened over the period of time and discrimination among them has become a problem. There had been occasional violence against members of Ahmadiyya community in Bangladesh, which the Bangla society had never experienced earlier in this part of sub-continent since partition of India.[171] Amnesty International reported in December 2001 that minorities, particularly Hindus who constitute 10 per cent of the population, have come under attacks.[172]

## **Ethnic and Regional Issues**

Bangladesh society is unique among other South Asian countries, due to its homogeneity as regards its language and ethnic grouping. However, there have been some ethnic and region-based problems in the CHT area, as well as regarding the Beharis settlers who migrated from India at the time partition, and in 1971 opted for Pakistan and among Rohingyas community in southeastern Bangladesh. These problems were accelerated by the poor social development, declining economic conditions and the political manipulation by different groups and parties, along with the cross-border dimension of these movements.

The Chakma tribes of the CHT had been fighting to establish their rights and attain autonomy since early 1970s. They were organized along political lines to obtain their demands. Since then they have carried out separatist activities, which at times have translated into terrorist incidents. The government signed a peace treaty - the CHT Accords - with the separatist elements in 1997, which improved the situation in the region. The accord promised the tribes restitution of their land, greater participation in the government, and the reduction of military forces from the CHT area. However, the treaty failed to take into account many crucial questions as to the co-existence between the tribal and settlers in the region, which had been an explosive issue since the beginning. The tribals, who constitute more than a half of the one million people of CHT, have strong reservations regarding their cultural identity and exclusive rights in the hills.[173] Despite relative stability in the area, there is tension within the tribal community, between the pro- and anti-peace accord groups. Although certain provisions of the accord have been implemented; such as creation of CHT ministry, establishment of CHT Regional Council and establishment of a Land Commission for settlement of land issue.[174] However, there is growing resentment regarding the full implementation of the accords among the tribal as well as among settlers.

The CHT problem has persisted rather intensified due to the severe unemployment problem, influx of illegal weapons, patronage from political parties, along with the inadequate and inefficient role of law enforcing agencies.[175] The 'internecine feuds' of terrorist outfits based in the Northeast of India have also spilled over into areas along the Indo-Bangladesh border.[176]

The CHT situation has become another point of contention in the ongoing power struggle between the BNP and Awami League. The BNP had earlier opposed the CHT accords on the ground that it favours tribal people over the Bengali settlers and in May 1998, the BNP stormed out of parliament after the ruling party- the Awami League- pushed through the passage of 4,000 amendments to the CHT administration laws without allowing full debate on the issue.[177] Political parties have also exploited the situation for their political motives/gains and have motivated public against the opposing parties. Such as the opposition leader and Awami League President, Sheikh Hasina Wajid during one of her public rallies in Chittagong urged the, "people of Chittagong to initiate a mass uprising against the misrule of the government".[178] The use of ethnic politics by the political parties for their electoral and political gains also helps in intensifying the ethnic differences among the people instead of resolving such issues in the national interest and for the prosperity of masses.

Another ethnic community, which has been a source of unrest in southeastern Bangladesh, is the Rohingyas community, considered as the 'illegal immigrants' who crossed over to Bangladesh in late 1970s, as result of Burmese military operations against them. The Rohingya refugee camps sprung up along the border south of Cox's bazaar, and a steady trickle of refugees from Burma continued to cross into Bangladesh throughout 1980s. The community soon started receiving aid from foreign organizations, and subsequently some political organizations were formed among the community on the Bangladesh-Burma border. Soon these organisations turned into militant factions and were aided by religious extremist groups.[179] In the early 1990s, another wave of Rohingya refugees entered Bangladesh and the influx of refugees created instability in the region and also ethnic violence in the area. With the UN intervention the process of repatriation of refugees started and the some improvement in situation took place.[180] However, the refugees still entangled inside Bangladesh are facing problems particularly the younger generation. This led to UN oral intervention by Anti-Slavery

International, on 6 April 2004 on account of deliberated measures taken by Bangla government against Rohingya children of Northern Rakhine State, designed to impede child development.[181]

### **Impact of Extremism in Bangladesh**

The increasing extremism and growing terrorism in the country has destabilized the monolithic nature of the Bangladesh society. The policies adopted by the respective governments and their inability to deal with the human development issues have created a politically and religiously-motivated violent groups. Ethnic problems in addition of being cross-border were further complicated by the government's policies and deteriorating economic conditions.

