Ideological Crises in South Asia

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The term 'ideology' was coined in the eighteenth century by the French philosopher Destutt De Tracy (1754-1836). Tracy developed a new discipline that concerned with the systematic analysis of ideas and sensations. It was this discipline that he described as ideology, literally the science of ideas.[1] Over the centuries, it has undergone many transformations. Today the concept of ideology is a highly contested notion, and there is no general consensus concerning the most appropriate way to define the term. Nevertheless, many commentators would agree that the study of ideology is an indispensable part of social and political analysis. Political systems, social and political movements, and relations of power domination are always interrelated in complex ways with ideas, beliefs and symbolic forms of various kinds. Power is rarely exercised without some kind of symbolic attribute or support. It is this aspect of power, and social and political life more generally that has come to define the distinctive province of the study of ideology.[2]

The present world order thrives on the failure of communism and the end of ideological confrontation.[3] Prior to 1980 there was a tendency to downplay the force of religion in politics. It proved counter productive especially because the sweeping political changes of 1980 witnessed most states of the world succumbing to the calls of so far submerged

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[1]   Louis Aitnurser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,* in Lenin, *Philosophy and Other Essays*, (London: Trans B. Brewster ,1971), pp. 121-73.

[2]   John B. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture* (UK: Cambridge, 1990), p.410. Also see Peter Merkl and Ninian Smart (eds.), *Religious Resurgence* (New York: Syracuse, 1987); Louis Aitnurser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, in Lenin, *ibid;* Martin Seliger, *Ideology and Politics* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1976), Jorge Larrain, *The Concept of Ideology* (London: Hutchinson, 1979).

[3]   After 9/11 the world is again moving towards ideological confrontation and 7/7 has further endorsed this trend.

identities. This consciousness is palpable in the new Europe, the Central Asian states, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. This new articulation of identity also impacted South Asia with a new vigor. A greater upsurge of regional religions was witnessed in the subcontinent. The region has experienced an increase in the number of religious organizations and the religious practices have become more pronounced. Religion, in fact, has emerged as a defining factor. In such an environment, the use of the 'religious card' ignites religious ferocity, which always seems to simmer just under the surface of South Asian life.[4] All of this has over the years manifested itself in the form of escalating importance of ideology and the resultant crises in the polity of the region. Ideology and religion fall in the same logical category in that both are total systems. The following tabulation highlights their divide.

Table 11: The Religion-Ideology Divide

Religion	Ideology
Divine order	Worldly order
Vision without programme	Vision with a practical programme
Faith, worship and inwardness	Mobilization of groups, classes or the nation
Purification of Human spirit	Militant spirit
Revelation	Reason alone

Ideology thus is a set of ideas shared by a nation or a social group. It represents a certain picture of social reality and sets up desirable values and goals for the society to strive. In any society there is a constant interaction among reality, ideology and the socio-economic institutions. Ideologies do not descend. They arise in specific historical milieu in response to circumstances and needs of the time.[5]

The spread and then the demise of colonialism contributed to the development of nationalist identity among people taking various forms relative to religion. South Asia is no exception, even after fifty plus years of independence the identity crises which flourished because of colonialism, continues to haunt the inter-state relations in the region. This is especially true for India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and even Bangladesh. Pakistan alleges that India has not adjusted to the division of the subcontinent and is still seeking to undo it. Whereas, India increasingly believes that Pakistan's use of terrorism is a part of bigger

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4   Eric Margolis, 'India's powder keg ready', *The Ottawa Sun* (Canada) reprinted in *The Muslim* (Islamabad), 6 January 1993.

5   K.M. Azam, *Pakistan: Economy, Politics, Philosophy and Religion* (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 2002), p.236.

design to destabilize India as a whole. The ideological divide that led to the division of the subcontinent was probably a logical end of the events then. The source of conflict has been its continuous politicization.

