Subnational Movements in South Asia

Edited by

Subrata K. Mitra and
R. Alison Lewis

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This book is dedicated to

the memory of those who fell in Amritsar in 1994,

to the Sikhs who defended their nation, and

to the soldiers and officers of the Indian Army

who defended the state

with the hope that it will help promote a greater understanding

of the significance of their sacrifice

and contribute to the orderly resolution of sub-national conflicts

in South Asia and in other regions of the world.

Contents

Illustrations

Acknowledgments

Rather like the sub-nationalists described in this book we can only hope to share our conviction that some things are worth doing for their own sake.

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1

Introduction

Subrata K. Mitra

Sub-national movements which claim control over parts of existing national states have dominated the recent politics of South Asia. These movements — in Sindh and Baluchistan; Punjab, Kashmir and India's Northeast; and in northern Sri Lanka to name only a few — vary widely in their level of popular support, their visions of the future and in the tactics they adopt to achieve their objectives. But the theme that is common to them all is their demand for a homeland for their 'nation'. The moral basis of this agenda — as expressed in the violent rhetoric of the leaders of these movements — is the inalienable right of a subjugated people with a distinct identity to its own homeland, government and sovereignty. The central authorities against whom they rebel depict them as separatist movements which pose a threat to law and order. The contestation between the central state and their sub-national challengers, with both sides defending their rival claims to legitimate authority, unleashes great passions. These political recriminations tend to overshadow the social, cultural, economic and political demands on which the movements are based, and the extent of popular support for their demands — in fact, the very factors that are crucial to the political resolution of these conflicts. Based on seven cases of such movements from South Asia, namely, Kashmir, Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, Assam, Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka, the book makes a case for a systematic inquiry into sub-national movements in South Asia with a view to the orderly resolution of these conflicts.

The book has three main aims. In the first place, it seeks to present sub-national movements in terms of their specific empirical details in a manner that could be useful to the area specialist as well as to those more generally interested in South Asia. Based on the basic narrative of these movements, the book seeks to understand the circumstances in which such movements emerge, what sustains them as they strive to achieve their goals and what happens to the movements once their aims are secured, or, in some cases, abandoned by their leaders. The primary emphasis in this respect is on the detailed empirical study of a sample of cases which, we hope, will lend a degree of moderation to their sensational reporting in the media. Written by authors with detailed knowledge of these cases, acquired

1

either through long research involvement in the area or through participation in the political negotiations involving the movements, the book provides the reader with a window into some of the main arenas of conflict in South Asia. In each case, our attempt is to present the political processes surrounding these movements in a manner that helps the reader appreciate the specific circumstances of each case, and thus, to differentiate the movements from one another.

The second principal objective of the volume is to emphasise the political character of these movements. These detailed case studies are intended to create a different picture from the one that is often presented in the media and in scholarly journals. Sub-national movements — sometimes involving mass murders, pillage and other atrocities, police brutality against the militants and the violation of human rights — when presented out of the larger context within which they take place, reinforce a belief that non-western societies are inherently incapable of sustaining an orderly political process.

The picture that the book seeks to create contests the view of non-western societies as organic communities, which, when faced with a political crisis, retreat to their primitive cultural roots and primordial identities. Instead, it is argued here that South Asia, like many other parts of the world, is currently witnessing a larger, unfolding political process where the tragic acts of violence are ensconced — present not merely as acts of moral aberration and mindless violence — but as political tactics pursued by groups, seeking to achieve their objectives through a complex political repertoire.

The third objective of the book is to move beyond the sociological and economic explanations of the origin and evolution of sub-national movements by formulating a political explanation. This will draw on theories of cultural nationalism and discuss the problems of collective action which each of these movements is faced with. As the authors of the seven cases show, the precise moment of the outbreak of these movements is critically influenced by the geopolitical context in which the crisis occurs and the political stability of the central authorities against whom they rebel. Our analysis seeks to go beyond existing studies by presenting these upheavals not simply as natural and spontaneous outbursts of anger but as politically convenient self-classifications, used as an instrument of identity, mobilisation, power and counter-hegemony that, once they achieve their objectives, revert to a more orderly process.

The overall objective of the book is, thus, to contribute to the development of a broadly comparative approach — both intra-systemic and inter-systemic — that explains the politics of sub-national movements. It seeks to do so by specifying the process of political mobilisation and macro-political institutions as conceptual variables. Thus, it aims at establishing a link between the primordial approach that views sub-nationalism as an organic and teleological process and the instrumental approach which emphasises its strategic character. Rather than focusing narrowly on the student of politics, the book seeks to reach a broader audience of actual and potential members of sub-national movements, legislators and administrators of policy towards sub-nationalism, the leaders of

2

religious and social movements which often get entangled with sub-national challenges to the authority of the central state and those generally concerned with the interactions between modern institutions and politics in different non-western and post-colonial contexts.

