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**INDIA'S SPATIAL IMAGINATION/S OF SOUTH ASIA**

**Project on:  
Globalization and the  
National Security State**

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# **India's Spatial Imagination/s of South Asia**

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## **Abstract**

How a region is conceptualised determines to a significant degree a state's foreign policy towards it. Regions are configured primarily in terms of space. A region, in brief, connotes a particular kind of space, with its distinctive features and possibilities. A region usually embodies multiple notions, or rival conceptions of space. Accordingly, the meaning of a region not only changes over time but also varies across the notion of space underlying it. In simple terms, a region can be characterised or defined by three conceptions of space, although these definitions are often overlapping and are never exclusive in character or modes of deployment. These concepts are region as power, as market and/or as community. In this study, we attempt to come to terms with the conceptual mapping of India's neighbourhood in South Asia. The argument presented here is that India's policy towards South Asia has evolved in according to its conception of space as power. This conception is primarily the result of its postcolonial status and its heritage of imperial geopolitics. While India did not espouse the expansionist idioms of imperial geopolitics, it had sought to prevent its neighborhood against external interferences and tried to achieve a geopolitical unity of the space. Alternative imaginations of the neighborhood were possible. India could have defined its neighborhood as a space of commerce and shared prosperity or as a community that did not care about political borders. However, its postcolonial identity has leveraged the geopolitical reading of the continent by absolutizing the salience of sovereign territoriality. The territorial imagination has naturally favored a power reading of its immediate neighborhood, which is fundamentally a defensive security centric imagination based on its claims of difference.

## Power, commerce and community as conceptions of space

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First, a region can be defined in terms of *geo-strategic references* and looked upon as a zone of conflict arising out of the distribution of power and the patterns of enmity and amity.<sup>1</sup> The etymological root of the word region is the Latin *regere*—to rule. Put a little differently, a region is a theatre of operations—past, present and future. Great powers have often defined regions by the imperatives of national power, or, *space as power*. Thus, for Britain, Southeast Asia and the Asia Pacific were once referred to space they had to control in their fight against imperial Japan. The Americans have likewise deployed a similar notion of space to define West Asia, i.e. in terms of the need for geopolitical control of the oil resources of this region. South Asia has often been understood as a region arising out of the asymmetric distribution of power between India and her neighbours. While India has sought for a leadership role in the region by exclusion of other (non-South Asian) powers from it, Pakistan (and also Bangladesh to certain degree) has denied its pre-eminence and sought to balance against Indian domination in the sub-continent. The smaller neighbours have at different times resisted India's attempts to hegemonize the sub-continent. India's fear of outsiders preventing its legitimate domination of its neighbourhood and its neighbours' unease with a dominant/resurgent India is the pivot of South Asia's regional politics and distinguish it from the other adjacent geopolitical regions. I use power in the sense Joseph Nye defines it. For Nye, "Power is the ability to achieve one's purposes and goals".<sup>2</sup> Power is both material and ideational, including

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<sup>1</sup> Kanti Bajpai, "Introduction: International Theory, International Society, Regional Politics, and Foreign Policy," in *Interpreting World Politics: Essays for A.P. Rana*, eds. Kanti Bajpai and Harish Shukul (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995), 31-32.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr., "The Changing Nature of World Power", *Political Science Quarterly*, 105, no. 2 (Summer 1990), 177.

capability and the will to hegemonize the region. When a state defines a region as a space of power, it tends to prioritize national security interests over shared commercial gains or community.

A second reading of a region is to define it as a space of *commerce and prosperity*. All regions are marked by latent economic interdependence; that is complementarities in natural resources, primary products, manufactured goods, and services. A region might demonstrate rather weak eco-interdependence by itself. But there are sources of interdependence that are significantly stronger, like the ones emanating from globalization-cum-liberalization that operate on the region from outside. International relations in some regions are motivated more by the reasons of market or commerce than by power. The European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are good examples. Major states in these settings have prioritized economic interests over strategic purposes. The motivation may be explained differently. First, tragedy of power can induce states to look at commerce. The unprecedented human tragedy of the two World Wars forced major European states to realize the futility of power competition and instead focus their collective energies to functional cooperation based upon free trade across borders. While this did not make borders, nationalism and territoriality obsolete, these were sufficiently softened to allow cooperation between states at various levels of collective existence. The sovereignty debate did not stall this growing process of cooperation and unification qua regional integration. This suggested that even bitter historical rivals could learn and socialize new modes of cooperation that offered positive gains to all. Second, shared threats often transform a region. Southeast Asia slowly tugged towards regional integration as national elites recognized that they could not survive the onslaught of Communist threats unless they gave up power for commerce or shared prosperity.

When such changes take place, major states alter the spatial imaginations. Rather than defining a region as a space of power and exclusivist control, they start investing in the ideas of prosperity and economic cooperation. Moving away from space as power to space as prosperity isn't easy; states need to alter their perceptual lenses in order to make for the shift. Liberal institutionalists have demonstrated that cooperation is possible for rational actors (states) despite egoism provided institutions take care of free-riding and enforcement of decisions. Space as commerce builds institutions and argues that interests are malleable. Unlike space as power that emphasizes strategic purposes, the commercial imagination stresses the rational pursuit of common or shared economic gains as the grid that guides policies for states. The idea here is to delink or decouple political and economic interests and allow the latter to craft the spatial imagination of states.

States, however, can also define a region as "community." According to this reading, the shared culture, language group or social structure defines regions. Yet a region may not and does not make a cultural unity; it can equally be an ambit of a distinct pattern of cultural

differentiation/contestation and marginalization. The claim to constitute South Asia along cultural lines is always intensely contested. Many believe that South Asia is a space of cultural affinity, its people united by common civilizational values. Others disagree, and base their case on the right to cultural difference. After all, the dual partitions (1947, 1971) of South Asia and its multiple ethno-religious conflicts involve questions of cultural difference or contestation and the fear of serious marginalisation.

Of the three modes of spatial imagination, community is perhaps the most contentious. In many post-colonial societies the boundaries of ethnicity, religion, or language do not overlap with national borders. Substantial kin populations live across boundaries in many such states. It is little surprising that many states feel they have an obligation to stand by their ethnic kin, particularly if they are persecuted or exploited by their neighbors who come from a different community. States that are created through partition and secessionism are particularly vulnerable in this regard. Multi-ethnic states show a peculiar paradox over community. On the one hand they categorically refuse national self-determination rights to communities living within. On the other, they display kin-country syndrome internationally.

As nation states forge different forms of communities, there is a built-in anxiety in them to relate to other forms of communities both below and above them. Community unites and divides at the same time. The argument is that states are edgy and excitable over communities. States have different range of resilience and may be drawn out differently from both within or without. Hence, modern states both attract and repel the spatial imagination of community, being unsure of what consequences might follow from it. All spatial imaginations have advantages and risks. With power and commerce, these are far more regular and predictable. Power can excite resistance; commerce can leave security vulnerable. With risks come insurance strategies as well. Power invites balancing and coalitions; markets insure against signal disorders and coordination errors. However, the case for community is different. Identity is risky for it remains agnostic to scale. To advance arguments on the appeal of community may hollow a state from within. Hence, nation states remain suspicious of community as a lever of policy.

### **The argument and scope**

This paper/chapter is about India's imagination of South Asia as a neighborhood through the three frames discussed above. By India's imagination is meant the elite imaginations that are reflected

in foreign policy discourses of the state.<sup>3</sup> The idea of a neighborhood is always a spatial imagination anchored in some metaphor or the other. The imaginations have two sources. First, they are rooted in India's self-identity as a nation-state. All imaginations are discursive in nature and inter-subjectively constituted. However, the Indian state has objective preferences that it seeks to realize in the neighborhood. The nature of the state or what may be called "state identity" condition these preferences. But a state, no matter how dominant it is within the region, cannot imagine the region purely through its own identity. Strategic, economic and cultural considerations provide the second source of its imagination of the neighborhood. This indicates a sub-text or a larger narrative that underpins their idea of a region. The spatial imagination of a state is a discursive sub-text that provides meaning and substance to a state's foreign policy vis-à-vis its neighbors.

India's understanding of South Asia thus involves a two-level exploration. The first deals with the contestations of India's self-identity as a nation-state and the identity selected by the dominant official elite to condition the state's foreign policy preferences in the neighborhood. The second relates to the deployment of spatial metaphors explaining India's policy choices as preferences born out of domestic identity considerations cannot be automatically projected on others. The conjugation of selfhood and the deployment of spatial metaphors answer some of the intriguing questions that plague foreign policy analysis. It explains why a state holds certain interests as vital by arguing that this is a deliberate process of selection by the dominant elite that renders alternative definitions of interests invalid; draws attention to the justificatory discourses that are invariably deployed to achieve legitimacy; and shows why alternative spatial imaginations are emasculated in the process.

To understand the contemporary complexities of South Asia as a socio-political formation and India's imagination of and place in it, it is necessary to turn to the historical formation of the sub-continent. The sub-continent evolved through the healthy paradox of commonalities-in-difference that nevertheless provided it with a sense of distinct regional identity.<sup>4</sup> Geography, history, culture,

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<sup>3</sup> This means that other forms of collective imagination of India and the region are available. Civil society groups, for example, are not constrained by the statist conception of a region. They have often deployed the categories of class and gender to define India and South Asia. Artists and radical scholars also engage in different forms of imagination that are very different from the existing political narratives. However, these imaginations do not engender concrete decisions and policies that decide domestic and foreign policies of states. This does not mean that the alternative constructions are irrelevant. They have enormous normative salience and indicate the different horizons of possibilities. However, unless any of these imaginations become politically dominant, they cannot rival the dominant elite discourses of the state.

