

## IMAGINE A NEW SOUTH ASIA

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*Year 2007 has been quite significant for many countries in South Asia including India as it was the 150th anniversary of the 'First War of Independence', centenary of prominent freedom fighter Bhagat Singh, and the sixtieth anniversary of the colonisers' departing subcontinent. The departure of colonisers resulted in the freedom, self-governance and sovereignty. In this paper I would like to talk about South Asia and with special reference to India. The paper will discuss its present status and briefly describe a new South Asia of my imagination.*

### SOUTH ASIA IN THE PRESENT

South Asia ranks among the world's most densely-populated regions. About 1.5 billion people live here - about one-fourth of all the people in the world (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SAARC>). Such a vast region with nine nation states (Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India), has experienced so many changes of division and unification over the years. Some of these experiences have been immensely beneficial to people and some not so. Often the people have been mere objects in these processes and often coerced into these processes. The elite and powerful have always benefited from these processes of change and when not they have subverted the processes in one way or the other. One of the processes is the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) which is an association of eight countries of South Asia (Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives, Pakistan, and India) and was established on 8 December 1985. Despite this, SAARC has not made Peoples' South Asia possible in spite of time, energy and money invested in it.

Revisiting 60 years of freedom for some of the South Asian countries raises the question: Whether we are really independent and democratic? Independence and freedom mean different things to different people. Very often freedom implies territorial freedom with no attention to its other

manifestations such as freedom from social discrimination, stigma, freedom from hunger, want, disease, poverty, undemocratic rule, neo-colonialism and violent conflict etc. Freedom for dignified life, life of equality, freedom of expression, belief, media, judiciary, and fundamental human rights are also included in the list which goes beyond the notion of creation of a sovereign state. South Asia as a region is home to a third of world's poor, with more than 100 million going hungry a day, belying what people in independence movement, founding statesmen and great leaders imagined it to be. Violation of the rights of citizens has continued in the post-colonial era. In the context of increasing inequality, identity politics, social and political conflicts, there is an increasing sense of fragmentation, mistrust and an internal political tendency to undermine each other rather than supporting and promoting a unified vision of a South Asia free of poverty, violent conflicts and mistrust. Many ordinary people like you and me, and not just our national heroes and heroines, struggled for freedom whose name may not be recorded in any of the history books and carved in some monuments. Yet 60 years of independence for many of us have not been the 'haven of freedom my *mother and father* let my country awake', dreamt by Rabindranath Tagore (italics are my addition). The freedom from colonial powers has been tarred by bloody divide of some countries, of communities and of families. History of South Asia has been both happy and painful. We have no

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one to blame but ourselves. We have not learned from history and have not mended our ways. Our mindset is still the old colonial one; feudal, patriarchal, communal, caste, religion, region, and class discriminative ideologies, practices, prejudices and mental divide. It will not be fair if we just blame our politicians because after all they are from among us promoted, elected and sent to rule over us.

Over the years we have differentiated, demarcated and divided South Asia and people within it as belonging to different creeds, sex, classes, castes, sub-castes, clans, biradaries, tribes, regions, ethnicities, ideologies and the Nation States. Difference and variety are part and parcel of human heritage but we have forgotten to appreciate, rejoice and celebrate differences. We have made the difference an excuse to divide and rule, manipulate, eliminate and dominate. The artificial divisions and boundaries we have created are justified and reinforced by myths, religious ideologies, national security phobia and creating an 'enemy'. In our greed for power, wealth and ego we have waged wars, killed innocent people within our own nation state as well as with our neighbours.

### **HOTBED OF INJUSTICE AND VIOLENT CONFLICT**

South Asia is one of the world's most complex regions with multi-ethnic societies, characterised by striking internal divisions along linguistic, regional, communal, castes and sectarian lines, but externally linked to one another across national boundaries. Muslims (Sunni and Shi'a), Hindu (divided in various castes and sub-castes and outcastes/avarnas), Jains, Buddhist, Christian, Indigenous/tribal faiths, Sikh, Zoroastrian, Jewish, Baha'i and Atheist are people with different faiths and philosophies residing in this part of the globe.

