

## Sub-Nationalism and the Case for Intrastate Re-Demarcation in South Asia

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### Abstract

*The demographic make-up of South Asia has helped reinforce ethnic politics in each country in the region. South Asia is a diverse and vibrant region ethnically, culturally, lingual and religiously. The diversity has its own downside in the region as it has been a constant source of tension and strife as well. Sub-nationalism largely revolves around ethnicity, and all-important policy decisions mainly reflect the ethnolinguistic diversity of any society. Various South Asian countries like India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka Nepal, Bangladesh, and have practised many sub-nationalist movements, most of them acquired separate political and social identities, and others are still persisting in certain forms. This article seeks to analyze the discourse around sub-nationalism, ethnic politics, ethnonationalism, and the creation of new federating units in South Asia.*

**Key Words:** Sub-Nationalism, Politics of Identity, Ethnic Fault Line, Re-Demarcation, Ethno-Nationalism, Re-Organization, Ethnic Group, New Provinces, Multi-Culturalism.

### Introduction

A huge number of the developing countries in the modern world have experienced sub-national movement and their revival in recent times. Sub-nationalities and ethno lingual societies which breathed in the so-called nations have underway proclaimed them in pursuit of distinct devolution of power and political identity, and even independence. (Muhammad Waseem, 1996) Since the time age-old human beings were inevitable to assume one identity whichever they have inborn, lingual, political, religious, and identities. In the evaluation and the history of multi-ethnic states in states of an earlier time of Africa, South Asia and Eastern Europe. (Muhammad Shaheed Khan, 2009) The demographic changes, material progress, unintended or intended, unequal development in social and economic circles outcome in sub-nationalism awareness of the advantaged as well as the deprived ethnic group in the ethnically diverse South Asian societies. (Muhammad Shaheed Khan, 2009)

South Asia is a group of countries with asymmetric political and economic profiles. Though South Asia is segmented along numerous axes of differences caste, ethnic, gender, class, language and religion. In fact, the mobilization of these individualities is the result of particular shapes of global political, social, local, and

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economic forces and of the appearance of particular electorates and politics of identity is based on new forms of politicized religion. In modern, South Asia has been difficult right from the start because this region has been dogged with continuing conflicts both at the domestic and interstate level. ([Anu Priya, 2020](#))

Summit Gangly underlined the four different reasons for conflicts in South Asia comprising India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, such as claiming on resources, colonial historical legacy, a legacy left by an external invader, and changes in existing due to modernization. (Karamat, 2006)

In the modern South Asian religion, politics, and language have been raised perpetually to explain national identity, while ethnicity, culture, caste and gender are determining the local identities other than the national identity. According to Ishtiaq Ahmed, grounding national identity on a particular language is basically an idea of the west, which is appealed frequently in modern politics of South Asia. ([Baljit Singh, 2006](#))

South Asia is multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural and a hub of sub-nationalist's regions. Disappointingly, ethnic diversity causes many clashes and formed much discontent both at the social and state levels in South Asia. (Karamat, 2006) Most of the sub-national movements are raising a voice for distinct political identity in the South Asian region as one sub-national group has demanded on a cultural basis and other on a religious, linguistic, and administrative basis.

Historical events have shown that some 15 ethnic clashes occurred in duration since the 1950s in the South Asian region. India has perceived 8, followed by three in Pakistan and one separately in Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Bangladesh. Sub-nationalist movements, Khalistan, Tamil Nadu, and East Pakistan, rose from the mishandling of the self-sufficiency strains, which led to the conflict escalation. (Karamat, 2006) Whenever an elite and a dominant ethnic group try to dominate over the right of the outlying minorities (regional, linguistic, and religious or other), the consequence has been either a passionate partition advent of sub-national movement, succession to achieve those privileges. Numerous ethnopolitical movements and conflicts became impetus in the post-world war period in South Asia. (Karamat, 2006)

Gurr stated that there are four causes that regulate whether or not the subgroups will activate against the other group or state dominance.