<sup>4</sup> On the various facets of this fascinating discourse, see Bernard S. Kohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Nicholas Dirx, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition: The Making of Modern India*, (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2004); Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*, University of Minnesota Press, 1993; Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Ramchandra Guha, *The Makers of Modern India* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2013).

civilization, heritage and aesthetics came together to mold this complex mosaic of identities that loosely united the inhabitants of the sub-continent amid their numerous differences. The identity was laid along a community-meta-state continuum and remained variable for a considerable period of time. The advent of the Europeans and the dual conceits of territoriality and modernity upset this rhythm fundamentally. Territoriality forged a strong sense of difference as indispensable to the new statist projects in the sub-continent and in the process decimated the community-state character of the sub-continent. As Sunil Khilnani explains, “Politics was thus consigned to the realm of spectacle and ceremony. No concept of a state, an impersonal public authority with a continuous identity, emerged: kings represented only themselves, never enduring states. It was this arrangement of power that explains the most peculiar characteristic of India's pre-colonial history: the perpetual instability of political rule, the constant rise and fall of dynasties and empires, combined with the society's unusual fixity and cultural consistency. Its identity lay not in transient political authority but in the social order.”<sup>5</sup>

Modernity exaggerated the taxonomical impulses of the modern state and hastened the making of a citizenry who had to be divided and united at the same time. The communalization of the sub-continent under modernity brought the modern South Asia in to being, pitting religious or communal identities against liberal-secular formations for the first time. Democracy, tragically enough, exacerbated this tendency. As numbers became vital for winning and retaining power, even under the slowly evolving self-governing dispensation under a watchful imperial tutelage, the political attribution of the demography assumed a new found significance. The politicization of religion was a natural corollary to the process. The politics of caste also began its political career but its innate complexity, stratification, non-territorial spread, and, perhaps most critically, relevance for Hinduism exclusively, prevented it for assuming the trajectory that religion took in the sub-continent.

When the sub-continent was violently divided along the lines of faith in an orgy of bloodshed and unimaginable rapacity, the divide between community and territoriality was complete. This was the new South Asia that was wholly anomalous to its past and destined to remain divided by the very logic of its constitution. There is no way that the model of a community-meta-state can be relived in this context. South Asian states were carriers of two traits right from the start: they justified their exclusivity by contrasting narratives of victimhood and made territorial nationalism existential to them. South Asia, in other words, became a fearful pathology of securitized nationalism, which required a strong politics of difference and exclusion, no matter what domestic attributes of social or

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<sup>5</sup> Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, Farrar Straus Giroux, New York, 1997, Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/k/khilnani-india.html>

collective identity the member states had. In other words, the character of the state, be it democratic or authoritarian, and the nature of its nationalism, whether civic or ethnic, did not impact on the project of otherization within the sub-continent. A secular India would have as much penchant for conflict as a non-secular Pakistan. In fact, over the years, the elite discourses in South Asia tended to veer towards a sanitized version of regular realist discourse: states, in other words, would fiercely compete in an anarchical setting, unsure of their own security, and regardless of the character and motivations of other states. As the community/state linkages were abrogated in South Asia, a realist imagination of the sub-continent took hold across the states. This study does not extend to the analysis of other South Asian states in detail; but the central argument of the predominance of a power/security centric understanding of the sub-continent would apply across the discourses of state elites of the sub-continent. However, this study argues that there is a sociological sub-text to this power imagination. This generic realism would not have emerged but for the effacing of the narratives of civilizational commonalities by those of nationalistic differences.<sup>6</sup>

India has a complex power imagination. The reason is that India's preferences in South Asia are paradoxical. India seeks to lead the sub-continent, owing to its natural material preponderance over all other South Asian states. However, while it achieves limited domination on occasions, it cannot lead the sub-continent. Its advantages over its neighbors are purely material and not ideological. It achieves therefore intermittent and rudimentary domination but fails to hegemonize the sub-continent. It offers little by way of ideas that others can comfortably share. India's narratives of democracy, pluralism and economic growth are strong but remain unattractive to its neighbors. India has not believed in democracy promotion as a norm, either internationally or regionally, and its record of dealing with democratic regimes in South Asia, virtually across board, remains difficult and hesitant. India's pluralism is again suspect not only for some of its domestic contestations that have border jumping consequences, but primarily for the fact this model problematizes the relations between community and the state. India's economic growth spawns a neo-liberal imagery that is undocumented by facts and figures. Although intuitively appealing, it requires porosity of borders and prioritizing economic well-being over state security interests that fundamentally contradict the prevailing dynamics of the sub-continent.

India betrays an agony over its perceived role in South Asia. The frustration of a perennial arriving converges with its inability to keep the sub-continent free of external interferences. As India's bilateral problems with its neighbors continue, the more China gets drawn into South Asia. China's

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<sup>6</sup> In terms of theoretical positioning, the arguments developed here is close to constructivism. Theoretically, constructivists are more comfortable dealing with community as a social category compared to realists and neo-liberals.

ties with Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh balance India and pull it to the sub-continent more closely. India's security concerns are serious in the sub-continent. It has unresolved territorial conflicts with Pakistan (over Kashmir) and China (both along the eastern and the western sectors of their long border), two nuclear powered states that are hostile to India on different counts, suffers from terrorism and insurgency with external links and support from a number of South Asian states, disputes over water and illegal migration and kin group treatments across South Asia.

There is also the growing realization amongst Indian elites that the success of India's economic growth demands more imaginative articulations of space, one that liberates it from the claustrophobic clutches of South Asia. The formal inclusion of Afghanistan in South Asia and the dilation of Myanmar's significance as a gateway to Southeast Asia are pointers to this effect. In the northwest, India seeks a stake in Afghanistan's future as the state is vital to its security interests, and India has made considerable investments in Afghanistan's economy and infrastructure. The gradual drawdown of the US-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces in Afghanistan in the near future weighs heavily in India's security planning. This reinforces the traditional realist imperative of its foreign policy for there is a gradual realization that India needs to be an active player in Afghanistan if Pakistan's designs of reclaiming its strategic depth are to be thwarted. In Southeast Asia, on the other hand, we have a more complex overlaying of economic and geo-strategic imperatives, in line with India's steady rise in naval capabilities and deepening of its political ties with the ASEAN and Asia Pacific states. India's Look East policy and its conceptualization of South Asian regionalism reflect these complementary and opposed preferences in full.

## **Identity and Self-hood**

India's identity can be gleaned from several sources and there are different registers of this identity. However, we need to clarify in what sense the term identity is deployed, given a mass of complex and often contradictory definitions of the concept.<sup>7</sup> In the older sense, identity "refers to the (often legal) association of a particular name to a particular person - the quality of being a particular person, or the same person as before."<sup>8</sup> Eric Erikson's concept of the 'identity crisis' further advanced the concept by implicating that identity refers to one's feelings about one's self, character, goals, and

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<sup>7</sup> Identity is a messy concept. For excellent analyses of conceptual difficulties surrounding it, see Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond Identity," *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (February 2000), 1-47; James D. Fearon, "What is Identity (As We Know Use the Word)", 1999, <https://web.stanford.edu/group/fearon-research/cgi-bin/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/What-is-Identity-as-we-now-use-the-word-.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> James D. Fearon, "What is Identity (As We Know Use the Word)?" Working Paper, Stanford University, 1999, 8. Available at: <https://web.stanford.edu/group/fearon-research/cgi-bin/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/What-is-Identity-as-we-now-use-the-word-.pdf>,

origins.<sup>9</sup> But identity is not merely a matter of feelings. It is a definition about the self. Personal identity is those attributes of a person considered essential by the person for his self-hood, the properties that are essential and not contingent. But an individual is not a prisoner of a given identity. In his personal life the matter is simpler for in most liberal societies at least individuals are granted a space where they become what they are. Personal identity is a predicate and anything can provide its content if the person approves of it. However, identity is not a matter of innocent personal choices. Identities are social and political. Social identity also asks the question about who we are but narrows the scope of definition by enjoining stricter rules of membership and certain attributes attached to the chosen group/s and expectations of accepted modes of behavior of the members. As used in international relations (IR) literature, the definition of Alexander Wendt comes closer to capture the meaning: “Social identities are sets of meanings that an actor attributes to itself while taking the perspective of others, that is, as a social object. [...] [Social identities are] at once cognitive schemas that enable an actor to determine ‘who I am/we are’ in a situation and positions in a social role structure of shared understandings and expectations”.<sup>10</sup> This means that it is often forgotten that people take certain social categories as natural, inevitable, and unchanging facts about the social world, while actually these are consciously created for them.

For India, the meta-contestation over its selfhood remains the one between liberal, secular nationalism on one hand and the Hindu communitarian vision on the other. Given that the Congress Party has ruled India for most of the period since independence, and the brief interludes of non-Congress rule have seen complex coalitions of both regional and national parties, barring the BJP government that has come to power in 2014 with an absolute majority, the secular, liberal nationalism has dominated India’s image of itself. In the words of Judith Brown, “That most articulate and influential founding father, Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister from 1947 to 1964, had envisaged India as a composite nation that included a great diversity of peoples and reflected a many-layered sense of “being Indian” that grew out of the subcontinent’s long history of dealing with outsiders who lived there, some as rulers. Despite the partition of the country in 1947 and the creation of Pakistan as a Muslim homeland, he retained this vision of a national identity born of diversity and sustained by tolerance and secularism.”<sup>11</sup> What is done in the following sections is to pay attention to this identity and see how this related to some of India’s foreign policy preferences in the sub-continent.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Wendt, “Collective Identity Formation and the International State,” *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 2 (June 1994), 395.

<sup>11</sup> Judith M. Brown, “The Jewel Without the Crown”, *The New York Times*, 15 February 1998. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/02/15/reviews/980215.15brown.html>

India's identity can be addressed at two levels. The first is the historical processes through which the idea of India took shape in modern times, though it borrowed freely from the past, both real and imagined. Indian political and social thinkers like Gandhi, Nehru, Tagore, Savarkar and Ambedkar, among several others, contributed to this process and each of them defined the Indian differently. The philosophical differences of these constructs have been pivotal in providing the registers in which the Indians would anchor their chosen definitions of their political identity. The term political is crucial here. Because some of the stable social categories that had provided a sense of continuity and meaning to collective life were already there- the immense intricacies of the Brahmanical caste order in particular, which seemed to have been instrumental in configuring a sense of social identity in the sub-continent, by providing a set of role expectations and expected modes of behavior that varied across regions, spaces and over time. But the idea of political India was quintessentially modern; it arose through primarily a contest between a broadly liberal and secular model of nationhood on one hand and a faith-based determination of self-hood on the other. While Gandhi had for the first time politically connected the modern sub-continent and had emerged as the uncontested national leader, a venerable father figure of the nation, his vision of an India of a stateless society, put out most ambitiously in his *Hind Swaraj*, which rejected modernity and embraced the traditional community, never caught the popular imagination of the masses. While India could trust Gandhi as a political liberator, they remained fundamentally alienated from his social ontology of being.<sup>12</sup>

The space was occupied by Nehru, who vigorously put across the idea of a modern and industrial India, embracing secularism and a broadly liberal orientation to life, which was opposed to colonialism and imperialism in all its political manifestations, and which invested in the ideas of fraternity and a silent self-confidence that came from its civilizational and ethical lineage and its commitment to a functional democratic political order. As is well known, the Muslim League and the Hindu nationalists have both challenged this paradigm of liberal, secular nationalism as being fundamentally alien to the sub-continent, which defined a sense of community by religious affiliation. After the vivisection of the sub-continent along the lines of faith through unprecedented bloodshed and population displacement, which partially vindicated the Muslim League's claim that Hindus and Muslims were two different communities whose peaceful and dignified political coexistence was an impossibility, the Nehruvian perspective of the idea of India, with suitable adjustments and

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<sup>12</sup> For a detailed analysis, see Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997).

accommodations now and then, remained the dominant vision of and for India that regulated both domestic life and structured India's ties with the outside world.