Yet, multiculturalism or pluralism as a guiding principle of governance is hardly adopted by the popular political culture of the region. A probable exception is India where different ethnic groups, at least in principle, enjoy 'equally' a degree of political

space for cultural and political autonomy in the democracy. But in India, multicultural arrangements are hindered by the states' intrusion into the affairs of political institutions, leading to political decay and erosion of democratic values (Dabhi, 2007a). The emerging new political scenario in Nepal still needs to examine that there are still people from civil society and political parties who would like to maintain the monarchy in some form or the other. The present political crisis and manipulation in Pakistan, Taliban strong hold in Afghanistan and army interference in Bangladesh are all part of South Asian reality.

It is not that South Asia as a region is politically, economically, socially and environmentally in turmoil but the number of nation states within it is a hot bed of gross socio-economic and political injustice and violent conflicts. The deprived, marginalised and excluded in their own way, some time in organised ways resist and respond to repression, injustice and atrocities unleashed on them and pay a heavy price. Their lives are buried under various committees, commissions and CBI inquiries and investigations.

All kinds of conflicts present in South Asia are interlocked due to the fact that a large section of the populace lives in extreme poverty. There are intense cross-boundary ethnic linkages as well as deep class, castes and ethnic divisions in most of the societies. At times the conflict prevalent in a particular society or country can overlap when the demands of two groups, which otherwise have a common adversary, infringe on each other's core interests, leading to a triangular contest between all three parties ([www.southasia.org](http://www.southasia.org)). One example that comes to mind is that of the Bodos' demand for a separate Bodo state within India is opposed by an ultra-Assamese nationalist group - the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), which spearheads a movement for a sovereign state of Assam. Both the groups consider the Central government as a common adversary.

There could be contagion of conflict as well which, occurs in the process of one ethnic

movement becoming an incentive for another group to assert its rights and articulate its demands. The separate state demand of the Nagas provided the political stimuli for many ethno-nationalist movements in Northeast India (also see Prakash, 2007). India is one country in South Asia which, can be termed as the hub of several ongoing conflicts. To name a few, there is conflict in Jammu and Kashmir, North- East, in the Chhotanagpur tribal belt as well as the inter-caste and inter-religious conflicts, which manifests in the form of communal and caste violence across the country. One of the most atrocious examples of communal conflict in recent past have been the masacars of the Sikhs in 1984, Muslims in 1992 followed by the Gujarat in 2002 and the recent Kalinganagar and Nadigram in Orissa and West Bengal, respectively.

The reason for all kinds of conflicts prevalent in the society can be attributed to the group's grievances and the nature of state response to its problem. In South Asia, the underlying grievances and interests of groups that characterise an ethnic conflict are multifarious, and the proximate causes of a bitter group contest are entrenched in the political process itself. Grievances of some groups have arisen from the post-colonial process of 'national territorial formation' when 'border minority groups' found their voice of dissent subdued by the coercive state apparatus backed by laws such as TADA, POTA (see Jowher, 2006). Colonial powers all over the world left a legacy of unending confusion and mayhem, not only by arbitrarily determining boundaries from the sole point of view of their administrative and military advantage, regardless of the history, needs and sentiments of the local population, but insisting on precise scientific demarcation of such borders (Gohain, 2007).

For those who nurtured hopes for a separate nation-state on the ground that they had been autonomous political entities in the pre-colonial period, the national boundary setting on the eve of decolonisation was unjust and arbitrary and still here to stay. In India, as many as five ethnic

movements-in Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Assam and Kashmir are rooted in what may be called the 'feeling of betrayal' or the legacy of colonial rule. The mainstream Naga, Mizo, Meitei and Assamese nationalists have questioned the integration of their ethnic territories into the Indian union, and made a strong claim for separate statehood.