First, political, economic and social, inequalities between groups. Secondly, a group's identity factor, thirdly, Headship is vital to the growing and raising of sub-national movements, and Lastly, ethnic conscription must provoke a reaction from the other leading group or state against which it is responding. (Karamat, 2006)

The restricting of the state has been the leading example in India where the restructuring of states happened many times around sub-national principles has, rather than growing pressure for separation, further national assimilation. In fact, India is not the single sample where ethnic federalism survives. Others include Spain, Canada, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Belgium, Switzerland, Russia, Iraq, Bosnia, Herzegovina, and definitely Pakistan itself, albeit many with examples of sub-nationalism. (Katharine Adeney, 2012)

## **Review of the Literature**

[Zulfiqar \(2012\)](#) study highlights that federalism was introduced by the British government before the partition, which remained continue even after independence. The study further revealed that Pakistan is an ethnically diverse society and comprising many sub-nationalities, ethnically and administratively divided into groups. Khan (2015) study revealed that all major Pakhtunes tribes are not in favor of the Baluch Nationalist Movement, and they are more interested in the promotion and development of their own distinct and separate identity. [Azhar \(2017\)](#) indirect communication Stated that HQM, later on in 1992, included in its objective the establishment of Hazara Province and the fourth achievement of this objective movement was started in all the Districts of Hazara Division. Zaman (2017) stated that renaming of NWFP as KP province was an ethnic move made by ANP, and they have the right to change the name, but the People

of Hazara Division also having the right to protect its separate identity, which is not possible without the establishment of Hazara Province. ([Azhar, 2017](#))

Kukreja, Veena (2008) deals with the subjects of development, democracy, and dissatisfaction in the general framework of South Asia and the particular contexts of the key countries of the region. Major challenges provoking development and democracy in South Asia, including the interface between multi-cultural democracy, sub-nationalism, identity, and development in India; a movement for the restoration of democracy in Pakistan; and the Maoist drive and its democratic accommodation in Nepal are part of the thorough discussions in the book. (Kukreja Veena, 2008)

Amartya (2006) illustrates three different methodologies of nationalism. Amartya argues that violence and conflict have been on the rise in the recent past. The world is divided among cultural, civilization, or religious boundaries. People are discounting other commonalities like morals, sciences, professions, language, politics, class and literature. (Amartya Sen 2006)

Bertus De Villiers (2012) discuss the basis of creation of new states or province and sub-nationalisms in different parts of the world, like India, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and South Africa. He argues all four countries had created the new states on all ethnic, lingual, administrative, economic, and geographical bases. The writer provided the sub-rational example of a different state in South Asia. (Bertus De Villiers, 2012)

Katharin Adeney (2012) stated federal system of Pakistan has been a topic of slight relative enquiry, partially because of Pakistan's fragile democratic identifications. While Adeney was conscious of the controlling of variety over national organizations within Pakistan from a comparative and historical perspective. (Katherine Adeney 2012)

## Research Methodology

The present research work is qualitative, normative and descriptive in nature. In fact, primary and secondary sources both have been used for the collection of data. Primary data has been collected from intellectuals, politicians and political activists, while secondary data has been collected from different books, research journals, newspapers and the internet.

## Sub Nationalist Movement and Politics of Identity

### Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a multi-religious, multi-lingual, and multi-ethnic country. In the last forty years, various sub-nationalist movements have been proposed there, and Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT) is one of them. Physically, 10% of the land of Bangladesh is covered by Chittagong Hill Tract. It is basically situated in the southeastern portion of the state. In detail, this area can be divided into three different districts; Rangamati is situated in the centre, in the south Bandarban, Khagachari in the North. CHT has twenty-five Uperzilas, twenty-five Uperzilas union. The districts have differences in terms of ethnic composition, topography, history, culture and religion, social organization and ways of life.