The governments have taken many actions under their own political considerations, without taking into account the implications of the policies in the long run on the national political scene and country's economy. Such as in August 1999, the government of Bangladesh came under international criticism for its eviction of more than 20,000 people from slums around Dhaka, on the grounds of stemming crime. However, many questioned whether making several thousand people homeless would not, in fact, increase the crime rate.[182]

The human rights of ethnic minorities have become a source of concern, especially in the CHT, due to the forced transfer of population. The policy of large-scale settlement by Bengalis from the plains in the CHT areas has led to the further impoverishment and marginalization of the indigenous people resulting in their armed uprising.[183] Though the CHT Accords in 1997 brought relative stability in the region, however, its complete implementation remains a cause of friction between the government, tribals and the settlers.

The law and order situation and the rise in militant Islam have discouraged investment and development in the country. The political confrontation has been a complimentary factor in the rise of terrorism. At times, political programmes give rise to terrorist activities like bomb attacks or violent political rallies. Such political environment also reduces incentives to invest in the country. The rising terrorist activities, increasing militant religious organizations, along with the political violence have created a negative image about the investment potential in the country to both local and foreign investors.[184]

The lack of proper social and human facilities for the public has created a sense of insecurity and frustration particularly among youth. Along with the rising militant organizations, there is large number of unemployed poverty-stricken youth, available as ready recruits through monetary incentives of militant organizations. The madrasa culture has also witnessed a steady rise in Bangladesh and has become a source of extremist ideology. The government so far has not been able to tackle with these issues in a just and fair manner.

### **Sri Lanka**

The Sri Lankan conflict and situation is indeed the most complex among the South Asian nations, with its multi-dimensional aspects that have strengthened over time. The conflict in Sri Lanka is unique in the sense that it is communal, ethnic and linguistic at the same time, along with the majority-minority politics playing key role in exacerbating the conflict. The predominant religious factor has been that the Buddhists form the majority community, and there are also the Christians, Hindus and Muslims, in fairly large numbers and therefore being active protagonists of their separate identities. There is corresponding religious divisiveness along ethnic lines. The Buddhist also happens to be largely the Sinhala community, the Christians are primarily the Tamils and Muslims are to be found in both ethnic-linguistic groups as well.

The course of events in Sri Lanka has had its own history of socio-political tussles accompanied by violence. Since the British period, there had been communal clashes between local religious groups generally on the occasions of religious festivals. The emergence of these localised clashes corresponded also to the heightening

of Buddhist and Hindu resurgence movements in the island, and in turn probably influenced the religiosity of Catholics and Muslims who found themselves in the midst of revitalised Buddhist and Hindu majorities. During this period, a number of displacements also took place for the purpose of supplying labour to plantations and this introduced the ethnic-cum-language factor as well. The Tamil problem in Sri Lanka is an illustration of this aspect.[185] The problem continued even after the British departure and was intensified due to the relationship between Sri Lankan Tamils and the Indian State of Tamil Nadu. With the continuous struggle between Sinhala nationalism on the one hand and the Tamil separatism on the other, the confrontations led to increasing incidents of terrorism.[186]

Sinhalese versus the rest communalism began in the British period, with the colonial government imposing a classification of the Lankan society along the ethno-religious and regional lines. As its character changed, its historical course became complex with passage of time, as the originally imposed communal identities were modified and at times challenged and also reconstructed by the emerging dominant groups within each community. The post independence history of Sri Lanka has been characterised by the communalisation of the Lankan state and especially by the rise of the Sinhala Buddhist ideology that has further deepened the communal divide.[187] Successive governments have failed to settle grievances of the Tamil minority in a way acceptable to the majority Sinhala population. The current impasse between the Sinhalese and Tamil aspirations shows how unbridgeable the divide is.

Despite such political and communal disturbances, the quality of life is quite high in the island. Although on the basis of per capita gross national product it is among the poorest countries of the world, however the human development level is among the best in South Asia. The literacy rate, estimated in 1990 was about 88 per cent[188], reaching up to 92 per cent in 2001[189] and its educational system is considered among the best in Asia. Its annual GDP growth has increased from 4.0 per cent during 1980-1990, to 5.0 per cent during 1990-2000.[190] However, in spite of the economic growth the income and development disparities exist among the regions and communities. The extremism faced by the island for more than a decade has retarded the process of economic development in the country, which otherwise would have been much higher than the current level. Moreover, by the turn of the decade, the fragile nature of the Sri Lankan economy was exposed when as a result of temporary decline in aid inflows and export receipts, a mini-balance of payments crisis erupted.[191]