Similarly, the Baluch minority found its forcible inclusion in Pakistan arbitrary and sought to regain the independence of its 'nation' that was lost to the Punjabi-dominated part. Some think that Bangladesh is one of the most politically polarised countries in the world. The country has a longrunning reputation for deep-seated corruption. The current caretaker administration, backed by the military, has pledged to eradicate corruption, will it? Besides severe poverty, the rights of the indigenous people continue to concern Bangladesh. The present crisis in Pakistan adds to the violent conflicts that exist there. You call it emergency or marshal law the agenda is to remain in power and hell with democracy and people's issues.

Often the issue of forcible territorial integration was not the sole source of grievance but provided the base for the rise of more serious inter-related problems, leading to solidification of their grievances for these groups. Some groups, which lost their territorial identity to the dominant groups of their region, have even become frightened of their assimilation as the eventual outcome of arbitrary ethnic boundary maintenance. To ensure their survival, they have articulated demands for a territorial complex based on their ethnicity.

The partisan role of the state has often been the cause of flaring up of the conflict. Experience suggests that in a conflict-ridden multiethnic society, the state behaves as a vested interest or more as an agent of the dominant or majority group than as an arbitrator of conflicting interests of groups.

## **VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND ANTI-PEOPLE GOVERNANCE**

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund have come with an agenda of good governance as one of the criteria for their conditionality for the financial assistance they provide to developing countries (Stiglitz, 2003). One must not be naive not to see the ulterior motive of these institutions in the guise of good governance. Often their good governance is limited to promote and framing policies for liberalisation, market driven economy, free trade, tight immigration laws, reduced state intervention and war on terror. Their conditionalities for good governance are often for their convenience and their stakeholder like U.S.A., U.K. and Europe. Framing policies conducive for globalisation and liberalisation are signs of good governance where by global trade and financial transactions are then kept out of the control of the State and under the dictates of the market (which obviously they control). However for us good governance would mean more of true democracy, secularism, participatory inclusive development, inclusive representative governments at all levels, people centric and human rights oriented judiciary, constitutional bodies which serve the people and not the political parties and the elite (Dabhi, 2007d). We want governance which is Rights-based. Now it is easier said than done. The governance in South Asia is far from what is desirable; corruption, nepotism, criminalization, regional and male domination are some of the evils to mention a few. The recent events in Nepal (democracy vs monarchy), Bangladesh (dictatorship and army rule), Pakistan (democracy and emergency/marshal law) and India (fake encounters, development of terrorism, communalisation of politics) are some indications of bad governance and human rights violations.

Pakistan is in a difficult phase of its socio-political history. The present crisis is part of Pakistan manipulative politics supported by the army. For half of the period since 1947 independent

Pakistan has been ruled by military dictators. The foremost factors in keeping up this system are the military's involvement in all spheres of political, economic and cultural life, the continuation of feudal landowning structures and the weakness of civil society outside existing networks shared by military, industrialists, landowners and administration (Berndt, 2000). Human Rights violation has been frequent and common in Pakistan. And the situation in Nepal, Bangladesh and Afghanistan is no better.

The basic tenets of true globalisation would be to remove borders, restrictions and create a free movement of people, technology, knowledge and resources. However, the globalisation aggressively pushed is skewed where finance transactions need no national boundary but labour movement highly restricted. The last decade and a half has proved that market driven globalisation is for the well-being of a few and a curse for millions - for example, the collapse of the South Asian tigers of 1990s, the impoverishment of African countries and the increase in disparities between the rich and the poor in Asian countries including India.

## **UNSUSTAINABLE EXPLOITATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

Some areas in South Asia are more rich in natural resources than other parts. Rivers and mountains flow and run through more than one country in South Asia creating opportunities for sharing resources, building bonds of interdependent neighbours. But this also leads to potential conflicts. The three major rivers sources in Himalayas form the world's major river systems - the Indus basin, the Ganga-Brahmaputra and the Yangtze basin. The mountains, the forest, the rivers and the planes have in one way or the other sustained millions of people over the years. Approximately 2.4 billion people live in the drainage (also called catchment area, river basin) of the Himalayan rivers, among them the people of Bangladesh. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Himalayas>). The flora and fauna of the Himalayas varies with climate, rainfall,

altitude, and soils. These resources have been cause of economic, territorial and political conflicts and have antagonised social relation between people of this region.