In the case of India and Pakistan ideology is the common denominator to the conflict matrix. It is present in not just the day-to-day relations of India and Pakistan and in their respective polity, but is a major contributing factor to the impasse on Kashmir. Ideology has also contributed to the lack of consensus about what kind of state India and Pakistan should be. The emphasis on Muslim culture and civilization more than on Muslim religion was the raison d'etre at the time of its creation. The focus emphasized upon by Mr. Jinnah. In fact the history of the creation of Pakistan is evident of the fact that he discouraged talk of an Islamic state.[6] Jinnah had openly declared that in Pakistan religion, creed and caste would have nothing to do with the business of the state. He did not reject Islam as a guiding force but envisioned Pakistan as a democratic country not to be ruled by priests with divine missions.[7] After a passage of more than half a century, the relationship of religion with state is still ambiguous. The debate, whether Pakistan should be liberal democratic or orthodox Islamic, continues and evokes different responses from different sectors of society. The mainstream political parties, the military, and the politico-religious groups have all attempted to define this relationship according to their vision of democratic development and the role of religion in society and state affairs. As a consequence an unending conflict of interests has added yet another dimension to the ideological and political polarization in the country.[8]

The ideological crisis in India also cannot be ignored. Among post colonial states in South Asia, India seems to have emerged as the classic example of a state trapped by built in contradictions. The contradiction is between its self-proclaimed ideological basis and the objective reality of its actions, which consistently violate its professed ideology.[9] The secularism the state swears by is tottering under increased communal tensions. A part of the Indian civil society practically rejects the ideology of secularism; it remains backward, ridden by caste

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6   David Page, 'The road ahead', *Dawn, 14* August 2003.
7   *Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah: Speeches as Governor General* (Karachi: Government of Pakistan), pp.9,58.
8   Rasool Baksh Rais, *Religion and Security in South Asia: Islamic Radicalism and Minorities in Pakistan*, (Islamabad: Quaid-e-Azam University, 2002).
9   Sumanta Banerjee, 'The politics of violence in India and Kashmir', Rupesingh and Khawar Mumtaz (eds.), *Internal Conflicts in South Asia* (Oslo: Sage Publication 1996), p. 93.

prejudices, religious intolerance, superstitious beliefs and obscurantist practices. The rightist political parties now extremely strong are monopolizing on these sentiments. They have gained momentum and have strengthened in recent years. The consequences of such developments on inter-state relations has seen an increased focus on the ideologies of Islam and Hinduism. From history, to Hindu Muslim relations, to impasses on Kashmir, and the entire matrix of bilateral relations between states (India and Pakistan) is largely viewed through ideological blinders.

The Bangladesh creation in itself is an exercise in the study of ideological crises facing the states of South Asia. The linguistic and development politics resulted in the Bengali speaking eastern province becoming Bangladesh in 1971. After the creation of Bangladesh language was soon replaced by religion as the primary focus of identity. Religion offered a common though transient bond that brought together the exploited peasantry, the emerging middle classes and the politically ambitious aristocrats.[10] The succession of Bangladesh was a body blow to raison d'etre of Pakistan. It ceased to be a homeland to a majority of Muslims. Post grief and reflection, what emerged from the crisis of identity, some what surprisingly, was an increased stress on Muslim identity, first diplomatically and later in domestic policy. Particularly after the constitutional amendment of April 1977, the Islamist element in the policy pronouncement of the government acquired a definite profile.[11] The eight amendment to the constitution, in 1988, declared Islam to be the state religion of Bangladesh. This decision not only impacted the domestic policy, but also had ramifications for the regional policies of the Bangladesh government and also in its policy towards the OIC countries.[12]

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[10]   M.J. Kabeer, 'Religion, language and nationalism in Bangladesh', in Rafiuddin Ahmed (ed.), *Religion, Nationalism and Politics in Bangladesh* (New Delhi: South Asian Publications, 1991), p.41.

[11]   The constitution was given in an Islamic orientation by the insertion of *Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim* (The prayer recited before beginning in Islam asking for the blessings of God.). The principle of secularism was replaced by the words 'Absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah'. Article 8 (1a) and proclamation (Amendment) Order No.1, 1977, cited by Syed Anwar Hussain, in Rafiuddin Ahmed (ed.),p. 150.