### **The Tamil Issue: Communal, Ethnic and Linguistic Dimensions**

Communalism in Sri Lanka was a process initiated decades before independence, gradually developing stronger and taking deeper roots in Sri Lankan society. The policies adopted by the colonial masters to maximize economic gains, introduced the factor of ethnicity in Sri Lankan society. In the 19th century the British brought Indian Tamils from Tamil Nadu as indentured labour on tea plantation. The plantation workers were segregated from the rest of society by the system of production and by their ethnic characteristics such as the language barrier. English soon as a result of colonial policies became an elite language used in Civil service, commerce, and higher education.[192] The 'divide and rule' policy of British Empire was exercised to bring the Sinhalese majority at par with the Tamil minority, which with the arrival of Indian Tamils became a significant community. Tamils took full advantage of colonial rule, entering civil services and the professions in disproportionate numbers compared to the Sinhalese. Hence, the minority, Tamils became a privileged class in the Sri Lankan society. Therefore, it may be asserted that the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka essentially has its origins in rival elite competition, deprivation of majority Sinhalese and the fear among Sinhalese of absorption by Tamil culture.[193]

However, despite traces of initial distrust, the Tamils did not become the target of Sinhalese communal violence till after the 1950s, when the language became a source of confrontation between the two communities. Along with the language issue another factor, which widened the ethnic divide, was the Ceylon Act of 1948 that rendered a vast majority of Tamils disfranchised. Sri Lankan government claimed that since

Tamils were Indians, therefore they ought to be repatriated. The Indian government rejected the claim and the result was that about 84 per cent Tamils were rendered stateless. The settlement between the Tamils and the government on the issue of citizenship and voting rights was accomplished years later in 1964.

With the Swabhasa movement gaining ground and taking shape of 'Sinhala only', the communal divide initially manifested itself as linguistic differences. There was also new resurgence of Buddhism in 1950s. The two issues, language and religion, became combined against that background. The movement was launched to redress the 'historical grievances' of the Sinhalese Buddhists.[194] With the passage of Sinhala Act in 1956, Sinhala was proclaimed as the sole official language of the country, with later legislation even further restricting the use of Tamil in various fields of administration.[195] With the passage of Sinhala Act, Tamils perceived a dire threat to their privileged position in the government services; share in economic activities, as an elementary knowledge of Sinhala became a prerequisite for recruitment. The Sinhalese viewed that the Tamil had an unfair share of government jobs, better economic opportunities and positions in the universities.

Nonetheless, Sinhalese chauvinism against Tamils grew with the passage of time and the policies adopted by the subsequent governments became the main reason of riots between the Sinhalese and the Tamil minority in 1950s and 1960s, as the state political patronage helped Sinhalese entrepreneurs in creating extensive job opportunities mainly for Sinhalese people, through the expansion of the public sector.[196]

Consequently, the Sinhalese urban middle and upper class got opportunities for upward social mobility, while denying the Tamil minorities similar chances. This increasingly alienated Tamils and after a period of riots the Tamil Eelam movement surfaced in the 1970s. Through out these years, a gradual process of political radicalisation occurred with in the Tamil community. Many small groups emerged during these years, which were the result of ineffectiveness of the Tamil parliamentary parties. The armed activities of the secessionist insurrection began in 1972 under the formation of the Tamil New Tigers (TNT). Increasingly violent act of political agitation against the then government's new Republican Constitution of 1972. The violence was of low intensity in these initial years and the government at that time did not realize that an insurrectionary process was underway. In the aftermath of the 1977 general elections, anti-Tamil riots occurred which served to increase the alienation of the Tamil people, which in turn led to increased support for the secessionism.[197]

Prior to 1977, the ruling Sinhalese parties made some efforts at different intervals to reach a working compromise with the Tamil leadership, but faced both the accusations of the Tamils and the onslaught of the opposition parties. The political exploitation by different parties also retarded efforts, by successive governments. Gradually violence became a common political resource. The competition for resources also tended to be seen as competition between these two groups.[198]

Following the anti-Tamil riots of July 1983, the Tamil insurrection escalated to a qualitatively higher intensity. These riots in fact boosted the separatists' cause and served to swell guerrilla organizations with thousands of new recruits. During these violent years, no political and economic reforms aimed at redressing the grievances of the Tamil people were formulated or could be effectively implemented. From 1983 to 1987, several military operations were carried out against the Tamils, but these were not followed by any coherent overall strategy to deal with the grievances of the Tamil people. A considerable amount of internal displacement of Tamil civilians occurred due to the military operations, and other tough measures. Consequently, the insurrection relentlessly increased in intensity. Some efforts were made to reach at a political compromise through offers of reforms to redress the Tamil grievances, but these efforts proved futile.[199]

The external dimension of the conflict further complicated the crisis, as the India factor also surfaced in this period. The political complexities of the ethnic conflict between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils are spread as far as the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. In 1981 many Tamil militants left Sri Lanka after the riots broke out. The Indian government in the early 1980s got involved in the Sri Lankan quagmire.