There are eleven chief ethnic groups that are formerly living there. Marma, Tripurna, Tanchangya,, Muu, Lushai, Pankhu, Khaumi, Chak, and Kheyang ([Khairul Chaudhary,2008](#)). The persons of the CHT have a diverse social organization, culture, religion, language, and social organization. They have their place in the Mengaloid race and performing both Buddhism and Christianity religions. The partition of India and the end of colonial rule and triggered a huge number of sub-nationalist movements in south Asia. ([Khairul Chaudhary,2008](#))

In CHT, there are two sub-nationalist movements currently. The Indigenous and Juma sub-national movement is famous in CHT. In the 1920s, the Juma National Movement was started, but formerly it launched in 1966 when a new party (CHTWA), Chittagong Hill Tract Welfare Association, was created. The Chittagong Hill Tract create a comprehensive political party (PCJSS) to coherent its party-political plans.

With the time being Juma sub-nationalist movement has changed its demand from independence to regional and provincial autonomy.

Certain agreements took place between the Bangali Government and CHT people. The accord which was held on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1997 was a famous one. The people of the Juma sub-nationalist movement have been given provincial autonomy and identity. ([Khairul Chaudhary, 2008](#)) Though, the PCJSS has claimed and raised a voice for the Juma people identity and joined Bangladesh Indigenous People Forum (BIPF), which is known as the indigenous group system.

In 1993 another sub-nationalist indigenous movement emerged on the international day of the year of the indigenous people. In fact, the movement is collaborative run by the leaders of the movement with around 20 NGO's. ([Khairul Chaudhary, 2008](#)) In fact, a very complex and different relationship occurred between these two movements. There is a huge difference between their political program. The Juma sub-nationalism focuses on the self-determination of Juma's people. On the contrary, the Indigenous movement is basically a civil society movement evolving concluded the collaborative move between NGO's and elites. ([Khairul Chaudhary, 2008](#))

## India

India is an ethnically diverse state and has been practising many sub-nationalist movements more than any South Asian state. India has re-demarcated state 15 times on the basis of ethnic, administrative and lingual. The following nine states have been created by separating from the existing states in the last 73 years, from the Bombay state the Gujrat and Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh from Madrass, after re-organizing Cohen, Kerala and Travancore. Nagaland and Karnatka were created by carving out Assam and Mysore were renewed; from Punjab, Haryana was created. Uttar Pradesh from Uttorkhand and Jharkhand from Bihar, Chhattisgarh from Madhya Pradesh. In addition, seven union regions were given the status of state. These are Meghalaya, Himachal Pradesh, Tripura, Sikkim, Gua and Mizoram, and Manipur.

In fact, a protest was started by Adhra Pradesh against struggling to form Telangana from the Andhra Pradesh. The process of re- demarcation is actually humble. It requires a simple majority to pass a bill suggesting re-demarcation and make it a law. ([Babar. 2012](#))

In post-colonial India, the idea of identities was kept in mind by the founding fathers of the Indian Constitution, which provides the framework of Indian polity. They provided India with a quasi-federal system to accommodate the diverse identities in the politics and the political mainstream as well. The idea was to provide autonomy to diverse identities and also to ensure their participation in the larger Indian identity, which will be plural in nature and federal in character. In 1956, the reorganization of states on the ethno-lingual ground was another main attempt to provide accommodations for the various individualities into the political conventions of the state. Hence, this demanding process was not ended even after the creation and reorganization of many new states; the multi-layered identities took the form of nativist and secessionist movements. ([Baljit Singh, 2006](#))

Many scholars and historians have distributed the reorganization process of India into three different phases. The first reorganization of states in India was started in 1956, which turned over a countrywide sub-nationalist movement and demanded the formation of a lingual province. ([Maya Chadda, 2002](#)) Since its inception, there are two major issues faced by India of language politics. First was the linguistic states, and second, was the problem of the national language. The second reorganization phase started in 1971 and ended in 1987. Nagaland was carved out from the North West part of India, and various new states were shaped. In 1999 the third phase was opened with the formation of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Uttaranchal in the northern province of India. ([Robert, D.King, 2002](#))