Section I

The fact that the book confines itself exclusively to cases from South Asia might, however, raise a question about the possibility of a hidden cultural agenda behind the selection of cases. Our concern with sub-national movements from South Asia is not intended to imply any innate cultural specificity that distinguishes sub-national movements in South Asia from other regions of the world. Sub-nationalism is not specific to South Asia. The politics of South-East Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America and Europe itself is replete with cases of sub-nationalism. In other words, South Asia is an area of investigation, not a part of the explanatory process.

In concentrating on cases from South Asia the book is in fact following a conventional demarcation of academic frontiers in terms of large geographic regions. This conventional concentration on politics within the South Asian region, however, is not without its advantages. In the specialised vocabulary of comparative politics, this is known as the 'most similar systems design.' It permits us to bring together a set of cases that share several cultural and historical attributes so that the list of explanatory variables can be narrowed down to the political and institutional aspects of the politics of South Asia in our model of sub-nationalism.[1]

These shared attributes, which, collectively, give South Asian politics some of its particular character — such as the salience of language and religion as the vehicles of sub-nationalism — need to be explained in some detail. The main commonalities which affect the politics of South Asian countries are: the shared experience of colonial rule and the institutional legacies of resistance to it; territorial contiguity with geo-strategic implications; and, historical transfer of population with irredentist claims and counter-claims. These factors are further complicated by the fact that the languages and religions of South Asia — often critically important for accelerating the demand for exclusive homelands — are, paradoxically, sub-continental in their geographic presence, with an attendant penumbra of a world-wide diasporic spread which sustains the sub-national movements both morally and materially.

However, while these factors distinguish the sub-national movements of South Asia from similar movements in other major geographic regions of the world, it is important to emphasise at the outset that the book does not make a case for any regionally exclusive or sociologically idiosyncratic character to these movements. Rather, the objective is also to identify specific circumstances that particular movements within South Asia might share with others from outside the

region and might not share with a similar movement from within the region. Those familiar with the violent politics of Northern Ireland will have a sense of déjà vu in Gurharpal Singh's 'The Punjab Crisis since 1984' and in the other cases discussed in this book. Punjab and Kashmir, though physically contiguous, present very dissimilar pictures in terms of the origin and development of sub-nationalism. At least in terms of the tendency to fractionalise, sub-nationalism in Kashmir has more similarities with distant Assam or Sri Lanka than its neighbouring Punjab. As Robert Oberst's 'Sri Lanka Tamil Nationalism' and Arun Swamy's 'Cultural Nationalism in Tamil Nadu' indicate, Tamil sub-nationalism in Sri Lanka and India, despite the many intra-systemic cultural and historical commonalities, have followed radically different political trajectories. These contrasts, I hope, will provide a safeguard against the all too familiar tendency especially among scholars, to marginalise the genuinely political character of these movements and, to lump them together in an inchoate mass,[2] incapable of confining politics to the modern institutional structure acquired from the west.

Section II

A project such as this is fraught with several dangers, of which conceptual confusion is perhaps the most serious one. The very concept of sub-nationalism itself is problematic. At its crudest, the concept appears to be somewhat condescending, referring to an inferior species of the real thing, namely, nationalism. Ernst Haas, in his criticism of this usage has pointed out: 'The very term "subnationalism" is question-begging. It implicitly privileges the nation-alism propagated by the ruling nation-state. [Thus] Indian nationalism is the true nationalism, against which Sikhs etc. rebel. Why is not the Sikh feeling of an identity (howsoever constituted) and the concomitant demand for political independence as much a nationalism as India's or Pakistan's? Mini-nationalisms, sub-nationalisms, secessionalism, diaspora nationalism — these are all inaccurate terms to denote the genuine nationalism of groups who have not yet succeeded in seceding from some other nation-state which they reject and from which they are alienated.[3]

These misgivings are borne out by reality. As one learns from Hewitt's 'Baluchistan', Malik's 'Sindh' or Bezbaruah's 'Sub-nationalism in India's Northeast,' the Baluchis, Sindhis or Bodos do not think of themselves as sub-nationalists. From their perspective, sub-nationalism is an awkward and oppressive category. And yet, the empirical reality surrounding sub-nationalism is too distinctive for it to be simply ascribed to the generic category of nationalism. In the interest of analytical rigour and precision therefore, a distinction needs to be made between nationalist movements with their nineteenth century connotations and sub-nationalism which is typical of the twentieth century.