Nehru's conception of India's identity is more crucial in international relations as he virtually singlehandedly defined the contours of India's foreign policy. Most importantly, Nehru had an internationalist perspective and conceived India's role in foreign affairs in global terms.<sup>13</sup> He remained an ardent enthusiast of pan-Asianism for the better part of his life and his imagination of India's role in South Asia was largely conditioned by this. He believed that India and China as heirs to ancient civilizations and having suffered colonial or semi-colonial exploitation, would work together for a new order in Asia that would bring back to the continent its lost glory and make for peace, prosperity and progress based upon cooperation and modernity. In this idealistic grand vision, South Asia as a distinctive geo-political space had no place.<sup>14</sup> Nehru's attitude towards India's neighbours remained pedagogic and aloof, and he primarily thought of India's role in South Asia as a part of its larger role in Asian affairs. India's war with Pakistan in 1948 and the subsequent acrimony over Jammu and Kashmir had already indicated the weakness of this grand design and the border dispute with China that led to the disastrous 1962 war demolished this discourse of being a moral power of global standing without sufficient material capabilities.

However, the weakness on part of Nehru to imagine South Asia as vital to India's geopolitical interests and also for its image as a state claiming post-colonial difference must be read in the nature of the state, nation, territoriality relations in the post-colonial world. Identifying the contested process of decolonization as the primary cause of contemporary Asian inter-state territorial conflicts, Itty Abraham analyzes the political implications of establishing a fixed territorial homeland as a necessary starting point for both international recognition and national identity. In his words, "In the absence any possibility of meeting the newly sanctified standard of national self-determination, colonial nationalists sought to redefine the prime criterion for independent statehood as unified political control over a defined piece of land, or territorial sovereignty. Once territorial sovereignty was established as the way out of the impossible one-land-people-state trinity, the loss of state territory could become nothing less than the loss of state power."<sup>15</sup> His conclusion is that states cannot

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<sup>13</sup> On Nehru's idea of Asianism, see Rajendra K. Jain, "From Idealism to Pragmatism: India and Asian Regional Integration," *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 12, no. 2 (August 2011), 213-231.

<sup>14</sup> On the gradual evolution of India's conception of region, see Arndt Michael, "Sovereignty vs. Security: SAARC and its Role in the Regional Security Architecture in South Asia," *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (Summer 2013), 37-45. On the role of Nehru in shaping India's post-colonial identity in international affairs, see Priya Chacko, *Indian Foreign Policy. The politics of postcolonial identity from 1947 to 2004* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), 31-76.

<sup>15</sup> Itty Abraham, *How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora, Geopolitics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 12.

compensate for territory as it is vital to the legitimacy of the postcolonial nation-state, which has little to do with their potential for economic gains or imagined narratives of historical memory. In his words, “The core problem with territorial loss is that it opens the door to an excavation of the relationship of state and nation. It exposes the nation as a historically contingent formation and being, and brings into question the state’s claim to represent this nation, now and in the past.”<sup>16</sup>

The post-colonial articulation of sovereignty has created the ultimate paradox for the elites. They realized immediately the artificiality of their constructs, the historical anomaly involved in this model of nation-state, and hence, invested completely in the idea of territoriality, which was much more than mere physical land, but was a terrain of political legitimacy for the new state. Borders thus became exclusionary and non-negotiable, and if the space outside was disorderly and dangerous, this was also the *raison d'être* for disciplining the inside, lest weakness is exploited by others in challenging the legitimacy of the state-led nation-building project that sought to bring about the trinity of the one land-state-people. The conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir is a good example. As Khilnani puts it, “Kashmir remained contested by India and Pakistan throughout the 1970s and 1980s, remaining as ‘a test of Indian state sovereignty, its capacity to protect its citizens, keep order and justify its territorial ownership.’”<sup>17</sup> Abraham argues in the Indian context, “With sovereignty in 1947, fluid imperial boundaries became fixed borders of the nation state. These borders now incorporated territories and peoples that could not easily be identified as culturally ‘Indian’ and, who, moreover, soon came to define themselves in opposition to a predatory Indian nation-state.”<sup>18</sup> Whether the state has been predatory or not remains debatable. But the general argument that the state’s foreign policy was not merely a matter of realizing international or global purposes but also forging of the national project in peripheral regions remains good.

The other model of India’s self-hood comes from the Hindu right, building on the writings of a pantheon of Brahmanical and nationalist writings dating back to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Swami Vivekananda through Veer Savarkar and Golwalkar. But there is a significant difference in these different lineages that the modern Hindu rightwing parties draw from. The early Brahminical writings, mostly penned by Bengali writers, wanted a revival of a mythical, resplendent and glorious Hindu past that has been lost through the Muslim invasions and the British colonial subjugation of the sub-continent. But Savarkar’s ideas were not a throwback upon the past. It was a model of Westernised nationalism that uses Hindu cultural symbols to make a wholly new body of citizens that

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, 31.

<sup>18</sup> Abraham, *How India Became Territorial*, 14.

are homogenous and ruthlessly efficient in building a modern Hindu state. It is this idea of India that the Bharatiya Janata Party, which came up as a successor to the old Jan Sangh Party, came up with in the early 1980s. In the words of Sunil Khilnani: "But the BJP's definition of Indian nationalism was precisely the contrary of Nehru's. It explicitly declared allegiance to the Savarkarite idea of *Hindutva*, "Hinduness", and celebrated a glorious Hindu past...But Hindu nationalism also embraced the armoury of the modern state. Its ambition was to complete the project of achieving an Indian nation state by piloting it towards what it saw as its logical terminus: a culturally and ethnically cleaned-up homogenous community with a singular Indian citizenship, defended by a state that had both God and nuclear warheads on its side."<sup>19</sup> According to T. B. Hansen, the ideology of Hindutva and "positive" or "true" secularism amounts to the principle of rule by Hindu majoritarianism. He notes that it is a "peculiar co-articulation of Brahminical ideologies of purity, romanticist notions of fullness and authenticity, and quasi-fascist organicism and celebration of strength and masculinity which characterizes the Rashtriya Swayamesvak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliated organizations."<sup>20</sup> This idea is fundamentally opposed to the secular model in as much as while the latter had followed a hands-off policy vis-à-vis the cultural practices of society, the proponents of Hindutva "hope to bring the array of Indian religious and cultural activities under command of the state, to tidy up the compromises and accommodations that litter Indian life and bring them into a regimented design, presided over by a single legal system."<sup>21</sup> Its ambition is much more austere: it is to build a model of state-society relations that is opposed to any legal or political recognition of cultural and religious differences.

The onslaught of the Hindu right has led to a major debate on what will ensure the toleration of religious, ethnic and cultural differences in a state like India. The liberal, secular nationalist model had proposed the idea of secularism. The Indian model of secularism, however, is different from the classical European one, for it connotes equal tolerance of all regions rather than a strict separation of state and religion. The model had come under criticism not only from the Hindu right, who castigate it as being 'pseudo-secular', but also from a number of noted Indian social scientists who considered it deficient. The Hindu right argues that while Indian secularism is tolerant of the many religious practices of the minority communities, it is harsh and derogatory towards those of the majority Hindu community. They therefore want a non-discriminatory secularism that would be equally just for all communities. According to Partha Chatterjee "positive secularism" is meant not only to deflect

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<sup>19</sup> Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, 188.

<sup>20</sup> T. B. Hansen, "Globalisation and Nationalist Imaginations: Hindutva's Promise of Equality Through Difference," *Economic and Political Weekly* 31, no. 10 (March 1996), 608.

<sup>21</sup> Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, 190.

accusations of its being anti-secular but also to rationalize, in a sophisticated way, its campaign for intolerant interventions by a modern, positively secular state against the religious, cultural or ethnic minorities in the name of "national culture" and a homogenized notion of citizenship. The argument is that the modern state is the principal ingredient of this concoction, as it is predicated on the fusion of modernity, science, rationality, sovereignty, and the massive facilities of statist coercion.<sup>22</sup> The modern Indian state put the powers of the state into secularism; the same powers, more streamlined, and turned more predatory at the auspices of the political right, can now be used to articulate the notion of 'positive' or 'true' secularism.

India's understanding of South Asia must begin here. However, it is curious to dig into the concept of land and territory in the Indian context. In the *Discovery of India*, Nehru repeatedly mentions how in his dialogues with people across the sub-continent, he was at pains to understand their 'idea of India', and after repeated probing, they would identify India with the dharti (sacred land), which gave them life and vitality, and was sacred in an existential sense. This notion of identifying land with "Mother" or with something sacred that demands reverence and conviviality, meant that people had a sense of land as something more than a mere political economy of possession. Land was a vital aspect of their sense of being, which located them and provided them with an ontology, no matter how obscure and beguiling it may have been. However, this ontology was not one of settled non-negotiable borders. It was a distinctive cartography of little communities living local lives but feeling a fraternal bond in this imaginary space of India. As Khilnani writes, "After all, before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, no residents of the sub-continent would have identified themselves as Indian. There existed intricate, ramified vocabularies of common understanding, which classified people by commonalities of lineage, locality and sect; but 'Indian' would not have figured among its terms. Sub-continental society was hardly static, yet most people never ventured beyond their own or neighboring loyalties."<sup>23</sup>

With the making of the partition, however, territory became a site of political legitimacy, a vital criterion of state power and capacity. This demanded doctrines of insulation against capricious powers and projection of power in South Asia, a new entity altogether that lacked precedent in the history of the sub-continent. South Asia was thus a complex space of a series of binaries - danger and fraternity, insecurity and hegemony, power and progress. Hence, my argument is that India's

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<sup>22</sup> Partha Chatterjee, "Secularism and Toleration," *Economic and Political Weekly* 29, no. 28 (July 1994), 1768-77. For a very useful discussion, see Thomas Pantham, "Indian Secularism and Its Critics: Some Reflections", *The Review of Politics* 59, no. 3 (Summer 1997), 523-540.