India, as a prominent South Asian nation, is not free from the politics of identities. Largely, it is thought that the case of India is much different from other south Asian countries. India has positively constructed an overall national identity. For example, despite its ethnic multiplicity, there is a unity in diversity and a sense

of unity. But similar to other South Asian countries, India's national identity is the most contestable ground in its politics. During the last fifty years, the national identity has been triggered by the homogenization of identity politics and sub-nationalism. The common Indian national identity could neither uproot the primordial identities nor properly accommodate them. ([Baljit Singh, 2006](#))

## Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has a long history of discussion for the political and constitutional path along with power-sharing measures. Tamil Nadu is a sub-national movement in Sri Lanka. Failure of that caused military action that changed the Tamil sub-national Movement in a minority question. ([Maya Chadda, 2002](#))

There are fifteen million people are living in Sri Lanka. In fact, Sri Lanka is a multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-ethnic country. There are 4 main ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. The major ethnic group of Sri Lanka is Sinhalese major, which is comprised of 72% of the total population. Tamils are the second major ethnic group of Sri Lanka. Tamils migrated from south India in 500 BC, and they speak the Dravidian language. In fact, this ethnic group comprised 12.6% of the total population of Sri Lanka. In the northern and eastern parts of India, a large number of Sri Lankan Tamils are living, and some are in the capital of Colombo city. ([Oberst, Robertc, 1987](#))

Indian Tamils are the third major ethnic group in Sri Lanka. They speak the Tamil language, and the majority of them are Hindu. Their culture is far more different from those of Sri Lankan Tamil. Indian Tamils comprised 5.6% of the total population of the country. The race riots have been the dominant factor behind the Sri Lankan Tamils sub-national movement, which started in 1950. ([Neil Devota, 2000](#))

The Federal Party (FP) was formed to defend the political and cultural concern of the Tamils community, which felt defenceless by the state. The Federal Party was required to preserve the Tamil culture's religion, customs, habits and language. Tamil-speaking people have a Federal Party, which is basically a collective party, which protect the ethnic-lingual identity of the Tamil people of Sri Lanka. In short, it is a sub-national movement that was formed by Tamil people to safeguard the ethnic, lingual, culture and political identity. ([Oberst, Robertc, 1987](#))

## Nepal

Nepal is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic country like other South Asian countries. Topographically this country can be divided into three areas, Tarai- Mehdas, Hills Mountains, and, The Tarai Medhas is the largest and most accessible part of the country. (Bishnu Pathak, 2009)

The Maoist insurgency began in Nepal in 1996. The Maoist insurgency was launched by a small extreme communist party which was expanded rapidly. More than 13,000 people were murdered, and thousands were displaced and injured during the Maoist insurgency. Millions were affected politically, economically, and psychologically. All of the seventy-five districts of the country were affected by Maoist insurgency within a decade.

Among popular demands of Maoists were an all-party government, a republic, and the design of a new constitution. Some other prominent issues were marginalized ethnic/cast groups, class inequality, women's rights and addressed concern about Nepal's sovereignty. (Syedur Rahman and Charles Keneddy, 2009)

The available literature on insurgency identified that economic inequality was the major cause of violent conflict. Relative deprivation between achieved wellbeing and expected might increase the alienation and pushed the group towards violent conflict. In the 1990's Nepal was the unequal country in the South Asian region. However, a comprehensive settlement process was initiated in November 2006 between Maoist rebels and the government and with the signing of a peace agreement between both, the Maoist insurgency turned into a non-violent and less popular movement. (Syedur Rahman and Charles Keneddy, 2009)

From the Medhas, the Medhasi sub-national movement was started. It is the huge mistreated border inhabiting the midpoints of Nepal's political phase. In short, the people of the Medhasi ethnic group are mistreated in terms of religious, socio-political and cultural identities and cultural way of life by the striking King's and the courtier's rules and parameters of Aryan Hindu culture. The matter of Medhasi people is a mixture of political, social, cultural, economic and procedures. In short, the Tarai-Medhasi people have started a sub-national movement for the definition and identity. (Bishnu Pathak. *Tarai Madesh*, 2009)

Mass Uprising was an unprecedented event in January and February 2007 for 21 days. A meeting was held on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March in which the cabinet was decided to change the regulation in the query by provided that an arrangement to Indigenous groups comprising the Madhesi and Tharus, identifying their separate and linguistic or ethnic regional.