[12]   Kathryn Jacques, *Bangladesh, India and Pakistan: International Relations and Regional Tensions in South Asia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp.110-12. Also see, Anisuzzaman, 'Religion, politics and the state in Bangladesh', in N. N. Vohra and J. N. Dixit (eds.), *Religion Politics and*

In the post 1971 Pakistan, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto encouraged closer relations with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, which were underpinned by the migration of labor and the emergence of their remittances as a pillar of the economy. Bhutto balanced the emphasis on Islam[13] with the rhetoric of social and economic progress. But he also bowed to Islamist pressures in declaring the Ahmadis to be non-Muslims. At the end of his term of office, in a cynical bid to buy off his Islamist opponents, he banned drinking, gambling and horse racing and adopted Friday as the Muslim weekend. This failure to robust political alternative to Islamic conservatism, far from bolstering his position, contributed to his demise and muddied the waters of political debate. General Zia-ul-Haq deposed Bhutto and used Islam to legitimize his illegal ascent to power. This contributed vastly to the tensions between established institutions and ideological pulls for an Islamic state and has caused serious rifts within the Pakistani society. The Afghan war that strengthened the General and his Islamic agenda produced a backlash of violence and killings in Pakistan

What makes the most literate nation of South Asia the most violent also has it's bearing in ideology. The brutal civil and the associated political violence in Sri Lanka and its resultant impact on India-Sri Lanka relations can never be fully comprehended unless the ideological crises facing Sri Lanka is taken into account. Sri Lanka like India and Pakistan has religious ideology at the center of its most severe conflict. The identity in terms of Tamils, Sinhalese and others are now based on the basis of separate ideological adherents. However, the inter-state conflict got exacerbated because Rajiv Gandhi's assasination is blamed on the Tamils. The Indian involvement in the peace keeping in Sri Lanka on the invitation of the Sinhalese Government had triggered this discord.

Since the motivational force behind the conflicts of South Asia are religious ideologies i.e. Islam for Pakistan, Hinduism and the confrontation polity of Hindu-Muslim for India, the Buddhist-Hindu religious confrontation in Sri Lanka and a reversal of Bangladesh

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Society in South and Southeast Asia (New Delhi: Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 1998), p.60-70.

[13] Bhutto in the Constitution of 1973 had declared Pakistan as the *Islamic Republic of Pakistan* and then held an international Islamic summit in Lahore. He appointed Maulana Kausar Niazi as a federal minister, tried to win over religious sections by declaring Pakistan a dry country (alcohol free) and changed weekly holiday from Sunday to Friday.

towards a religious identity all make an analysis of how religion relates to politics at inter-state level, a pre-requisite for the ongoing discourse.

Religion relates to politics in a number of ways. First, it interacts in various ways with the nation state, which is now the standard political arrangement throughout the global community. Second, many religions are powerful worldwide forces and thus affect international arrangements. Third, religious conflicts can intensify divisions within and between states. Fourth, religious values are often invoked to justify and legitimize political actions and political arrangements, and this affects voting behavior and other manifestations of political struggle. Fifth, religious institutions themselves play a role within nations. Sixth, the behavior of political leaders often owes something to their religious beliefs. All these points are of course intertwined.[14]

The six dimensions of religion and political interplay sheds light on the religious-political scenario of South Asia. An understanding of which is indispensable to focus on the conflict spectrum of the region. The politicization of religion and exploitation of ideology is a historical fact for South Asian states. The colonial legacy can never be subtracted from the conflict analysis of the region, unless there is a desire to do it in a vacuum. The ideological crises in South Asia have bearings in the colonial legacy. A very critical element of the colonial strategy was to divide and rule. To avoid the horizontal aggregation of political demands against the authoritarian colonial rule the British in the early twentieth century created separate electorate[15] of the Muslims. A move that created the original fault line between the people of the subcontinent and eventually culminated into becoming the ideological base for the creation of Pakistan. Jinnah's demand for an independent Muslim state and Muslims being a separate political category was based on this particular fact. This became the central theme for the creation of Pakistan and an assertion of Muslims identity and Islamic ideology.