<sup>23</sup> Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, 154.

imagination of South Asia is never seamless and unitary; it has always encapsulated conflicting and complementary images, with the image of power overshadowing the others. Why did this power image overshadow the rest? The reason for this must be sought in the mismatch of the community and the state in South Asia, which has in the past been an Indo-centric space, modeled not on territoriality but on a meta-polity of diverse communities that competed and coexisted over time. The making of modern South Asia was the very onset of the new logic of geo-strategic understanding of space predicated upon sovereign territoriality. It is only far from home that one could be what his national identity demands. This has been the archetypal colonial experience and the same is also demanded of post-colonial subjects. This at once explains the anxieties of the state in South Asia, as the citizens could not separate them from the neighbors, and even if they did, this differentiation would not have made any anthropological or social sense. The political impossibility of the image of the community under the new sovereign dispensation guaranteed the domination of the power imagination of the sub-continent, which made India's post-colonial geopolitics "wholly consistent with imperial strategies of defending and extending colonial Indian territorial boundaries".<sup>24</sup>

### **The Impossible 'Other': India's Rivalry with Pakistan**

The conflict between India and Pakistan lies at the heart of South Asia. In fact, the reason why India's spatial imagination of its neighborhood has been so distinctly realist is because of this fundamental and intractable conflict.<sup>25</sup> The conflict is sourced in the history of colonialism and the consequent violent denouement of the Partition that gave birth to the two states in 1947.<sup>26</sup> Very broadly, there are two rival explanations to it, one based on territory and the other on identity.<sup>27</sup> Paul marshals several arguments against both territory based and identity centric explanations of the enduring rivalry and extends his own explanation based on the concept of truncated power

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<sup>24</sup> Abraham, *How India Became Territorial*, 16.

<sup>25</sup> On the various dimensions of the India-Pakistan conflict, see Sumit Ganguly, *The Origins of Wars in South Asia: The Indo-Pakistani Conflicts Since 1947* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); T.V. Paul ed., *The India-Pakistan Conflict: An Enduring Rivalry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For the origins of the Kashmir dispute, see Jyoti Bhushan Dasgupta, *Jammu and Kashmir* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), and Alistair Lamb, *The Kashmir Problem* (New York: Praeger, 1966).

<sup>26</sup> On the various perspectives, history and historiographical debates on the Partition of the Indian sub-continent, see Mary Doreen Wainwright, *The Partition of India: policies and perspectives, 1935-1947* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970); Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Bidyut Chakrabarty, *The Partition of Bengal and Assam, 1932-1947: Contour of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Joya Chatterji, *Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India 1947-1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007); Priya Kumar, "Testimonies of Loss and Memory: Partition and the Haunting of a Nation," *International journal of postcolonial studies* 1, no. 2 (1999), 201-215; Ranabir Samaddar, ed. *Refugees and the State: Practices of Asylum and Care in India, 1947-2000* (New Delhi: Sage, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> For an excellent discussion, see T. V. Paul, "Why has the India-Pakistan Rivalry Been so Enduring? Power Asymmetry and an Intractable Conflict," *Security Studies* 15, no. 4 (2006), 600-30.

asymmetry, based on a detailed analysis of India and Pakistan's relative capabilities, their conventional military and nuclear strategies, and the role of alliance politics. That may well be the case. My argument on the other hand is that post-colonial sovereign territoriality and rival national identities are the key drivers that cause enmity and bitter rivalry between India and Pakistan.<sup>28</sup> What makes territorial concessions virtually impossible in this case is the peculiar imprint of the nationalist identity on them. Had the dispute not been on Kashmir but on some other issue, unrelated to the divergent national discourses, a resolution would have been much easier to achieve. But a cursory glance into the elite discourses shows that a zero-sum mind-set prevails on Kashmir, as both India and Pakistan consider it as a crucible of their nation-building projects. Truncated power asymmetry builds on this fundamental divide. As years went by, new inflections complicated this original divide. The increasing Islamization of Pakistan has dilated the value of *faith as people* model of nationalism. The importance of Muslim Kashmir for Pakistan has therefore increased over time. The Hindu right in India on the other hand has also a tight integration model of the nation that demands the withdrawal of separate status to Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>29</sup>

The traditional Indian statist discourse has been to deny separatism as a legitimate position on the national narrative. Kashmir has thus been looked upon as a security issue. Second, dialogue with the Hurriyat or with forces demanding independence of Kashmir has been resisted as being opposed to the national integration of India. India's sensitivity to Pakistan's influence with the separatists is easily understandable; it sees it as a nefarious ploy that challenges India's national integrity, and invites third parties into the resolution of the conflict. In fact, the Indian narrative is that there isn't any conflict over identity at all; the discourse of identity dispute has been smuggled in by Pakistan to polarize the conflict. Similarly, from the perspective of Pakistan, there is no conflict over identity; for to recognize the conflict is to challenge the very narrative of the seamless nationalist identity itself. In this paradoxical game of mutual denial, they recognize the blind spots of their national narratives. Dilemmas of reputation and status aggravate the negative dialectics of identity and sovereign territoriality between India and Pakistan. The argument advanced here is that explanations based on either reputation or status *are not opposed to but complementary* to the one based on identity and post-colonial sovereign territoriality.

India has fought four wars with Pakistan and faced many serious crises under the shadow of nuclear arms. Pakistan has persisted with a strategy of sub-conventional warfare and supported

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<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of identity and ideological differences between the two states, see Ayesha Jalal, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>29</sup> I draw a distinction between what causes the rivalry and what keeps it going.

insurgency and terrorism in India since the 1980s. The Indian state, despite its manifest superiority on many indicators of capability, has apparently had variable success against this strategy of a thousand cuts against it. India was able to effectively cut off Pakistani support to pro-Khalistan Sikh militants in the 1990s and thereby terminate this domestic conflict. However, India has had limited success against terrorist violence in Kashmir. What is most significant is the role that Pakistan's army and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) have played in supporting the war of terror against India. There is corroborative evidence linking Pakistan's state agencies with the daring terrorist strike against the Indian Parliament in 2004 and the Mumbai Attacks of 2009. However, such evidence has not been accepted by Pakistan and some of the masterminds of these attacks have a safe haven in that state. The argument is that India has had very little success against Pakistan's militarism and New Delhi has not been able to formulate any definite security strategy or doctrine against its rival.<sup>30</sup> Nuclear weapons have brought in an asymmetric deterrence in the sub-continent and have virtually ruled out the potential of long wars though the possibilities of small-scale military exchanges are not entirely ruled out.<sup>31</sup> One of the reasons that makes India seriously wary about its role in South Asia and strengthens the transcendentalist discourse in its neighborhood policy is its limited success against Pakistan. There is an increasing realization that a policy of dialogue and friendship does not work with a Pakistan bent upon inveterate enmity against India.

### **India's Regional Security Doctrine (1970-90): The Arrogance of Power**

This section discusses India's security discourses vis-à-vis the smaller neighbors in South Asia. While India did not develop conscious regional security doctrines, elites since Indira Gandhi onward have contributed significantly in developing India's approach to South Asia. In the remaining part of this article, I survey these discourses closely and argue that there is an unmistakable rendition of the sub-continent through the image of power in them. Power does mean military domination. What India has sought are two closely related objectives: that South Asia remains immune to external or outside interferences and disputes are bilaterally negotiated and resolved; and, a manifest recognition of India's post-colonial difference that more than its disproportionate material capabilities legitimizes its pedagogic discourses in South Asia. While neither of these objectives has been fulfilled ever, this has not led Indian elites to redefine the sub-continent differently. The tragedy of South Asia's regionalism and India's relative success in transcending South Asia physically through its

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<sup>30</sup> For details, see Paul, "Why has the India-Pakistan Rivalry Been so Enduring?"

<sup>31</sup> See, Rajesh M. Basrur, *South Asia's Cold War Nuclear Weapons and Conflict in Comparative Perspective* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008); Sumit Ganguly and Devin T. Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry: India-Pakistan Crises in the Shadow of Nuclear Weapons* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); Paul, *The India-Pakistan Conflict*.

Look East policy, by effectively liking up with Southeast and East Asian states, both commercially and strategically, reinforce this diagnosis.

If South Asia is viewed geo-politically, it shows some attributes of a loose regional sub-system.<sup>32</sup> While the traditional literature on regional sub-systems has emphasized the role of states, Paul extended the concept further to include ‘societal level insecurities’. Paul also recognized that many clusters of relationships could not be accommodated within the concept of a regional sub-system. His general argument has been that South Asia’s insecurity is explained by “...two critical factors: *the presence of weak states and weak cooperative interstate norms.*”<sup>33</sup> The character of the South Asian sub-system that he develops emphasizes the region’s Indo-centric nature, its multiple cleavages of religious, ethnic and other identities, and its inability to qualify as a hegemonic order. The absence of hegemony is explained as follows: “Part of the reason for this lack of hegemony is the unwillingness of key states to accept Indian leadership, let alone dominance on many issues. The region is not economically interdependent, and as a result a potential source of power that India could exert is missing.”<sup>34</sup> It is this contested geo-political neighborhood that India negotiates. It is therefore logical enough that the space is imagined primarily as one of power requiring appropriate security insurance against untrustworthy neighbors.

India’s regional security environment assumed increasing complexity during the second half of the 1970s onward, though this seems rather paradoxical as India defeated Pakistan and dismembered its eastern part that emerged as sovereign Bangladesh in 1971.<sup>35</sup> What is even more crucial is that victory came in the wake of an exceedingly geo-political situation that saw Pakistan, China and the US aligning against India. India signed the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in August 1971, which was a cleverly concealed defense agreement, to balance this unfriendly coalition. Its decisive military victory meant that the fear of Pakistan opening a second front in the east and cutting off the chicken’s neck, a thin corridor along northern West Bengal’s terai region, which joined the India’s mainland with the volatile northeastern states, was exorcised once and for all. While relations with China remained strained, the prospect of a Chinese incursion, given the security of the Indo-Soviet treaty, was negligible. And yet, India’s Prime Minister found the

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<sup>32</sup> T.V. Paul, “State Capacity and South Asia’s Perennial Insecurity Problems” in *South Asia’s Weak States: Understanding the Regional Insecurity Predicament*, ed. T.V. Paul (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 8-9).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 4. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 9-10.