India not only provided food and shelter to the Tamil refugees but also provided military training and funding to these refugees for military operations.[200] As India gained influence over different Tamil militant groups inside Sri Lanka, by its policies and pressure on the Sri Lankan government it became a party between the Tamils and the Sri Lankan government.[201] As the result of a large scale military operation embarked by the Sri Lankan government in the Jaffna peninsula, in July 1987, under Indo-Lanka Accord India became a direct player. The Accord enabled India not only to exert pressure via diplomacy on the Sri Lankan government but also enabled it to covertly assist the secessionist insurgent Tamil groups in Sri Lanka, some of whom had been trained in India,[202] armed and financially supported to carry out guerrilla activities in Sri Lanka.

In 1987, the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) was sent to Sri Lanka. The large scale operations by IPKF during 1987-90 could not decisively defeat the Tamil rebels, under the umbrella of the LTTE. From April 1989 to June 1990, Sri Lankan government got engaged in direct communications with the LTTE leadership. In the meantime, fighting between LTTE and IPKF escalated in the north.[203] As a result of cease-fire agreement between Sri Lankan government and LTTE in 1989, the Sri Lankan President requested the Indian government to withdraw its forces. In 1990, as the IPKF left the island, the schism between the Sinhalese and Tamils was wider than before.[204]

The Tamil insurgency continued with heavy fighting and occasional ceasefires. Presently, the secessionist insurrection has undergone changes and the current peace process initiated by former Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe, and the parallel peace process also begun to take shape facilitated by the Norwegian government, injected hope in the decade-old conflict. After many years of conflict, negotiations regarding the underlying causes have begun. However, there was a negative fall out as the political crisis turned into an open conflict between the President and the Prime Minister,[205] resulting in the dissolution of the Wickramasinghe government. It served as a setback initially to the talks underway. However, as the new government was installed in April 2004 efforts were made to restart the peace talks. An unexpected issue has entered to complicate the situation. This was issue of the break up of the LTTE on regional grounds, and the resorting of violence by the two factions of LTTE. LTTE, after break away of Karuna faction, has set two preconditions for peace talks to resume between itself and government. One is the ISGA proposal, which it has presented as the sole basis of peace talks. The other condition is that Karuna group's activities must cease. LTTE has demonstrated in past negotiations that when it lays down a precondition it will not budge from it. In order to get out of the gridlock, the government needs to assess its own capability to give concessions which it can deliver. With the coalition JVP objecting to government negotiation on the basis of ISGA proposals, President is unlikely to be able to carry the rest of her government with her.[206]

### **Impact of the Tamil Movement on Sri Lankan Society**

The Sri Lankan ethnic conflict is a result of economic, political and cultural deprivation and grievances of a minority, which provoked a violent rebellion against the state that has gradually come to be seen as representative of majority ethnic group. The ethnic polarization resulting from political and violent conflict also impacted on civil society, which today stands ethnically divided. The population has through the years become polarized into relatively defined ethnic groups, who speak different languages, belong to different religions and learn a history that glorifies self-image at the expense of others.[207]

A number of contributory factors stand out in the post-independence politics of Sri Lanka:

a) The unfortunate history of post-independence Sri Lankan politics is that opposition parties have repeatedly seized upon governmental concessions to Tamil parties as a betrayal of the Sinhalese to mobilize popular opposition to the government.[208]

b) The efforts undertaken by governments had failed to take into account the grievances of the minority groups, which had translated into violent conflict. Primary objective of the government should have been to develop and implement policies to regain and retain the allegiance of the Tamil constituency, from within whom the secessionist movement arose.

c) The insecurity faced by ordinary Tamils was a potent factor in the development of the secessionist insurrection. Hence the security of the minority community should have been a major consideration for the government.[209]

d) Foreign element in the conflict, in addition to the governments' shortsighted policies, has been a major factor in prolonging the bloody crisis.