The various development projects in the region undertaken by various countries have provided benefits for some but have created ample cause for human made disasters. The UNICEF press note highlights the problems the flooding can cause in this regionii.

Depleting clean drinking water is a world-wide phenomenon and the problem is acute in many of the regions within the South Asian countries. Given the scope of globalisation and greed for profit many governments would not hesitate to privatise water everywhere. Thanks to resistance from people that they have not succeeded. South Asia has to rise to the challenge in preserving and restoring the water sources and managing them well. Water Aqua robbery by corporates is becoming common in the Third World and therefore the Stockholm Declaration of the United Nations on Human Environment evidences this seminal proposition: "The natural resources of the earth, including air, water, land, flora and fauna and especially representative samples of natural system, must be safeguarded for the benefit of present and future generations through careful planning or management, as appropriate. Nature conservation including wildlife must, therefore receive importance in planning for economic development" (as quoted in *The Hindu*, 20th January 2004).

Search of greater profits often disguised in development projects (Dams, mining, national sanctuaries/parks, tourism, infrastructure, etc.) is causing havoc for the marginalised communities besides creating environmental hazards. During the last decade, the widespread use of the Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction (IRR) model and methodology in research on developmentbased forced displacement and resettlement (DFDR) research worldwide has generated a new and enormous body of empirical

data confirming impoverishment as the dominant outcome for "displacees" in the overwhelming majority of cases reported in the scientific literature (Cernea, 2007). Anuradha Dutt in her article 'Earth, a ball of fire', argues "The large Himalayan glaciers, about 70 in number, feed perennial rivers such as Sindhu, Brahmaputra, Ganga and Yamuna. But, an estimated 67 per cent of the glaciers are said to have melted in the past 10 years. The Gangotri glacier has reportedly been retreating 30 metres every year. The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change states: "Human-caused global warming will produce droughts and floods across the world. Ice sheets and glaciers would melt, resulting in floods and rising sea levels as well as extreme weather events (*The Pioneer*, August 24, 2007:7).

Large population in South Asia is dependent on agriculture and allied employment (see Shah and Sah, 2002). The Land reform study carried out under the aegis of the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India highlights the failure of land reforms in India and government apathy, the unholy nexus between landlords, police, bureaucrats and politician are a few among many reasons cited. Ownership of land lies in the hands of a few families and now in the hands of big industrial houses (under the SEZ policy of the government). The vast majority of the rural population is either landless or owns too little land. Some of the land owned by landowners is not used productively at all. Landowners are well connected to the centres of political power in Nepal (Berndt, 2000). Redistribution of land was one of the concerns for Maoist movement in Nepal and India.

Barraclogh Solon in his article 'The Quest of Sustainable Development' argues that policies are purposeful courses of action towards perceived goals. They are inevitably conflictive. Moreover, their impacts tend to be ambiguous in dynamic systems. Their outcomes are influenced by many unforeseeable internal and external factors as well as the divergent intentions and interests of some

of their supporters. Public policies ostensibly aimed at advancing sustainable development have had positive impacts as well as frequent negative ones.

It is further argued that local-level democratic decentralisation has been incorporated as a goal of sustainable development. At the same time, global concentration of technological, military, financial and political power has been rapidly increasing by most criteria. This contradiction is supposedly overcome by implementation of subsidiary principles whereby decisions and resources are ascribed to the lowest (most decentralized) level possible. What these levels are in practice, however, leaves room for infinite debate and conflict. Moreover, decentralisation, in the absence of reforms in national and international policies and institutions accompanied by a redistribution of resources, has often proved counter-productive.

Barracloch Solon yet argues that recent efforts to build partnerships for sustainable development between United Nations Organisations, large transnational corporations (TNCs), governments and some NGOs should not be expected to make much of an impact. A few big TNCs now control many of the world's financial resources and its capacity to produce modern technologies essential for states' political-military power. They largely influence policy and ideological agendas everywhere through their control of mass media but they are helpless without the military and political protection of a few powerful nation-states.