<sup>35</sup> On the creation of Bangladesh and the 1971 India-Pakistan War, see Srinath Raghavan, *1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh, Permanent Black* (Ranikhet Cantt: Ranikhet, 2013); Garry J. Bass, *The Blood Telegram: Nixon, Kissinger and a Forgotten Genocide* (New York: Vintage Books, 2014); Leo Rose and Richard Sisson, *War and Secession: Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1991).

country endangered both within and in the neighborhood, justifying her fear by theories of foreign (read American) conspiracies. Relations with Sri Lanka and Nepal deteriorated and Bangladesh, whose independence was impossible without India's war, took little time to turn against New Delhi.

India got involved in Sri Lanka's civil conflict over the rights of the ethnic Tamil population against an increasingly centralizing and authoritarian state. Several factors motivated India's decision. First, there was domestic consideration and the fear that if India did nothing to help the Tamil community in the island, not only will there be an increasing exodus of refugees to Tamil Nadu, but this might also rejuvenate the secessionist constituencies of that state. Second, there were fears of external (American) involvement in the Indian Ocean as Sri Lanka was increasingly looking up to the West for support in its domestic conflict. Third, India thought that as the problem involved the Tamil community, the resolution of the conflict demanded an active Indian role. What motivated such thinking? Scholars differ in their interpretations. Sankaran Krishnan argues that it was India's penchant for hegemony or domination of the sub-continent that pushed it on the proactive path. Priya Chacko, in contrast, says that it was India's defensive mentality, the fear psychosis that Indira Gandhi suffered from, that made India to get involved in Sri Lanka.<sup>36</sup> If fear provoked Indira Gandhi, her son, Rajiv Gandhi, who succeeded his mother with an unprecedented majority, was motivated a new sense of confidence and quick modernity as a panacea to all troubles in life, whether domestic or regional. It was his restlessness and confidence in India's ability that he thought needed to be showcased to the world that made him intervene militarily in to Sri Lanka's domestic conflict, in wanton disregard of the post-colonial rules of territorial sovereignty.<sup>37</sup>

The period also witnessed highhanded tactics from India in its dealings with Nepal. India on the one hand flaunted its special relations with this Himalayan Kingdom as underscored their deeply shared cultural, ethnic and religious ties. On the other hand, Nepal had consistently expressed dissent against what it considered to be the unjust Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship and had been skeptical of India's intentions particularly after Sikkim was turned into a part of India on May 15, 1975.<sup>38</sup> The intricacies of the crisis between Nepal and India in the 1980s were complex, rooted in a

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<sup>36</sup> Both scholars have, however, dismissed the argument that India feared secessionism in Tamil Nadu that tied its hand.

<sup>37</sup> The complex unfurling of this episode is a well-documented. See, S.D. Muni, *Pangs of Proximity: India and Sri Lanka's Ethnic Crisis* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1993); Sankaran Krishna, *Postcolonial Insecurities: India, Sri Lanka and the Question of Nationhood* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Chacko, *Indian Foreign Policy*; J.N. Dixit, *Assignment Colombo* (New Dehli: Konark Publishers, 1998).

<sup>38</sup> As late as in December 2013, the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, maintained: "Under the provisions of this Treaty, the Nepalese citizens have enjoyed unparalleled advantages in India, availing facilities and opportunities at par with the Indian citizens. The Treaty has allowed Nepal to overcome the disadvantages of being a land-locked country. Over the years, many regimes in Nepal have raised the issue of revision of the treaty. India has maintained that

controversy over the expiration of two trade and transit treaties. It was a classic confrontation between an emerging regional superpower and a strategic yet landlocked nation that is not only geopolitically vital to India being a buffer to China but one that survived economically through the years largely through Indian generosity.

Nepal, enjoyed favored treatment from India, but became increasingly concerned about its own security and sovereignty in recent years, after Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi ordered his troops into two other small South Asian neighbors, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. In what many diplomatic observers viewed as a symbolic gesture, Nepal decided in 1988 to purchase military equipment from China. The Nepalese government also announced that it was imposing restrictions on Indian residents and business people in Kathmandu, who in the past have enjoyed the same freedom that tens of thousands of Nepali migrants have enjoyed in India. India took this as an act of betrayal. When the two treaties expired March 23, the Indians closed 15 of the 17 land entry routes to Nepal, which relied on India for all of its petroleum and 35% of its other imports. And India has been the lifeline for imports from third countries. The blockade led Nepal to compromise and to restore the traditional benefits enjoyed by Indians working there. However, the event left a bitter memory in the minds of the Nepalese political elite, and relations between the two states, despite India's Prime Minister V.P. Singh's success in getting assurances against Chinese involvement in Nepal, did not regain the warmth and mutual trust of the past.<sup>39</sup>

India's desire to play an active security role in South Asia was further manifested in the military operations it undertook in Maldives in 1988 when India intervened to prevent an attempted coup by mercenaries.<sup>40</sup> In November 1988, a force of some 80-200 mercenaries, largely drawn from a Sri Lankan Tamil insurgent group, the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), infiltrated the Maldivian capital of Malé and took control of key points in the city. However, the rebels failed to capture the Maldivian President, Abdul Gayoom, who took refuge in the Maldives National Security Service headquarters. It is clear that President Gayoom requested military assistance from several countries, including India, the United States, Britain, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, etc. for help. New Delhi responded to the crisis with uncharacteristic speed and decision, seeing it as India's prerogative and its responsibility. The Indian troops took control of Malé within several hours and rescued President Gayoom. India recalled the bulk of the troops after the mission

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it is willing to examine all bilateral arrangements with a view to further strengthening our relations. "India-Nepal Relations." Available at: [http://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Nepal\\_December\\_2013.pdf](http://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Nepal_December_2013.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Devin T. Hagerty, "India's Regional Security Doctrine", *Asian Survey* 31, no. 4 (April 1991), 360-62.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 358-60.

had been achieved, with around 150 troops staying back for a year as a security cover. While India saw its intervention in the Maldives as a model for the benign security role that India could play in the Indian Ocean, many analysts saw this as a part of the new regional doctrine that India has espoused in the 1980s. It is noteworthy that India undertook the intervention alone, demonstrating its ability to airlift troops over long distances and to successfully intercept the miscreants at sea, thereby signaling a growing confidence of its maritime power.

India's ties with Bangladesh, whose political freedom came through joint military operations of the Mukti Bahini (Freedom Army) and the Indian armed forces against Pakistan, after the initial period of warmth, became complex and difficult. Several factors contributed to this: the tragic assassination of Mujib, the chief architect and the first Prime Minister of Bangladesh and the coming into power of a military government under Ziaur Rahman; the problematic basis of Bangladesh's dual identity; the unresolved land and maritime boundaries; and the sharing of water. Sharing of river waters became contentious for the first time during Mujib's rule. India decided in 1951 to construct a barrage at Farakka, a village in Murshidabad near Bengal-Bihar border, and about 11 miles from Bangladesh's border. Pakistan had objected to it as it would have affected the flow of the Ganges waters into East Pakistan. The barrage and the feeder canal were finally commissioned in 1975 following an interim agreement signed between India and Bangladesh on April 18, 1975. But differences arose over augmentation of the fair weather flow of the Ganges. An agreement on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1977 for a five year period provided for the withdrawing of 20,500 cusecs and 34,500 cusecs water from the Ganges by India and Bangladesh respectively, during the leanest period (21-30 April). But this did not receive favorable response in many quarters in India.<sup>41</sup>

After the coming of the first non-Congress Janata Government in 1977, Morarji Desai began talks with Zia that paved the way for a five year agreement on river usage. The return of Mrs. Gandhi in 1980 and the assassination of General Zia, leading to the military takeover of Bangladesh under General Ershad, prevented any finalization of the Treaty. Bangladesh urged for dam construction upfront in Nepal that India saw as a ploy to regionalize the issue. The stalemate ultimately gave away to the two-year agreement between Rajiv Gandhi and General Ershad in 1985, but Ershad was forced to resign in 1990. Under the BNP rule that followed, despite a number of protracted and acrimonious meetings, no agreement on water sharing could be inked. Looking at the period under review, Devin T. Hagerty's analysis seems to hold good. In his words, "Based on the available evidence, it is impossible to support the notion that New Delhi's regional security policy from 1983 to 1990 was characterized by flexibility or ambivalence. The denial of external influence in South Asia was a

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<sup>41</sup> *Foreign Affairs Record*, volume XXIII, No.11, November 1977, 215-16.

consistent and overriding current running through India's South Asian policy under the governments of Rajiv Gandhi and V.P. Singh.”<sup>42</sup>

### **Imagining South Asian Security in the Post-Cold War Period: Fraternity as Power**

India's approach to regional security changed considerably as tumultuous changes began to affect the international order. The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union posed enormous security burdens on India. More crucially, India met with an unprecedented economic crisis in 1991 that led to a qualitative structural shift in its economic policy, paving the way for economic liberalization. As these changes unfolded, new priorities emerged. International trade and development of close economic ties with the West became essential prerequisites of growth. Hence, it was perhaps necessary that India's perception of South Asia as a space would also need to adjust to these new priorities. Unfortunately, the immense increase in terrorism that engulfed India since the late 1980s, much of which was sponsored by Pakistan, which took full advantage of India's domestic troubles in Kashmir and Punjab, and increasing violence in the northeast, particularly in Assam that also had close international linkages, did not allow India to fundamentally alter its spatial conception of South Asia. The realist understanding of space as power and security continued to shape its understanding of the immediate neighborhood though the policies required to meet the challenges began to change.

The framework of a new policy was articulated by Inder Kumar Gujral, India's Prime Minister between April 1997 and March 1998. As the Minister of External Affairs under the governments led by V.P. Singh and Deve Gowda, Gujral had shown inclination to improve India's ties with neighbors in South Asia, to regain the trust lost due to the more interventionist policies pursued during the 1980s. Gujral formulated the “Gujral doctrine” that articulated the concept of ‘non-reciprocity’. In his words,

The ‘Gujral Doctrine’, if I may call it so, states that, first, with its neighbours like Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, India does not ask for reciprocity, but gives and accommodates what it can in good faith and trust. Second, we believe that no South Asian country should allow its territory to be used against the interests of another country of the region. Third, that none should interfere in the internal affairs of another. Fourth, all South Asian countries must respect each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty. And finally, they should settle all their disputes through peaceful bilateral negotiations.<sup>43</sup>

During his tenure as the PM, India signed crucial water sharing treaties with Bangladesh and Nepal, agreed in principle to allow Nepal physical connectivity with Bangladesh, and signed an

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<sup>42</sup> Hagerty, “India's Regional Security Doctrine” 362.