Sri Lanka has also faced serious economic set backs due to the conflict. Though it was the first South Asian country to implement economic liberalisation policies in 1977, yet its policies did not take off because of the uncertain security environment that surfaced with the Tamil movement. The decades-long ethnic war has taken a high toll of the economic development of the country. The economic cost of the war, according to one study, during 1983-1996, was 168 per cent of the country's 1996 GDP.[210] High defence spending has resulted in high budget deficits, discouraging investments in physical infrastructure needed for other development activities. A total of one million people have been uprooted and displaced internally as a result of this turmoil, with another half million leaving the country to claim refugee status abroad.[211]

## **Nepal**

The Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal has been described as an ethnic turntable of Asia due to multitude of indigenous tribes that make it rich in its ethnic diversity. This ethnic diversity can be gauged from the results of its 2001 population census, which has recorded 49 ethnic/cultural and 51 caste groups.[212] Currently, country is facing an ideologically-based extremism, led by Maoist, which has become the major security challenge for the country. The Maoist-led armed uprising in Nepal is now more than eight years old. It was launched on 13 February 1996, when the Communist party of Nepal (Maoist) proclaimed a 'peoples war' to seize political power. The insurgency began with over 40 demands to the government covering social, political, economic and foreign policy issues. Within the first week of launching the demands, the insurgents conducted almost 5,000 armed activities the country.[213] The armed revolt initially started in three or four mid-western districts but now has spread to almost all the 75 districts of the country and has left more than 7,000 people dead since 1996, when it all begun.[214]

The social, economic, political and strategic dimensions of the insurgency suggests that it is the result of social and economic disparity among certain regions and classes, which is evident from the fact that the Maoists strongholds in the western hills are also located in the poorest regions in Nepal. Overall poverty, negative effects of 'structural adjustment programmes' and the rising number of the educated unemployed youth have also contributed to the rise of the insurgency,[215] which has been heightened by explicit centralization of developmental process. Discrimination against the Maoists on cultural grounds and the low castes on the basis of ritual status, along with the negative developmental process adopted by the government has created support among the masses for the Maoist movement.

The success of Maoist insurgency has more to do with the timing and appropriateness of channelising the tremendous upsurge to remove the present non-performing institutions, agencies, systems and policies, rather than ideology, political doctrine and idealism. In other words, it is not a cadre-based movement, but is the result of the helplessness, economic depression and state repression, which has brought the movement to this diabolic level.[216]

The conglomeration of various politico-economic and socio-cultural factors triggered the Maoist mobilization and violence. The regional disparity has been most blatant and according to the Human

Development Report of Nepal 1998, districts like Dang, Rolpa, Dhading, Baitadi, Dolpa and Jajarkot, considered to be the bastions of the Maoists, have Human Development Index (HDI) value less than 0.3 as against Kathmandu's 0.6. Most of the social indicators like literacy, birth rate, death rate, life expectancy, malnourishment of population are still at a low level. With these social indicators and disparities, Nepal remains in the bottom of quartile of 48 Least Developed Countries in the world.[217] Poverty, with a relatively high annual population growth rate of 2.24 per cent, has been a fertile ground for the Maoist recruitment.

Apart from mass poverty and social oppression, several other factors facilitated the growth of Maoism in Nepal. Poor governance, corruption and lingering political instability gave the Maoists the leverage to discredit the established order and present themselves as the alternative. The political instability syndrome was so strong in Nepal that it led to change of ten governments between 1990 and 2001. Among the deprived class were also the ethno-linguistic minorities and Maoists were quick to comprehend and manipulate their alienation and grievances, expanding their support base.

### **The Rise of Maoist Extremism**

The Communist party of Nepal was founded in 1949, influenced by the Chinese revolution and Mao Zedong thought. It opted for a parliamentary socialism. Since the beginning, the party faced ideological infighting, splits and breakaway groups, rebelling against the official party line. When in 1960, the panchayat system was introduced in Nepal; the Communists got divided over the course of political action. This later led to creation of many splinter parties from within the main group. The Communist party of Nepal - Maoist (CPN-M) was formed as a result of split in 1994, led by Pushpakamal Dahal (also known as Comrade Prachanda). It boycotted the mid-term polls in Nepal held in November 1994 and opted for armed struggle. These Maoist rebels were soon able to establish close links with the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) and the People's War Group (PWG) in India, due to the facility to travel freely to India.[218] The India factor strengthened the Maoist ideology and also provided material support.