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[14] Donald E. Smith, *Religion and Political Development* (Boston: Little Brown, 1970), Peter Merki and Ninism Smart (eds.), *Religion and Politics in the Modern World* (New York: 1983).

[15] The decision by Morley and Minto to create separate electorates crystallized nationalism in India around electoral politics. As two further episodes of franchise expansion and relatively greater self government occurred in 1917 and 1935, the contention of various groups within the subcontinent to have a formal representation became insistent.

The two nation theory gave the country a nationalist ideology, it has even been described as an 'ideological state'[16], which has been formulated against India. It was the fear of the rights of the minority in the face of a majoritarian interpretation of democracy that led to this articulation. Moreover, mechanical application of the nation state idea, with its monolithic credo and unitary state structures, on the deeply multi-cultural societies of the third world was structurally flawed. The whole process negated the diversity, humanness and freedom that were fundamental to their cultures. Trying to manage and enforce ideological and political conformity on the sub-nationalities in the interest of the nation-state, sought to impose monoliths and homogenization that were alien and alienating. The two most sordid and violent conflicts of South Asia are that of Kashmir and Sri Lanka. These conflicts, having ideological manifestation, have regional as well as international implications. The protracted insurgencies are in the predominantly Muslim Kashmir valley and the predominantly Tamil-Hindu area in the northeastern Sri Lanka. The militant groups of South Asia cooperate ideologically first and then financially and technologically.

Where ideological confrontations function at the interstate level patterns of cooperation fail to emerge. This is because intra-state conflicts over ethnic, linguistic and religious issues in the region often assume inter-state character. Reverberations felt in the neighboring state lead to trans-border movements of refugees, political dissident and arms. In contemporary South Asia, more than anything else, cross border affiliations of ethnic, linguistic and religious groups create almost irresistible temptations for involvement in the intra-state cleavages on the neighboring countries. On certain occasions, ethno-religious conflicts are fueled from across the border. In others the ruling elite, unable to find out solutions to intra-state conflicts, seek an external bogey to justify repression and mobilize general public to defend the sovereignty and integrity of the country. The transformation of intra-state conflicts into inter-state ones has always been and still remains the single most dominant factor contributing to violent conflicts in South Asia.[17]

Another very pertinent historical aspect which is relevant to this discourse is that ideology was a need of pre-partition politics. Ostensibly, the secularism of the Congress and the communalism of the Muslim

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[16]   A. Hussain, 'Ethnicity, national identity, and praetorianism: The case of Pakistan', *Asian Survey*, 16:10 (October 1976), p.919.

[17]   Dr. Abdur Rob Khan, 'Forward', in Moonis Ahmar (ed.), *Paradigms of Conflict Resolution in South Asia in* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 2003), p.xvi.

League are the main ideological legacies of the colonial era in India and Pakistan. But it is only by scaling the gap between rhetoric and reality that the ideological impact of colonialism in the subcontinent can be meaningfully assessed. Both creeds were formulated as a response to colonialism in a bid to win the allegiance of large segments of Indian society.[18]

Instead of representing two sharply divergent or a mutually exclusive worldviews, secularism and communalism in the subcontinental context in fact reveal themselves as alternative strategies of political mobilization. As such they appear less as polar opposites than competing and interacting political forces. Just as the Congress' secularism was frequently over wrought with evocation of Hindu symbolism, the League's communalism was shot through with concerns that were other than purely religious. It is a paradox that Mohammed All Jinnah, with his secular leaning, advocated League's communal demand for Pakistan; whereas Gandhi, and his strong communal beliefs, propounded the doctrine of communal unity – a thinking that became the central pillar of Congress' post colonial secular ideology. It is a comment on the ambiguities surrounding the use of religion in South Asian politics.[19]

The role of history is yet another augmenting factor. The Muslims and Hindus have glorified their past power and conquest and view it through ideological blinders. Asghar Ali elaborates upon this by highlighting several points. First and foremost being the fact that Hinduism has been a non-doctrinaire, non-formalistic and umbrella religion. Islam was normative religion that originated in Arabia, and for most part was viewed in the subcontinent as a religion of the aggressor and was highly doctrinaire in nature. For contemporary India, these are not distant historical facts; they are repeatedly invoked by communalist in the present Hindu-Muslim conflict. The current controversy about Babri Masjid Ramjanambhoomi is a proof of how relevant the past has become in the present conflict between these two principle communities. History, in fact, has become a most powerful weapon in the hands of communalists today. The parliamentary elections in India (November, 1989) were practically fought on the issue of Ramjanambhoomi Babri

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[18] Ayesha Jalal, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1995), p.25.