<sup>43</sup> Text of “Aspects of India's Foreign Policy,” A Speech by I.K. Gujral at the Bandaranaike Center for International Studies in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 20 January 1997. Available at: <http://www.stimson.org/research-pages/the-gujral-doctrine/>

investment promotion with Sri Lanka that changed the trajectory and quantum of New Delhi-Colombo trade significantly, and offered unilateral tariff concessions on many commodities to facilitate the realization of the South Asian Preferential Trade Area (SAPTA).<sup>44</sup> Gujral's doctrine was, however, more of a continuity than a fundamental break in India's understanding of its neighborhood. Its conciliatory note was further legitimized by India's traditional commitment to fraternity and autonomy that build on India's identity as a democratic civilizational-state. However, near home, apart from underlying the need to offer more to weaker neighbors who may not be able to reciprocate in kind, no fundamental re-reading of the South Asian space happened. The territorial order premised upon sovereignty was vindicated as in the past, and non-interventionism and bilateralism were re-emphasized as drivers of policy. As Gujral's own statements on Sri Lanka suggest, India's legitimate concerns over the fate of Sri Lankan Tamils could not be brushed aside.<sup>45</sup> The Gujral doctrine, in brief, was not a fundamental alteration of India's spatial imagination of South Asia. It was a change in the drivers of policy brought about by the pragmatic realization of the limited efficacy of the earlier and stronger interventionist doctrine of the eighties.

India's conceptualization of South Asia had followed the lines of the Gujral doctrine on most occasions since the new millennium. Relations with Sri Lanka took an interesting turn. Sri Lanka decided to militarily liquidate the LTTE taking full advantage of the post 9/11 international mood against terrorist and militant groups. The US named the LTTE a terrorist organization and froze its overseas assets. The Rajapakse Government of Sri Lanka approached the issue with a great deal of planning and resolve. It purchased both offensive and defensive weapons from China knowing that India would not give Colombo arms owing to domestic sensitivities. The story of the violent decimation of the LTTE need not detain us. The fact is that between January 2008, when the Sri Lankan Government pulled out of 2002 ceasefire agreement and launched massive offensive, and May 2009 when it declared Tamil Tigers defeated after army forces had successfully overrun last patch of rebel-held territory in the northeast, killing the supreme Tiger Commander and the dreaded rebel leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, the Sri Lankan army launched a massive and superbly orchestrated military offensive to wipe out the armed rebellion for good.

What explains the Indian approach to the terminal phase of the Sri Lankan civil war? One needs to recall that from 2003 to 2009 India had supported the goal of a "negotiated political settlement" for Sri Lanka through forms of power devolution that would satisfy "the aspirations of

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<sup>44</sup> Chacko, *Indian Foreign Policy*, 163.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

all communities.” In keeping with my central argument of post-colonial territoriality and sovereignty as the critical ingredients of India’s imagination of its neighborhood, India held onto its unambiguous preference for the “unity, sovereignty and integrity” of Sri Lanka. During the final phase of the conflict, known as the Eelam War IV of the period 2007-2009, the escalation of violence in Sri Lanka and the growing pressure from Tamil Nadu induced New Delhi to put some degree of pressure on the Sri Lankan government regarding wanton violation of human rights of many innocent Tamils. However, this did not detract from the real policy that actually supported Sri Lanka, both militarily and diplomatically, to help eliminate the scourge of the LTTE, through what New Delhi had come to believe as a massive and just counter-terrorism operation.<sup>46</sup> In the words of Sandra Destradi, “In 2007 India began to abandon its rigorous non-involvement approach and started to take an indirect but highly significant role in the military conflict. This new approach was manifested, on one hand, in the crackdown on LTTE networks in Tamil Nadu, which helped the Sri Lankan government in its fight against the Tigers, and, on the other hand, in the provision of military hardware, mainly in the form of “defensive” equipment, and in other forms of military cooperation with the Sri Lankan government.”<sup>47</sup>

India’s relations with Nepal and Bangladesh had also been difficult till 2008. While the Bangladesh Nationalist Party led by Begum Khaleda Zia was in power, India had significant security concerns vis-à-vis Bangladesh. In addition to long term problems over river water sharing, demarcation of boundaries and alleged illegal migration of Bangladeshis into India, the BNP-Jamat coalition pursued a rabidly anti-India policy and became a safe haven for religious extremists and terrorists operating freely across the international border, in addition to patronizing camps that trained anti-Indian insurgents active in the volatile northeastern states.<sup>48</sup> Both the NDA and the initially the UPA-I Governments had great difficulty dealing with Bangladesh during this time. With the return of the secular Awami League to power with a massive mandate, relations with Bangladesh improved significantly. Though India and Bangladesh signed a historic agreement to settle the land boundary

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<sup>46</sup> According to Sandra Destradi, “This shift in India’s approach was made public, to a certain degree, in a statement by External Affairs Minister Mukherjee in January 2009, which basically legitimized the strategy pursued by the Sri Lankan government: “[...] military victories offer a political opportunity to restore life to normalcy in the Northern Province and throughout Sri Lanka, after [...] years of conflict.”, *Statement by the External Affairs Minister Shri Pranab Mukherjee in Sri Lanka*, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, January 28, 2009, quoted in Sandra Destradi, “India and the Civil War in Sri Lanka: On the Failures of Regional Conflict Management in South Asia”, GIGA Working Papers 154/2010, Hamburg, 13, Available at: [http://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/system/files/publications/wp154\\_destradi.pdf](http://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/system/files/publications/wp154_destradi.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>48</sup> Some of the top Indian militant organizations that have found sanctuary in Bangladesh belong to the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) in Tripura, United National Liberation Front (UNLF), the Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA), the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and the Kanlei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL) etc.

and made considerable progress towards drafting a water sharing treaty on river Teesta, a river that flows through Nepal, northern West Bengal and drains into River Padma in Bangladesh, due to the intransigence of the West Bengal Government, neither the Treaty could be ratified in the Indian Parliament nor any agreement be signed on the sharing of Teesta River water.

These setbacks notwithstanding, Bangladesh was quick to operate against the terror groups and dismantled the anti-India insurgent camps within its territory. India's ties with Bangladesh hinges critically on the nature of Bangladesh's domestic politics, or rather upon the dual basis of Bangladesh's national identity, which has led to the double partition of the state. The complex socio-cultural relations between Bengalis across the border point out to the difficulties of the community-territoriality disjuncture in the sub-continent. For many Bangladeshis, crossing over into the other side is habitual; for this has been the normal pattern since the remote past. The same migration, however, has altered the demographics of at least one province in India, Tripura, where the original inhabitants gradually lost out to the migrating Bengalis in numbers and also over the languages of power, and is deemed existential in a number of other provinces in the northeast. The increasingly violent riots and killings in the Indian province of Assam in the last five years in particular between Bodos and Muslim migrants across Bangladesh also point to the intractable nature of the problem. Bangladesh and India are intertwined in a serious human security imbroglio that cannot be solved through the sovereignty-territoriality model that pervades the imagination of both states. However, the inability to open up the issue of community fearing unknown consequences for territorial sovereignty ties the hands of both states.

Since the relations touched nadir in 1989 over India's coercive attempts to bring Nepal to line, relations between India and Nepal remained frosty. Before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Nepal in 2014, no Indian PM had visited the country in the last seventeen years that saw major political instability due to the Maoist insurgency, changes in governments, removal of the monarchy by the people's movement and elections to the Constituent Assembly to write a new Constitution. India distanced itself from the pro-democratic struggles in Nepal and was deeply concerned over the Maoist movement. To the manifest disappointment of the pro-democratic forces, India during this period of political instability did not wish to get embroiled in Nepal's domestic politics and also in government formation. The situation had been more complex given the role of China in Nepal's political system. However, India followed the course of events in Nepal closely. In 1990, the popular participation by the masses overthrew the Panchayat government and replaced it by the new rampart of democracy consisting of constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy. In 2006, democratic political forces, through yet another movement, got rid of the constitutional monarchy and declared Nepal as a federal democratic republic. As people were instrumental in making these remarkable

changes, India found it an imperative to adapt to the situation. However, the Indian Government had grave difficulty in dealing with the Maoists as they declined the special privileges that India had always enjoyed in Nepal, showed eagerness to move closer to China, and indulged in strong anti-India propaganda. Moreover, intelligence reports in India pointed to certain linkages between the Maoist guerillas in India and their Nepalese counterparts. In fact, India was more comfortable in this period with the conservative elements in Nepal, who had been the tradition bastion of strength for New Delhi. However, India's careful but consistent narrative of sovereign territoriality held its ground. In fact, Prime Minister Modi maintained that India wanted Nepal to develop its own political course and will develop relations with governments irrespective of ideology. In fact, while addressing the Constituent Assembly Modi stated that "India would always support Nepal's sovereign right to choose its own destiny". Domestic politics in the two countries have immense impact in shaping their relations. India's policy towards Nepal has made a dramatic shift from twin pillars approach to 'people's choice'. Both the choices in the foreign policy sprang from the changes in the domestic politics of Nepal. India's policy towards Nepal as a result came to support the 'people's choice'.

These domestic changes had a strong impact on the bilateral relations between India and Nepal. There seems to be stability in Nepal after the second Constituent Assembly-cum-Parliament elections in 2014. All the major parties are in agreement of writing the Constitution by January 2015. This fits with India's approach to the sub-continent premised upon post-colonial territoriality and sovereignty. As Sangita Thapliyal puts it, "These historical bonds are unseen between any two countries in the world. The cultural ties have worked well between the people and leaders of the two countries but it cannot be synchronised with similar foreign policy interests or goals and security interests. Every sovereign country works to the best of its national interests defined by time and context."<sup>49</sup> There is a critical threshold beyond which community cannot be invoked in South Asia. India's relations with Nepal, despite the attractions of the popular narratives of being another theatre for rivalry between India and China, are better approached through the prism of India's post-colonial difference based on the community-territory disjunction.