The CPN-M's main objective has been to establish a 'people's government' if necessary through waging a 'people's war', following the strategy of 'surrounding the city from the countryside'. On 4 February 1996, the Maoists submitted a 40-point memorandum to the government, demanding the abolition of the royal privileges and promulgation of a republican constitution, the abolition of Mahakali Treaty with India, among other demands. On getting no attention from government for their demands, the Maoists started carrying out simultaneous attacks in different parts of Nepal from 13 February 1996. Since then attacks on government installations, para-military forces and violent clashes between Maoists and government agencies intensified.[219] There were serious endeavours to open peace talks with the Maoists in mid-2001, however no positive outcome has been accomplished yet, as this study goes to print.

The strength of armed Maoist guerrillas is now estimated to be around 2,500, backed by 10,000 or more militia. These are largely recruited from the rural poor and interestingly one-third of the guerrilla squads are women.[220] The cross-border links of Maoists have strengthened overtime and it has become an established fact that the Nepalese Maoists have been procuring weapons and are conducting joint training camps along the Bihar-Nepal border.[221] In addition to receiving assistance in equipments and training, a crucial advantage for the Nepalese Maoist guerrillas has been the access to safe sanctuaries in India. There are Indian militant organizations that have networked with Maoists such as Gurkha National Federation, United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and Kamatapur Liberation Organization (KLO).[222]

### **The Caste System**

Nepal is also witnessing a strong undercurrent of caste groups' resurgence in its different regions. Nepalese society is stratified into different castes and ethnic groups arranged in a hierarchy of socially designed and defined relations. The state has implemented the policy of giving an unduly distinct status to three castes -



Bahun, Chhetri and Thakuri- constituting about 30 per cent of the population, who monopolizing the lead role in social, economic and political activities. On the other hand the majority – the Mongoloid stock – have been neglected, deprived and backward lot.[223]

The discriminating religious and linguistic policies have led to entrenchment of high-caste Hindus in bureaucracy and the power structure. There also exists a clear correlation between caste hierarchy on one hand, and literacy and economic status on the other. For instance, adult literacy rate for high-caste groups ranged from 42 to 58 per cent, while for 'untouchables' Dalits it was 23.8 per cent. Among those with higher education degree, 88.8 per cent were high caste, and Dalits were only 3.1 per cent. Social groups with a higher level of literacy and education also have higher in per capita incomes. High castes have per capita income exceeding the national average of Rs. 7,673 and for Dalits it was Rs. 4, 940. The lower caste also remains subjugated in governance.[224] The class difference has also been a source of frustration among the deprived sections and the Maoists' leadership has used the issue of backward classes as their base for the ongoing movement

### **Impact on Society**

The Maoist insurgency is the result of the government's mismanagement leading to socio-economic deterioration, strengthened over time by external factors. The rise of extremism in the country has seriously affected Nepal's socio-economic situation. With 42 per cent of its people living below poverty line, Nepal is facing economic recession, mainly due to escalation of insurgency, which has hit its main industry i.e. tourism that is a significant source of foreign exchange earning. The lack of security and political instability, have hit the economy and has led to contraction of GDP by 0.6 per cent by the year 2002.[225] Unemployment has become a very serious problem in Nepal as well, which currently is estimated to be approximately 45 per cent.[226] The major physical and social infrastructure has been destroyed by the violent activities of the Maoist movement.

Stability is unlikely to return to Nepal unless the grievances of the deprived are addressed and political system is allowed to function properly. The power struggle between the Monarchy and the political parties has added to the Maoist movements' political strength. The current political system has not been able to tackle problems of poverty, disparity, injustice, corruption and centralization. Nepal needs to revisit its constitutional issues and build public consensus on the issues of national importance.[227]

### **Bhutan**

Bhutan, like most of South Asian countries, has considerable diversity in its ethnic composition, which have cross country linkages with neighbouring countries. Today, like other South Asian countries, Bhutan also faces the rise of violence on the basis of ethnic discrimination, threatening its security. These ethno-based differences are the result of the government policies and the cross-border migration, along with the economic problems.