The quintessential sub-nationalist takes on the world of the 20th century with the rhetoric and aspirations that characterised the nineteenth century heyday of

nationalism. But the world we live in today is radically different from the one that gave birth to the nation-state. Contemporary political processes are different from their nineteenth century predecessors in terms of mass participation, methods of rapid communication and weapons that are typically suited to modern guerrilla warfare. It is also a world where the legacy of the nineteenth century — of well-entrenched nation-states ready to battle challenges from above and below through concerted action, whether through anti-terrorism laws and rapid extradition of terrorists or the failure to intervene openly in favour of sub-national movements — where nation states are still conventionally deemed to be the only legitimate arena of political organisation, possessing sovereignty over their territory and citizens. Sub-national movements, in spite of their use of the nineteenth century rhetoric of nationalism, operate under very different kinds of constraints, and as such, follow trajectories that are different from their older counterparts. Sub-nationalism can therefore be seen at best as an academic label under which are found a broad range of movements, from those embodying a spirit of incipient separatism to those at an advanced stage of winning statehood. In our usage, sub-nationalism describes a nationalist movement expressed within the boundaries of an existing nation state, drawing support mainly from a region whose inhabitants are distinguished by a relatively high degree of cultural and historical identity. Beyond this rather minimal commonality, sub-national movements come in all sizes, ideological complexions, military and political tactics and levels of organisation.

Despite the similarity in the rhetoric of sub-nationalism and the anti-colonial nationalist movements in South Asia, sub-nationalism has other distinguishing features as well. Unlike the anti-colonial nationalist movements of the early years of this century, the leaders of sub-nationalist movements are often drawn from the same society as their adversaries. In fact, the strategy of the Indian state in Punjab has been to fight the militants through a well trained police force mainly drawn from the ranks of Jat Sikhs who have also produced several leading figures of the Sikh sub-nationalist movement. They are formally entitled to at least a nominal degree of participation in the political process and in the institutions of the state as are all citizens. Once again, as Gurharpal Singh's 'Punjab since 1984' points out, it is the formal entitlement to mass participation which has enabled the government of India to use election as a viable strategy against sub-nationalism with considerable success — in a way that the British colonial rulers of India could not have, without conceding the demand for Indian nationalism in the first place. Further, often in practice, sub-nationalists appear only to be striving to achieve the same ideals such as cultural identity on which the national state is based, albeit, in a rather strident fashion. It is this aspect of sub-nationalism, as Ganguly and Bajpai point out in their article on Kashmir, which causes genuine bewilderment among liberal Indians. The appearance of shared political ideals is important because this gives a semblance of legitimacy to their separatist cause. Sub-nationalism, seen from this angle, appears to be a tactic, whose objectives are broadly legitimate even though they may not be so in a narrowly legal sense. It

thus presents a difficult challenge for the twentieth century nation-state to overcome because, thanks to the anti-colonial rhetoric that underpinned the movement for nationhood and the democratic ideals on which their legal and political institutions are based, they are constrained to seek legitimacy from popular participation and therefore, solicit support from all sections of the population, including those who wish to secede.

Section III

The existence of sub-national movements, as the authors of this volume point out, is a challenge to the legitimacy of the central state. The fact that sections of the people of Punjab, Kashmir or Sindh engage in battle against the central state and its army of 'occupation' only serves to reveal the narrow reach of the concepts of citizenship in South Asia, the lack of deep popular support for its nation-states and the fragile as opposed to the resilient character of the national political communities that the nation-states are based on. Nevertheless, besides the case of East Pakistan which rode on the mass uprising on the issue of Bengali nationalism to breakaway and became the sovereign state of Bangladesh, the nation-states of South Asia have proved to be capable of suppressing or otherwise containing the separatist movements within the limits of their national authority. The issue then is: what motivates rational individuals to risk their lives, liberty and property and that of their loved ones in order to pursue the uncertain goal of nationhood? In answer to this question, the 'primordial' approach finds the motivation for political action in the desire to establish political boundaries to conform to linguistic, racial, ethnic or other 'natural' groups. The search for identity functions as a teleological process. In contrast to this formulation is the instrumental approach which conceptualises sub-nationalism as a political vehicle, used by its potential beneficiaries as a tool in their struggle for power. In my chapter on 'Sub-national Movements in South Asia,' I have discussed these conflicting formulations by drawing on the theories of rational choice and collective action.