Madhesi sub-nationalist's forces stressed the government to certify the conception of one Pradeshs or Madhes with complete provincial autonomy in federal construction in the upcoming election.

The Trai-Madhesi issue has occurred in the 1950s when the Nepali Medium of teaching education was enforced. The issues of citizenship and work permits were two major things for the Tari-Medhesi people. The democratic movement was started in the 1950s, which instigated a sub-nationalist movement where Madhesi people promoted the Hindi language and demanded identity, culture, language and political demands.

In fact, the central land of Nepal where the Madhesi movement was started mainly and the Tharu sub-nationalist movement mostly in the midwestern and western. Medhesi and Tharu sub-nationalist movements started in the 1950s and 2006, respectively. Both sub-national movements are dissimilar from each other. Madhesi and Tharu movements propose to assimilate all without classifying Madeshi, Taraian and Pahade. All these kinds of societies are searching for a separate cultural and political identity with all their economic, philosophical, gender, sociocultural, economic, political and economic dimensions. (Bishnu Pathak. *Tarai Madesh*, 2009)

## **Pakistan**

In Pakistan, re-demarcation or reorganization of provinces on an ethnic-lingual or administrative basis is long overdue. (Babar, 2012) Pakistan is a multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic, a country like most of the other developing countries of South Asia. Sub-nationalism on the basis of various variant have been common in Pakistan from the very beginning. The case of East Pakistan, now Bangladesh which resulted in the fall of Dhaka after a civil war in 1971. (Babar, 2012)

Pakistan has a diversity ethnical where many sub-nationalist movements have been launched in different time periods. Mahajar Qaumi Movement latter on Mutheda Qaumi Movemnt, Bengali, Seraiki, Potohar and Hazara Province Movement are the significant among them. Many sub-nationalist movements are demanding on lingual, and ethnic basis and some are asserting separate province on administrative basis. (Babar, 2012.)

The creation of new provinces in Pakistan is a vehemently discussed issue. There are many sub-nationalist movements working in different parts of Pakistan like in KP (Hazara), and Urdu speakers in Sindh, Pashtun in Baluchistan, and Saraiki and Bahawalpur in Punjab, but it might not end there. In fact, the provinces never got their fair regional; religious, ethno-lingual divides are getting stronger day by day. (Soherwordi, Sayed Hussain Shaheed, Khattak, Shahid Ali, 2014)

## **Conclusion**

The issue of ethnic politics is shredding apart the social stuff in democratic states of South Asia. But there are instances when the situation became devastating. Sub-national politics is regrettably the reason for these countries not stirring forward in eradicating socio-economic deprivation. It terminates social unity and stands

in the way of economic development. South Asia is an ethnically diverse region of the world. The major countries of the region, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, have been facing sub-nationalism and ethnic fault-lines since their inception. Most of the states have been accommodated their sub-nationalities ethnic groups in their national framework, like India has played a significant role by accommodating various sub-national ethnic groups by providing them separate states, protecting their identity and giving them economic betterment. India created 15 new states after partition on all linguistic, ethnic, administrative and economic bases since its independence. In India, agitations for the formation of linguistic states had mostly occupied the form of bonding people rather than dividing them.

Ethno-religious identities are the important issues in the history and evolution of multi-ethnic states in South Asia. A principal concern in the sub-national and multi-ethnic countries is the fear of dominance or exploitation of some ethnic groups and assimilation by the other ethnic group. Finally, it can be said that the existence of sub-national and ethnic politics is not the threat but how the government tackles the situation is the main challenge.

All the South Asian countries are post-colonial apparatus, and the state and their respective governments followed the colonial legacy. Likewise, sub-nationalism and ethnicity is basically a natural phenomenon, and national integration can be achieved by giving equality/equal rights among the citizens. Likewise, many other states have been failed to accommodate their ethnic groups, and when failure of national integration took place state lost some of the important regions of that country, like Pakistan has failed to accommodate ethnic diversity and lost its eastern part in December 1971.

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