On balance, India's understanding of South Asia has traversed along the Gujral path. There is a complex intertwining of realist and neoliberal metaphors to it. Shiv Sankar Menon, India's Foreign Secretary, in one of his speeches noted:

The challenge for us in our neighbourhood is to build inter-dependencies which not only integrate economies but also create vested interests in each other's stability and prosperity in the subcontinent. Interestingly, today

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<sup>49</sup> Sangeeta Thapliyal, "Modi's Visit to Nepal: An Assessment", *Mainstream* LII, no. 34, 16 August 2014. Available at: <http://www.mainstreamweekly.net/article5127.html>

India is not the issue in any of our neighbors' political transitions; rather, the countries of the neighbourhood look to the Indian market and economy as positive factors for their own economic growth... We will continue to work with each of our neighbours, through the innovative use of development partnerships, our economic and technological capabilities, the development of cross border infrastructure projects as well as our civilisational linkages, to achieve the goal of a peaceful periphery. In this process we are ready to provide benefits to our neighbours without necessarily insisting on reciprocity.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, his predecessor, Shyam Saran, maintained, "It is true that as the largest country in the region and its strongest economy, India has a greater responsibility to encourage the SAARC process. In the free markets that India has already established with Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan, it has already accepted the principle of non-reciprocity." And yet, simultaneously, he also brought back the sub-text, one that harps on India's post-colonial difference, the claims of sovereign territoriality, and privileges security over everything else:

The sub-continent is now home to several independent and sovereign states and this is a compelling political reality... As a flourishing democracy, India would certainly welcome more democracy in our neighbourhood, but that too is something that we may encourage and promote; it is not something that we can impose upon others. We must also recognize, regrettable though this may be, that the countries of South Asia, while occupying the same geographical space, do not have a shared security perception and, hence, a common security doctrine. This is different from EU or ASEAN. In South Asia, at least some of the States perceive security threats as arising from within the region.<sup>51</sup>

### **(Re)-imagining the Neighborhood: Extension or Transcendence?**

India has thus found itself constrained in South Asia by both a strong revisionist state and a number of relatively smaller states who have neither agreed to bandwagon with India consistently nor accepted its claims of leadership. This underlies India's abortive regionalism in South Asia. Why could not SAARC transform South Asia? The problems with SAARC as a regional organization are multifarious. But the moot point remains the structural asymmetry that India has vis-à-vis its South Asian neighbors. India's aspired power projection goes beyond South Asia, and it clearly wants liberation from the South Asian quagmire to play a more assertive role in Asian, if not global, affairs. Indian security thinking takes it that the prospect of a status-quo and strategically united South Asian sub-continent is dismal; hence, it is perhaps legitimate for her to seek to expand its influence elsewhere, by transcending the troubled neighborhood.

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<sup>50</sup> "The Challenges Ahead for India's Foreign Policy" Speech by Foreign Secretary, Shri Shivshankar Menon at the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, 10 April 2007. Available at: <http://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/1847/The+Challenges+Ahead+for+Indias+Foreign+Policy+Speech+by+Foreign+Secretary+Shri+S+hivshankar+>

<sup>51</sup> Foreign Secretary Mr. Shyam Saran's speech on "India and its Neighbours" at the India International Centre (IIC), 14 February 2005. Available at: <http://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/2483/Foreign+Secretary+Mr+Shyam+Saran+speech+on+India+and+its+Neighbours+at+the+India+Internatio>

When it comes to commercial policies and the economic imagination underlying it, the logic of transcendence assumes even more clarity. South Asia as an economic space is too claustrophobic for a growing Indian economy and the logic of scale, more than anything else, demands rapid integration of India with Southeast Asia and the Asia Pacific with or without the existing South Asian states. The structural difference between the Indian economy and those of its neighboring states of South Asia is a strong impediment to establish a free trade regime in South Asia that would be truly remunerative and economically attractive for all the states of the region. India clearly prefers bilateral economic deals with its South Asian neighbors rather than genuine economic multilateralism for obvious reasons. The relatively weak and smaller neighbours want just the opposite. The pull of globalization has furthered compromised the chances of success for a liberal regional economic arrangement. The logic of the market, to which the liberal imagination is inextricably wedded and the present direction of India's foreign and domestic economic policies, militates against the idea of sub-optimal gains in the interest of altruistic considerations. There is yet to be any compelling counter economic reasoning that makes regionalism at the level of the SAARC, as it is presently constituted, an attractive option for India, in keeping with the meta-assumption of self-interest or egoism as the driver of the liberalization policies pursued in the different spheres of the economy as a whole.

Finally, the SAARC is structurally committed to be a collective of sovereign nation-states as the only form of community having a claim to legitimate political arrangement. The fixity and exclusionary nature of South Asian borders rule out its transfiguration into a looser form of political community that would radically question the inside/outside or citizen/others distinctions. India suffers from grave difficulties in its capacity for identity-transformation within the sub-continent since the principle of territoriality as a container of national specificity trumps attempts at redefinition over and above the state. The neighbors have problems of community vis-à-vis India and these cannot be ignored in fashioning a vision for regional cooperation along communitarian lines. In simple words, South Asia remains too state-centric to allow itself to be redefined as a community of people. India arguably has little incentive in such a move since its existing conflicts over community remain intense and often violent and any attempt by New Delhi to espouse a vision of a community is liable to be translated as socially hegemonic by the neighbors. The dilation of the state and the contested nature of community-state ties trump the community imagination of South Asia. Given the centrality of India in the sub-continent and the unsettled claims of nationhood in virtually all South Asian states, there is little realistic possibility of curving out a new South Asian identity at the level of a community that might provide a fresh conceptual basis to build a strong

regional organization here. At least, India's unsettled historical residues of conflicts over community vis-à-vis its neighbors rule out such a vision as serious paradigm for regionalism in South Asia.<sup>52</sup>

The failings of the conventional political geography of South Asia have encouraged India to re-imagine the boundaries of its neighborhood by extending it on both eastern and western directions. India has therefore tried to problematize the nature of geo-strategic interactions of South Asia. On the west, India was pivotal in getting Afghanistan into the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).<sup>53</sup> It is pertinent that the British, whose geopolitical framework India inherited and remained broadly committed to, never fully mastered Afghanistan and treated the state as a buffer member of SAARC retains its character of a being a classical buffer state. It theoretically provides India a much needed corridor to connect with Central Asia and Iran for reasons of energy and oil, and affords an opportunity to counter Pakistan's policy of strategic depth in that state. Afghanistan's geo-strategic location at the crossroads of the Silk Route made it the meeting point of great philosophic and cultural traits with influences of the Indian and Zoroastrian traditions and the Persian Greek and Roman empires. Talibanization had thwarted this syncretism but it could not destroy the heritage and historic links. India has primarily sought to invest in infrastructure and industrial development in order to promote economic growth and reduce poverty in Afghanistan, to lay new road and railway connectivity and thereby enhance Kabul's cross-border and transit trade with neighboring countries. However, Afghanistan, poses a huge challenge for India. India has no little geopolitical purchase in the state. The drawdown of the US led NATO troops might put the security of the civilian government in jeopardy, unless the much vaunted Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA), which would allow a force of 8,000 to 10,000 troops to remain in Afghanistan beyond 2014, materializes and international financial assistance continues to pour in. India, with its panoply of economic, political, and strategic investments in Afghanistan, therefore has a profound interest in ensuring that NATO forces stay. However, India has done precious little in diplomatic terms to facilitate that agreement. While India wants Western powers to arm the Afghan security forces more heavily, it has continuously vacillated over its own role, preferring to remain content

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<sup>52</sup> Shibashis Chatterjee and Sulagna Maitra, "Space and Regional Cooperation: The SAARC Story," in *Envisioning a New South Asia*, eds. T. Nirmala Devi and A. Subramanyam Raju Shipra (New Delhi: Shipra Publications, 2009).

<sup>53</sup> India's Ministry of External Affairs noted in a statement issued on August 2012: "In regional cooperation, Afghanistan joined SAARC at the 14th SAARC Summit held in Delhi in April 2007, opening possibilities of Afghanistan becoming a trade, transportation and energy hub linking together the countries of the region from Central to South Asia. India has also encouraged Afghanistan's efforts at capitalising on its unique geographical location at the heart of the Asian continent by supporting regional initiatives like the Istanbul process and RECCA that seek to assist in Afghanistan's development through cooperation in a various sectors of the economy." Available at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/afghanistan-aug-2012.pdf>

with training 1000 Afghan internal security force personnel annually.<sup>54</sup> The limited role that India plays in Afghanistan, despite the state's crucial importance to its national security, follows from the perceived threat of the Taliban and extremist or terrorist elements that have harried India in the past. While the sagacity or appropriateness of this approach is debatable, it indicates a conservative approach to an extended spatial imagination of South Asia to the western front.

India's attempt to redefine its neighborhood in the East is not merely an exercise to broaden the sub-continent but transcend it in several important ways. In keeping with India's self-identity and the spatial metaphors underlying its imagination of neighborhood, one finds that there are three visions of India's Look East initiative, each underpinned by a certain conceptual orientation.<sup>55</sup> Thus, Look East policy might be conceived as an extended security trajectory, whereby India would develop a sophisticated array of security relations in Southeast and East Asia with an eye to project India's legitimate power and resist growing Chinese domination of the region. The momentum of this policy would thus hinge on India's strategic interests and the reward of this initiative would primarily translate in terms of India's security interests.

A second vision of the Look East drive sees it as primarily a strategy of economic cooperation undergirded by liberal or neo-liberal trade theories. The rationale here is the prospects of large mutual gains to be derived from extensive trade and commercial relations between India and the Southeast Asian nations, extending up to Japan, and including Australia in the south. This vision is based on optimism born out of globalization and the pursuit similar liberal policies by all the major states of the region. This vision is more robust compared with the realist power-based understanding and builds on the logic of absolute gains. Thus the pace of cooperation between India and East Asia is not to be decided by how these states divided or shared the gains, but by the actual volume of gains accruing from a much-extended level of transaction between the actors concerned. The security metaphors are either sidestepped or abhorred by the proponents of this view. They believe that the promise of India's Look East diplomacy lies in multiplying manifold the level of prosperity of the state.