Powerful corporations now claim to be able to bring about sustainable development through their exercise of "corporate responsibility" and observance of a "triple bottom line", integrating the goals of monetary profits with those of promoting social well-being and environmental protection. This is nonsense in the present world order, argues Solon. It would have to imply responsible and responsive governance, participatory decision making, conscientious public and constitutional institutions, peoplecentred market regulations,

accounting practices, tax structures, subsidies, equal and inclusive social relationships etc. In the given circumstance such a vision is considered utopian by most observers.

My friends Arun Shrivastava from India and Muhammad Khurshid from Pakistan in their draft of forthcoming article 'Imagine a new South Asia - Natural Resource Management' write, "As land use planning and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is not being done even for mega projects, natural resource base is under severe stress. The fragile mountain ecosystems are being converted into agricultural land besides being ruthlessly logged and heavily grazed. Constructions of buildings in mountains are done without following any building code. Therefore, these mountains are losing soil rapidly due to erosion. Agricultural land is polluted by wilful use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides coupled with dumping of industrial and domestic pollutants. Water is polluted by industrial and sewage waste. Marine ecosystem is also threatened not only by dumping chemical waste and untreated solid and liquid waste from major cities but also logging and lopping of mangrove forests. As a result biodiversity of land fresh water and marine ecosystem is highly threatened."

Energy crises are not new to the world especially to the developed world due to their consumerist life style and capitalist intensive development. Oil, coal and wood are sources for energy and South Asia is facing energy crisis. The option for Nuclear energy is blindly followed by India according to some scientific scholars when other options are not explored such as water and wind (Iyer, 2007, Dabhi, 2007b, Dubey, 2007).

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AT THE COST OF SOCIAL JUSTICE**

The economic growth and development during British rule was 'primarily geared to pump out surplus' (Shah, 1997:29). The change that India has experienced after independence from British colonial rule speaks volumes for economic growth

and development in the country. These changes would not have been possible without economic growth and development. In many sectors we have planned and managed our development well enough to improve the quality of life of Indian citizens and address some of the problems we have had. However, it is well understood that development is no longer considered identical with economic growth (Kumar, 2003).

The concept of social justice goes beyond economic development. Economic development is important but it is not merely growth (measured in term of increase in the GDP). Rather, in the words of Henri Bartoli (2002, 'Rethinking Development', a UNESCO Publication), "Development encompasses the enhancement of material well-being in low-income countries, be it food, health, education, or the duration and dignity of life... It also assumes a human dimension when, through vigorous human activity, it seeks to establish for men and women, the world over the conditions essential to the maintenance and blossoming of life". The task development policy is to ensure that growth does take place and also to ensure equitable distribution of the fruits of growth so as to maximise social welfare. The link between economic growth affecting inequality is both direct and indirect and require politico-economic choices (Kumar, 2003), and therefore, change is not possible without political will on the part of the government, market and civil society.

"Poverty is not the problem of the modern world. For we have the knowledge and resources which would enable us to overcome poverty. The real problem - the thing which creates misery, wars and hatred among men - is the division of mankind into rich and poor". Julius Nyerere in 'Man and Development' (as Quoted in Dabhi, 2006a)

Human Development Report (2003) and even studies carried out by World Bank (HRD, 2005) worldwide have shown that poverty is gendered and women are the worst victims of poverty whether it is urban or rural. Inequality keeps women at a

disadvantage throughout their lives and stifles their development prospects and that of the society they live in (SAAPE, 2006). Women are the subset of the growing urban poor; part of a poor household as wives, mothers, daughters, daughter-in-laws, etc. Poor single women are part of this sub-set because they have nowhere to go, have limited options, limited ways and means of earning their livelihood. Poor education and health affect human capacity and this in return influences one's ability to access employment. Lack of capacity among women makes them more vulnerable to effectively engage in market economy (see Dabhi, 2006, 2007c).