[19] *Ibid.,* p. 27.

Masjid controversy[20]. In Pakistan there is an effort at state level to equate Muslim and Pakistani identities, associated with the insistence that hate against India and the Hindus was an essential component of the ideology of Pakistan.[21] The politicization of history thus should not be underrated as far as conflicts between Hindus and Muslims are concerned. This particular lineage of conflict is not just confined to Hindu-Muslim relations in India but has a spillover effect on India and Pakistan relations, and also on relations between India and Bangladesh.

The creation of Pakistan did not resolve the Hindu-Muslim problem in a lasting or just sense. Rather, it gave a devious twist to future Hindu-Muslim relationship and took the form of rivalry between India and Pakistan. Moreover, the well being of the thirty million Muslims left behind in India was also dependent upon India remaining a democratic and secular state. More importantly the role of religious nationalism in the post-independence period was detrimental to the development of a rational and democratic political consciousness in the subcontinent. It continues to haunt the politics of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.[22]

However, what is baffling about South Asian politics and needs to be focused upon is the continued negative use of religion in contemporary politics. The security paradigm of South Asia actually stands threatened because of this continued investment in the politics of religion and ideology by the elite of the region. The aggressive politico-religious stance is a bane to conflict resolution in South Asia. It does not allow the region to progress towards integration and even modernization. Every step taken towards regional integration or modernization is viewed against the ideology of the state. The Saffron family[23] of India and the green turbans[24] in Pakistan threat and wield street power to oppose such moves. A closer examination of the religious opposition and conflict reveals a remarkably common pattern in the states of South Asia. Behind the complexities and ambiguities there is always the vested interest of those who have stakes in the conflict. These interests can range from

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[20]   Asghar Ali Engineer, Indian Muslims in a contemporary multi-religious society in Douglas Allen (eds.), *Religion and Political Conflict in South Asia* (London: Green Wood Press, 1992), p.55-6.

[21]   A.H. Nayyar, 'Islamization of curricula', *South Asian Journal*(Lahore), No.2, October-December 2003, pp.72-8.

[22]   Ishtiaq Ahmed, *State, Nation and Ethnicity in Contemporary South Asia* (London, New York: Pinter, 1996), p.96.

[23]   The color saffron has religious significance in Hinduism. Saffronization refers to Hindu tendencies.

[24]   Green is the color sacred to Muslims because they identify it to the green tomb of the mosque Masjid-e-Nabvi in Madina.

efforts to destabilize the existing political power structures to continued investment in defense with no transparency to seeking economic advantages, or simply finding excuses for social and economic ills.

The deliberate patronage of the dominant ideology by the political leadership to remain in power is also common in the politics of the region. It is openly practiced in Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Religious teachings and practices are twisted and reinterpreted to support the vested interests of those who are in position of status. The majority religion is made a tool to buttress rulers control rather than made to promote justice, peace and understanding. Especially, the post 1980 developments in South Asia are closely intertwined with religion, which does not promote tolerance and harmony but is reactionary and majoritarian. Hence moving away from the principles of tolerance and inclusivity. Douglas Allen argues that one of the most dramatic and surprising development of 1970s and 1980s was a global proliferation of very aggressive religious-political positions.[25] The Government of India was toppled in November 1990 because Prime Minister V. P. Singh had taken two religious-political stands. He opposed millions of chauvinistic and fundamentalist Hindus who were determined to tear down a Muslim mosque at Ayodya and replace it with a Hindu temple at the spot they claimed was the birthplace of Lord Rama. Two, he proposed a quota system to provide lower-caste Hindus with more opportunities and power. In October the same year the Government of Pakistan was toppled, at least partially, because conservative Muslims felt Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was not aggressive enough in working for the Islamization of the country. In May 1991, Rajiv Gandhi, about to become the Prime Minister of India, was assassinated most likely by Sri Lankan Hindu Tamils who were angered by his earlier alliance with the Buddhist government in Colombo and his deployment of Indian troops to crush the Tamil Elam separatist insurgency.[26] The examples of V. P. Singh, Gandhi and Bhutto are in some ways examples of the contemporary political struggles that have involved ethnic and communal conflicts and violence and have assumed religious forms. The religious positions have thus become increasingly politicized. The religionization of politics and the politicization of religion continue to be a challenge confronted by some of the regional states. The governments have been destabilized and over thrown and hundreds and thousands of South Asians are killed, tortured on the basis