The third or final vision argues for a communitarian reading of the Look East venture. This argument links up India's Look East policy with the northeast in general and the issue of sub-nationalism in particular. Thus far the poverty of India's spatial imagination has been its northeast policy. The Look East policy provides an excellent opportunity for the state to overcome the legacy

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<sup>54</sup> Shashank Joshi, "India's Afghan Muddle", *The Hindu*, 18 December 2013. Available at: <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/indias-afghan-muddle/article5470772.ece>

<sup>55</sup> Shibashis Chatterjee, "Conceptions of Space In India's Look East Policy: Order, Cooperation or Community," *South Asian Survey* 14, no. 1 (2007), 65–81.

of parochial territoriality. The integration of the northeast within a dense economic maze stretching from Myanmar to Korea through Bangladesh, Thailand and the new ASEAN states, might ultimately help the northeast to transcend the historical tyranny of fixed borders and allow its inhabitants fullest possible benefits in the process of economic exchanges qua the Look East move. This view interprets the positive dividends of the Look East policy in terms of investments into community building and soft border exercises. It differs from the second vision in making its communitarian pledges a vital precondition to a successful economic transformation of the eastern region. In other words, the key to successful economic relations lies in effective community formations. Scholars hospitable to this orientation argue that India can ill-afford to bypass the communitarian facets of the northeast in its Look East imagination. The optimality of the policy in fact hinges critically on how the entire region is transformed by a new and imaginative blending of a series of sub-nationalisms that straddle the sensitive parts of India's northeast, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Thailand. As visions, the community imagination is diametrically opposed to the realist reading. Unlike the realist discourses, it is non-statist and hostile to mainstream security considerations. It is not fundamentally opposed to the market conception of space espoused by the liberals, but it puts the claims of community prior to that of the market. Hence, this is an articulation that challenges the territory-sovereignty discourse of the post-colonial Indian state. Empirically, therefore, there is no investment into this radical imagination by the national elite, lest it unleashes de-territorializing tendencies in the periphery.

India has in fact started to move beyond Southeast Asia. It has flagged off a policy of looking Far East in 2012 that seeks to take her to the South Pacific. India's economic aid to the small islands in this region has grown steadily. While the figure is small when compared to the US, China, or even Australia, given India's distance and India's economic capacity at the time, the investment is commendable. There are reasons as to why India is expanding its reach. But perhaps more importantly, given the potential for liquefied natural gas extraction through deep sea mining, particularly off the coast of Papua New Guinea (PNG), with India's improving deep sea mining capabilities, engaging with these islands contributes to a further widening of its energy import basket. With the advent of the idea of the 'Indo-Pacific', which sees the region stretching from Madagascar to the Marshall Islands as one unit, deepening partnerships with the Pacific Islands might help India gain a more overarching presence in this "two ocean" region. In the words of Kailash K. Prasad, "With new opportunities for trade and with resource based interests stretching further into the Pacific ocean, New Delhi could also make a stronger case for playing a greater role in ensuring freedom of

navigation through the maritime highways of global commerce in South and East Asia – a role India’s rapidly modernizing navy might not find entirely unwelcome.”<sup>56</sup>

India’s role in Asia pivots on its maritime imagination and policy. It is in the confluence of oceans that India seeks to rediscover her central role, not far from the lines originally suggested by Prime Minister Nehru. In the words of Ranjan Mathai, one of India’s former Foreign Secretaries:

I think that if we just look at the Asia that pans itself out in front of us today, the most critical conceptual idea for Asia I believe is in the Indian Ocean Rim area. This is the only emerging regional organization and growing regional organization that is linked with water. Every other regional organization is largely linked with land mass. This is the only regional organization that is linked with the seas. And in that sense, it is special because it is different. But it is also in a sense that gives India a point of a pivot which we have. We have Australia on our right, Southeast Asia, ASEAN countries and Australia again giving us a lead to the Pacific. We have the vast Indian Ocean that buttresses the pivot. If we get to the left, we have mineral rich countries of the GCC and also West Asia. And then above us we get China and Central Asia.<sup>57</sup>

## Conclusion

My argument is that India’s policy towards South Asia has evolved in according to its conception of space as power. This conception is primarily the result of its postcolonial status and its heritage of imperial geopolitics. While India did not espouse the expansionist idioms of imperial geopolitics, it had sought to prevent its neighborhood against external interferences and tried to achieve a geo-political unity of the space.<sup>58</sup> Alternative imaginations of the neighborhood were possible. India could have defined its neighborhood as a space of commerce and shared prosperity or as a community that did not care about political borders. However, its postcolonial identity has leveraged the geopolitical reading of the continent by absolutizing the salience of sovereign territoriality. The territorial imagination has naturally favored a power reading of its immediate neighborhood, which is fundamentally a defensive security centric imagination based on its claims of difference.

The heritage of being an old civilization, its democratic culture and institutions, its preference for strategic autonomy and a sense of defiant affirmation of its role in world politics, have contributed

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<sup>56</sup> Kailash K. Prasad, “India Looks Far East: A growing presence in the Pacific Islands could have significant benefits for India,” *The Diplomat*, 28 April 2014. Available at: <http://thediplomat.com/2014/04/india-looks-far-east/>

<sup>57</sup> Transcript of External Affairs Minister’s Address at the Annual Convention of the Indian Association of International Studies on “The Dawning of the Asian Century: Emerging Challenges before Theory and Practices of International Relations in India,” 10 December 2012. Available at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/20962/Transcript+of+External+Affairs+Ministers+Address+at+the+Annual+Convention+of+the+Indian+Association+of+International+Studies+on+The+Dawning+of+the+Asian+Century+Emerging+Challenges+before+Theory+and+Practices+of+International+Relations+in+India>

<sup>58</sup> See Mustapha Kamal Pasha, “Security as Hegemony,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 21, no. 3 (July-Sept. 1996), 283-302.

to articulate this sense of difference. India has not only sought hard to become a modern state, but has also sought to imagine South Asia as such. Modernity and territoriality get fused in this geopolitical imagination of space as power. It is interesting to note that India's imagination beyond South Asia has changed much easier compared to its vision near home. India has increasingly moved towards being a critical supporter of a neo-liberal international order. While it occasionally bandwagons with the less developed countries against the developed West, its role in international political economy is now far more positive than in the past. In the words of Rahul Mukherjee, "Embedded liberalism has driven the country to make decisions to spur growth and welfare within a secure international environment."<sup>59</sup> However, no sustained politics of liberalism is visible in South Asia, and though India's official position has often been to urge South Asian states to make good of India's economic growth, the discourse of power has remained its dominant narrative. South Asia has thus remained weak on regionalism, low on intra-regional trade, dubious of functional integration, and high on inter-state disputes. Most of these disputes are the result of the breakdown of the meta-community nature of the sub-continent and its replacement by a garrulous family of territorial states. More than anything else, it is the fear of contested legitimacy of the nation-building projects that underlie these fractious discords in the sub-continent.

India's imagination of South Asia is a two-level process. First, it sources in India's own identity and thus contains the fragility of its models of self-hood. The secular, liberal model of civic nationalism that came to dominate India's self-imagination has become contested over the years. The contestation is manifold. On the one hand, it is about the silences – the politics of dignity and recognition questioning the innocence of India's civic nationalism and thereby strengthening the social cleavages of caste and ethnicity. However, more drastically, the liberal model is now under threat from the Hindu right, which blends culture, faith and nationalism to create a new ideology of honor and unity. The inability of India to defeat terrorism supported from Pakistan, the sanctuary that insurgents get in some of the neighboring states, the alleged Muslim migration from Bangladesh that threatens the demographic balance in some border areas in India's fragile northeastern states, have strengthened the politics of the Hindu right in recent years. However, the first NDA government that ruled India from May 1998 to May 2004 was a coalition government that did not have the freedom to implement the Hindutva agenda in India. Especially, in terms of foreign policy, it did not make any radical departure that was fundamentally overhauled by successor states. It did not create any new South Asia policy on the basis of its Hindu politico-cultural agenda.

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<sup>59</sup> Rahul Mukherji, "India and Global Economic Governance: From Structural Conflict to Embedded Liberalism," *International Studies Review* 6, no. 3 (September 2014), 461.

However, India's imagination of South Asia cannot be fully home-grown. This would neutralize the very basis of the inside/outside distinction that the politics of postcolonial sovereign territoriality entails. Hence, India imagines its neighborhood as a space different from itself. The necessity for territorial otherization makes realist power politics the most appropriate basis for imagining South Asia, and perhaps the only inexorable one under the circumstances. It has a weak neoliberal imagination given liberalism's problematic relation with territoriality and the innate logic of the market to transcend fixed or bordered spaces. India, like other South Asian states, fear the meta-community of its past. This delegitimizes the politics of community that perhaps would have been the most appropriate imagination of the space.

South Asia, after all, is a very geopolitical, Curzon-ian construct; it is completely opposed to South Asians as a people, as they had historically been, notwithstanding their political identities and nature of rule. But modern South Asia is a territorialized space, valorizing sovereignty and control. Hence, India's engagement with the region has been through strategies of national security. While Nehru was not keen enough to factor in the neighborhood as a vital element of India's regional security, partly because of his lofty Asianism and partly due to his faith in the fraternal or pedagogical notion of power, his successors have had to respond to security challenges in a far more direct way. While India gradually developed a more assertive and interventionist discourse over the 1970's and 1980's, which caused major problems with its neighbors, it gradually moved to a more fraternal discourse based on non-reciprocal concessions vis-à-vis the smaller states of the region. However, its rivalry with Pakistan did not transform; it assumed a balance of terror character with both becoming recognized nuclear powers after 1998. This intractable conflict prevented the possible redefinition of the region. India's difficulties over Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, which exposed the superficiality of the inside-outside distinction as demanded by the states, limited returns to its new politics of friendship or fraternal power. Frustration over its incapacity to lead the sub-continent and being harried successfully by its neighbors, India has gradually started to redefine the geography of South Asia by incorporating Afghanistan in the west and linking up with Southeast Asia and then the far Southern Pacific islands in the east. But this re-articulation is also based on India's perceived geopolitical needs. In Afghanistan, India needs security guarantees against Pakistan and a corridor to the energy economies of Central Asia. In the east, it needs to exploit economic opportunities and balance against an increasingly assertive China that threatens India's rise. Hence, its new regionalism is also predicated upon *a geography of power* and fear. The confidence required to imagine alternative spatial imaginations are lacking with India, which uses foreign policy to streamline, discipline and crush the challenges to its territorial nationalism and, in the process, reinforcing the imagination of South Asia as a space of power.

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