Poverty has accompanied economic growth. It is multifaceted, its nature, dynamics and intensity change from place to place, over time - "the special map and social base of poverty have significantly changed over time and poverty is increasingly concentrated in a few geographical locations and among specific social groups" (Radhakrishna and Rao, 2006:15). Arvind Panagariya, is professor at Columbia University, writing on Inequality and reforms citing example from India (The Economic Times, October 29, 2007, Editorial) argues that two forms of inequality that have gone up significantly and deserve closer examination, however, are regional and rural-urban inequality.

Inequality and disparity in terms of salary, facilities, access to opportunities, and access to capacity-building to avail the opportunities are found in all organisations. However, inequality and disparities have increased in the last few decades, more so after the introduction of liberalisation. "The ratio between the incomes of the richest and the poorest country was 3:1 in 1820, it became 35:1 by 1950 and shot up to 72:1 in 1992. What is true of countries is also true of classes. In 1960 the richest 20% of humankind was earning 30 times of what the poorest 20% earned. By 2000, this disparity doubled, it became 60 times. In 2000 the richest 1% of world population received as much income as the poorest 57%. With the advent of globalisation the situation has further

deteriorated" (Oommen, 2006:7-8). Poor are not against development but they resent development which are anti-people and opens avenues for human trafficking, child and cheap labour, for sexual tourism, depletion of natural resources, displacement and deprivation for millions.

"The effects of growth on the poorest members of society are controversial. Has growth been harmful to the poor, as some have argued? Or has growth tide raised all boats, as others have argued? (Helpman, 2005:105)." I would like to argue that the growth tide has raised many boats but not equitably and in the process some boats have been damaged and even sunk (Dabhi, 2006).

Therefore, equity (distribution) and social justice (equality) are at the heart of development. Equity and therefore distribution of wealth and assets is closely related to poverty. But this does not mean that the concept of inequality is identical with the concept of poverty. A community may be poor and yet may be less unequal compared to other communities. On the other hand, a community, rich with wealth and resources may have a high level of inequality. For example economically rich states like Punjab and Haryana have highly unequal sex ratios.

Some examples need to be cited where economic growth and related economic development are obvious. India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for 2003 was \$560 billion. Though fluctuating to some extent our economic growth in 2003-04 was eight per cent, which is the second highest in the world, second only to China whose growth rate is 10 per cent. The per capita income has increased after independence. The level of poverty has decreased over the decades (see HDR, 2005).

Average per capita income growth in developing countries in the 1990s was 1.5%, almost three times the rate in the 1980s. Since 2000, average per capita income growth in developing countries has increased to 3.4% - double the average for high-income countries (HDR, 2005:20). The Human

Development Index (HDI) is a composite indicator and covers three dimensions of human welfare: income, education and health (HDR, 2005:21). Examining the economics of various countries through the prism of HDI one realises that the developing countries are low on the scale of all the three indicators. The disparities and variations among some of the indicators are high within the regions of these developing countries.

Julius K. Nyerere in 'Man and Development' argues, "For the truth is that development means development of the people. Roads, buildings, the increases of crop output and other things of this nature are not development. They are only tools of development. A new road extends a man's freedom only if he travels upon it. An increase in the number of schools buildings is development only if these buildings can be, and are being, used to develop the minds and the understanding of people. An increase in the output of wheat, maize or beans, is development only if it leads to the better nutrition of the people".

Undoubtedly many things have changed in the last few decades and inter-temporal comparisons at macro level are apt to be somewhat misleading. More fertilisers, better methods of irrigation, highyielding varieties of seeds, more efficient equipment, better storage facilities, higher support/procurement prices, greater diversification in land-use, have all been of benefit to farmers in varying measures. But by and large, most of these benefits have accrued to the bigger and more affluent cultivators rather than to the small and marginal farmers.