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[25]   Douglas Alien, *Religion and Political Conflict in South Asia* (London: Green Wood Press, 1992), p1.

[26]   *Ibid.*, p.1.

of political and religious connections. The impact on the inter-state relations definitely exists. The tendency of stressing the differences rather than similarities and the political nomenclatures used by Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka have not helped the situation. The strengthened Islamists in Pakistan, the ever strong going BJP in India and the uncompromising Sinhalese leadership in Sri Lanka are pertinent examples.

The persecution of religious minorities (especially Muslims) by the BJP government,[27] the behavior of Indian state forces in the occupied Kashmir, the readily evident economic differences between the Hindus and the Muslims where the Muslims are underrepresented in the higher strata of the society, the disparity between the two communities and their maltreatment and marginalized status in India has reinforced the original Muslim League stance that the Muslims of the subcontinent were better off having a state of their own. The Hindu-Muslim equation gets applied to Indo-Pak relations. The understanding is that India has never really reconciled to the reality of Pakistan, an allegation India denies. The denial is viewed in Pakistan more as an exercise of compulsion rather than conviction. Pakistan's military activism in Kashmir and the Kargil episode have further fueled the conflict and have also strengthened BJP with its tract record of targeting the Muslims other as a means of political mobilization, a strategy which was witnessed most graphically in the destruction of Babri Masjid, and continues to haunt the political life of India.

The continuous use of religion and ideological leaning marks the polity of South Asia and emerge as one of the major impediments to peace building and regional cooperation. The social and political cost of this also mars the progress of the region. This particular source of conflict contributes towards the crises of confidence between India and Pakistan. Each suspects the other for every wrong doing, from the violent insurgencies in Kashmir, Punjab or northeast India or dissident movements in Sindh or sectarian clashes in Quetta or Karachi. India and Pakistan suspect the covert hand of the other in fanning their respective internal conflicts.

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27   The world witnessed Hindus rampaged and killed 2000 Muslims in revenge attack in Gujarat, between 1989 to 2003 the insurgency in Kashmir which has left more than 30,000 dead. The communal violence of Meerut in 1987 had 350 Muslims dead. 1992 saw the tearing down of the Ayodya Mosque, in 1983, in Nillie, more than 500 Muslims were massacred and buried in a mass grave. See Nick Papadopoulas, 'Unveiling the rage' *Times Asia* (New York), 11 August 2003.

The polarization of South Asian societies along religious, ethnic and sectarian/communal lines, the ineffectiveness of various governmental measures, the reliance of governments on religious lobbies to justify their control over power in authoritarian setups and for electoral mobilization in democratic setups hence contribute towards the ideological crises facing South Asia. Religion and ideology is used in South Asia in the construct of hegemonic national cultures. These hegemonic national cultures do not allow the primacy of the individual in policy making to come to the fore.

For sustainable improvements in bilateral relations and regional integration and co-operation, the religio-political equation has to be realistically evaluated. There needs to be a dialogue for bringing about amity, faith, good will and understanding between the clashing 'civilizations' in South Asia.[28]

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[28]   Huang Xinchuan, 'Trends, features and prospects of religious development in South Asia', in N. N. Vohra and J. N. Dixit (ed.), *Religion, Politics and Society in South and Southeast Asia* (New Delhi: Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd,1998), pp.1-30.