Since late 1800s, the Lhotshampas (people of Nepali origin) began to migrate to the southern regions of Bhutan in search of farmland for economic prosperity. However, little contact developed between the Drukpas (Buddhist Bhutanese of Tibetan origin) already living in those areas and the settler Lhotshampas, who mainly settled in the south. Over the years, the Lhotshampas retained their Nepali culture, language and religious traditions, which starkly differed from that of the Drukpas. Until mid 1980s, there was not much visible conflict between the two communities; however, with the passage of legislation in 1985, mandating the adoption of the Drukpa culture by the minorities, protests ensued, followed by violence and killings. A national program was instituted to verify the citizenship of Bhutan's residents and under this program a large majority of Lhotshampas were classified as illegal immigrants. In response to demonstrations and protests by these immigrants against the new laws, the government cracked down on the demonstrators, leading to atrocities

and a forceful eviction of Lhotshampas.[228] According to some estimates, about 100,000 refugees made their way across the border to eastern Nepal which in turn led to differences between the two governments.[229]

The reasons for the conflict were both political and cultural. The monarchy, with its cabinet of appointed ministers was exclusively Drukpas (until the late 1980s) and held absolute political authority in Bhutan. However, as the Lhotshampas became educated and began infiltrating high-level positions in the government, the Drukpa elite became fearful of the viability of their political hold. Hence, the tensions between the Drukpa elite and the Lhotshampas emerged slowly and came to a boil in the late 1980s, when the afore-mentioned legislation was passed. The predominantly Drukpa government, also feared the swamping of their Buddhism-based culture by the Hindu traditions and cultural practices of the Lhotshampas.[230]

Another external factor negatively affecting the stability and security of the kingdom was the forceful occupation in the early nineties, of some parts of the country by the Indian separatist rebel groups. There are estimated to be around 19 to 20 camps of Indian insurgent groups based inside Bhutan, of such Indian militant groups as the ULFA, NDFB and KLO who have established camps in the jungles of southern Bhutan.[231] During a state visit to New Delhi in September 2003, the Bhutanese king invited the separatist groups for talks to settle the question of their peaceful withdrawal from the Himalayan kingdom.[232] Talks were held in Thimpu between Royal Government and ULFA in October 2003 and with NDFB in November 2003,[233] militant groups having failed to produce any positive outcome and KLO not even responding to Royal government's invitation for dialogue, government resorted to military action as decided in 81st session of the National Assembly held on 28 June-18 August 2003.[234] In mid December 2003, Bhutan government launched a military crackdown named Operation All Clear against Indian separatist groups and their bases. According to estimates about 3,000 rebels from 3 separate groups are operating inside kingdom.[235] Although with the launching of military operation has resulted in demolition of all the 30 rebel groups but militants are still holed up inside the kingdom.[236] Bhutan earlier didn't take any direct action against these militants due to fear of retaliatory attacks on its nationals. However, such military action was long awaited as these rebel groups have disrupted the socio-political environment of the country.

### **SECTION III**

#### **The Comparative Analysis of Trend in South Asian Extremism**

An observer has stated that with the passage of time, terrorism is becoming the substitute for the great wars of the 1800s and early 1900s, and new forms of terrorism along with the state-sponsored activities are gaining momentum.[237] The South Asian region has also witnessed a marked rise of terrorism, which often is a manifestation of the increasing multi-dimensional extremism. As discussed earlier, there are several common factors responsible for the declining social and human security and strengthening of extremist trend in the region. The deteriorating socio-economic conditions, governments' self-serving policies, along with the foreign intervention, which in South Asia has mainly been cross-border, has made the region among the most volatile regions in the world.

A United Nations supported study on human development in South Asia has slammed governments for corruption, inefficient bureaucracy and discrimination against women, and has declared the region as one of the worst governed in the world.[238] The system of governance has become unresponsive and irrelevant to the needs and concerns of the people. In these conditions the rise of extremism was predictable phenomenon, which has become a major security challenge for the South Asian countries.

Extremism and resultant terrorism is the main destabilizing factor in the South Asian security framework because of its multi-dimensional nature. The most serious threat from the extremism is its critical role in influencing the thrust of bilateral relations and linkage between the extremist elements and the foreign powers, particularly neighbouring countries. There have been clear examples in the region where an attitude

of acquiescence or encouragement has been adopted by one state towards terrorist violence in other state. The interstate terrorism can lead to intensification of the existing ethnic strife, and in case of South Asia, most of the societies are multi-ethnic, a fact often exploited by different elements.[239]

The multiple ethnic groups divided over by the boundaries, are the main targets for exploitation by the neighbouring countries. The case of Indo-Sri Lanka relations during the early years of Tamil insurgency is a case in point. The operations conducted by Tamil militants in Sri Lanka from the safe sanctuaries and bases in India gave rise to serious strains in Indo-Sri Lanka relations. Just prior to the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement on ethnic conflict in July 1987, India directly intervened under the pretext of dropping food supplies to the beleaguered Tamil militant communities. [240] The Indian intervention in Tamil affair for establishing its dominance as regional power generated acrimony in Indo-Sri Lanka relations.