Farmers committing suicide is alarming in India. The trend equally alarming is the farmer households which have moved out of the category 'self-employed in agriculture' are those in the bottom layer of small and marginal farmers. Some of them have added to the number of agricultural labour households, while others have joined the ranks of casual labour in urban areas. Altogether, it would appear that while for the rural sector as a whole, the HCR may have fallen between these two rounds,

its incidence has been uneven and it is more than likely that income and other disparities have widened. Since the bulk of India's population is still heavily rural, none of the Millennium Development Goals can be achieved without drastic shifts in the magnitude and relative share of poor agricultural farmers and agricultural labourers in total output (Krishnaswamy, 2004).

## A WAY FORWARD

No doubt all is not bad but all is not well either and worse for those who are kept at the margin of society in South Asia. All is not lost in all these 60 years of independence, there are signs of hope amidst deprivation, discrimination and exclusion. The wave of change for democracy in Nepal is significant for South Asia beside assertion of the Dalits and indigenous people. Resistance to Nuclear deal, people's dissent about SEZ policy in tribal belt in India, resistance to army rule and emergency in Bangladesh and Pakistan, voice against right wing fundamentalist forces (Puniyani, 2003) in the region all goes to say that people are awake and want to change the situation in which they live and suffer. People's movements and organisations have shown the way in some places and given hope to the marginalized communities in South Asia. This is the signal of impending positive change that is lurking on the horizon in South Asian countries. A new South Asia where the citizens can aspire to form a collective vision for a vibrant, united South Asia where she can imagine her people are free from hunger and deprivation.

For socio-economic development, human security, safety and just-peace are necessary. Militarisation and extra judicial powers to police and arm forces do not help in the long run. All the countries, starting with India must reduce spending on armaments and move towards demilitarization in the region.

Conflict and development induced displacement within and from outside the country is a reality in South Asia which needs serious attention and responses from civil society,

governments and profit making organisations. Violation of human rights, civil and political rights of the displaced and refugees have to stop and concrete steps have to be formulated in terms of policies and ensure that these policies are translated in the ground level changes. Full citizenship and rights and responsibilities which go with it is the direction in which the people of SAARC must move.

A conflict-free India and South Asia may be a distant dream but violence free India and South Asia is possible. It is possible because those of us who believe in human well-being and human goodness will not stop working for a new South Asia. We shall create; evolve a new South Asia by our collaborative efforts on non-violence, on peace which is based on justice, respect for various communities and cultures, spirit of learning and sharing. Our generation and generations to come will see a new India and a new South Asia violence free because there will be a celebration of diversity and negation of hegemony and oppression in the name of religion, ethnicity, caste and culture. There will be Maldives, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India but they will be borderless because people, knowledge, technology, goods and all this will flow without restriction for benefit of all, for development and well-being of all citizens of South Asia.

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#### NOTES

i [http://www.unrisd.org/unrisd/website/document.nsf/\(httpPublications\)/5BA838E26007676EC12570A1\\_002EE441?OpenDocument](http://www.unrisd.org/unrisd/website/document.nsf/(httpPublications)/5BA838E26007676EC12570A1_002EE441?OpenDocument)

ii NEW DELHI, 3 August 2007 - UNICEF today highlighted the crisis developing across South Asia as monsoonal rains continue to pound northern

India, Nepal and Bangladesh, creating havoc and chaos with heavier rains forecast in upcoming days. Some 20 million people are believed to be affected in all three countries in what is being described as the worst flooding in living memory....UNICEF is particularly concerned about the situation of women and especially children and adolescents who make up 40 per cent of South Asia's population. They are especially vulnerable to dehydration, exposure and diarrhoea. This follows on from the devastating flooding in Pakistan caused when Cyclone Yemyin struck Balochistan and Sindh in late June affecting some 2 million people.

iii The term "social justice" was first used in 1840 by a Sicilian priest, Luigi Taparelli d'Azeglio, and given prominence by Antonio Rosmini-Serbati in *La Costituzione Civile Secondo la Giustizia Sociale* in 1848. It is assumed that ideal conditions need to be created and fostered in which all members of a society have the same basic rights, security, opportunities, obligations and social benefits (Dabhi, 2006a).