Similar tensions have existed in Indo-Bangladesh, India-Nepal, and India-Pakistan relations. India-Bhutan relations have also witnessed a setback due to the Bodo community issue, which is living on the both sides of the border. The same issue is causing tensions between India and Bangladesh. India has also been involved in supporting, directly and indirectly, the Maoists in Nepal, who have created a war-like situation in Nepal for almost a decade now.

Indo-Pak relations since their partition have remained tense, and both have been charging each other of supporting terrorist elements and interfering in each other's internal affairs. Pakistan's support for the separatist elements in Kashmir has been an issue of contention between the two states, and Pakistan has been accusing Indian secret service for supporting and conducting terrorist activities in the country. The Indian role in the East Pakistan crisis is still a source of mistrust in Pakistan towards India.

The process of radicalisation is also a result of government policies of sponsoring a particular group, community or region, while ignoring or suppressing the rights of the others. The result has been the rising extremism and terrorist activities. A sense of insecurity has been created because of terrorism and exploited by governments to preserve their hold on power instead of entertaining social grievances.[241] The security threat has resulted in curbing of political freedom and independence of the general population. This in some cases has also led states to enact laws curbing human rights of citizens. The Indian government has come up with POTA (Prevention of Terrorist Act), apparently to deal with the challenge of terrorism but in reality it gave wide ranging powers to the Central government to arrest and detain people on the mere suspicion of their involvement in terrorism.[242] In Nepal the king asserted de facto power of the state on 4 October 2002, by sacking the Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and his cabinet, invoking article 127 of the Constitution and putting off parliamentary polls indefinitely which were scheduled for November 2002.[243] This situation rose due to the escalating Maoist crisis, along with the failure of the political parties to develop a national consensus among them to deal with the security challenge posed by the rising terrorism. Terrorism has supplemented the failure of leadership to cope with the challenges posed by the plural system, leading to systemic decay and power consolidation by the monarchy.

Political and social radicalism has promoted a streak of authoritarianism in the psyche of political leaders across South Asia caused by their sense of personal insecurity. Political violence has damaged the democratic process and the governments, being unable to deal with the problems, have heavily relied on use of force and coercive policies to maintain their control on the leverage of political power.[244] Such policies adopted by governments have actually accelerated the extremist trends and has led to the rise of terrorism in all of the South Asian countries.

Terrorism, which is generated by socio-economic deprivation and disparity, in turn also impedes the process of economic development by not only damaging the existing infrastructure but also discouraging foreign and local investors. Moreover, the state also has to mobilize substantial resources to deal with terrorism, while the economies of all the South Asian states are still in the developing stage and can ill-afford such expenditures.

For instance, in the case of Sri Lanka, the economy has suffered massively because of constant waves of terrorism it has experienced. In 2001, terrorists destroyed civilian and military aircraft at Colombo airport, resulting in several losses to Air Lanka, forcing it to discontinue its flight operations to a number of countries.[245] In other South Asian countries too, terrorism has damaged economic progress leading to a rise of insecurity among the people.

There are increasing inequalities of income in all the economies of the region. These growing inequalities are evident in terms of differences between rural and urban residents, between regions and sub-regions within the countries. The widening income gaps have been closely associated with increased social and political tensions in the states.

The South Asian states, if willing to tackle problems, will have to revise their policies of self-justification and redress the grievances of the general population in a genuine manner. The socio-economic problems and issues of human security need to be given at the highest priority by the governments, as these are the main causes of frustration among the masses and particularly among the educated, unemployed youth, who become easy recruits for the radical organizations for their terrorist activities. In addition to the individual state efforts to deal with the extremism, a concerted regional effort is also required as the problem also has a significant regional dimension to it. Many existent problems can be solved effectively through a collective region-based approach.

The localized and country-specific terrorism can be tackled at the level of individual countries through domestic policies and legislations and by paying proper attention to the issues of human insecurity in the states. Cross-border terrorism and interference by the states in the affairs of others and in aiding certain communities and groups has to be dealt with at regional level. Bilateral and regional initiatives may serve to deal with the cross-border interference and support to different groups. Without formulating a comprehensive approach to deal with the issue of terrorism at the state, society and regional level, the menace of radicalism cannot be eradicated.

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