 The rival claims to legitimacy from the territorial state and those challenging its authority on the basis of separate nationhood are often substantiated by their respective leaders with appeals to a separate identity based on language, race, ethnicity, history and geography. The politics of sub-nationalism is, thus, fraught with competing identities — of the Sinhalese, Buddhist ethos of the Sri Lankan state against the Tamil identity, as one can see in Oberst's 'Sri Lanka,' or of the Islamic basis of the state in Pakistan against the Sindhi and Baluchi identities as suggested, respectively, by Hewitt and Malik in their chapters on Baluchistan and Sindh, and of Indian secular nationalism against the Sikh, Kashmiri Muslim or Bodo tribal identity of the North-East. According to the 'primordialist' explanation of sub-nationalism, these identities are the primary motives behind politics, dating back historically to the precolonial roots of politics in South Asia. As long

as the forces of an occupying foreign power were visibly in control, these local and regional identities were accorded a position of dignity by nationalist leaders within the broad church of the anti-colonial struggle. However, once the foreign colonial rulers relinquished their hold, and power passed to the hands of the national leaders, a new struggle started between the central state and its sub-national adversaries. The deep irony of it is seen from the fact that the Islamic nationalism of Pakistan and the secular nationalism of India, locked in self-righteous conflict before and after independence, have responded with similar indignation when faced with challenges from within their own societies.

In contrast to the primordial explanation of nationalist movements which concentrates on culture as the mainspring of political action, the instrumentalist view operates through the political arena where the leaders attempt to weave together a set of social moorings into a powerful political movement for a separate statehood. It is important here to make a distinction between an ethnographic understanding of caste, race, language, religion and tribe, and, the use of these categories in the context of the politics of sub-nationalism.

The latter is embedded within the context of an 'imagined political community' — imagined in the sense of being adopted by those who see themselves as marginalised by the central state as their chosen instruments of struggle. Political actors, challenging the authority of a territorial state, seek to make the implicit link between the imagined community and its social anchors explicit through the politics of sub-nationalism. Thus, in an instrumental way, they use sub-nationalism to generate political power with which to give concrete, territorial expression to their demand for a separate statehood.

The book attempts to show how both the primordial and instrumental explanations have their limitations. Thus, if identity is the primary mover in politics, why did the Sikh identity remain dormant during certain historical periods, or, at a given time, within certain sections of the Sikh population? On the other hand, while the instrumentalist view, very much the current favourite among students of nationalist movements, convincingly explains why rational actors devise what tools they can muster to pursue their political objectives, it fails to explain how it is rational to court certain death, which appears to have been the case with the Sikh militants facing the might of the Indian state in Amritsar in 1984. It is not surprising that one finds an array of political tactics — from voting where public participation is legally possible to more coercive acts such as boycotts and no tax campaigns — in the repertoire of political actors. The difficulty, however, arises with the fact that one goes past the limits of instrumental behaviour once the threshold of mortal danger is reached. For death, as Thomas Hobbes reminds us, is the end of all felicity. Instrumental behaviour which carries a high risk of death somehow stretches the limits of credibility.[4] The quintessential nationalist is willing to kill or die, in a manner that defies reason. When applied to nationalist movements, the instrumentalist approach to politics rapidly appears out of its depth.

7

I have attempted to meet some of these difficulties in my chapter through hypotheses that argue that real life actors operate out of mixed motives and that the very act of combining the rational and primordial bases of sub-nationalism itself is influenced by a number of intrinsic and external factors. While the social reference points are a necessary element of the politics of sub-nationalism, by themselves they are not sufficient to produce a political movement. A movement is a complex network of interests, sentiments and attitudes that are crystallised into a common, collective object. To make this possible, the political environment needs to be propitious. The main issue here is why and how rational actors perceive sub-nationalism as a legitimate and effective course of action. This involves at least three problems. First, a sub-national movement cannot exist without a clearly articulated political agenda. Secondly, by its nature, this agenda needs to be specified outside the pale of conventional political parties and therefore, involves additional transactional costs including the possibility of censure, even repression. Thirdly, once the agenda is present within or on the fringes of the political arena, it will require a mass following in order to achieve its objectives. The first two issues typically involve the 'public goods' problem. If the ultimate objective of the movement is to benefit a class of people (a homeland for all Sikhs for example) then it is irrational for any given individual to be among the first to stand up for it and pay the terrible costs for a valued good which will be available free of cost to others once it becomes a viable proposition.

The arguments presented in my chapter on 'Sub-national Movements in South Asia' suggest that there is no neat answer to this question. People act out of mixed motives and it takes a judicious mix of opportunism and idealism to produce a viable sub-nationalist movement. Using the metaphor of the stock broker who seeks to achieve market neutrality through a combination of investment in stocks and bonds (for sub-nationalist politics, even more than other political manoeuvres, is extremely risky behaviour) I have argued that sub-nationalists compose their political repertoire by drawing on the non-negotiable aspects of identity which motivate people to do things for their own sake and on transactional motives where sub-nationalism becomes a vehicle which could deliver what other political methods are unlikely to yield. The schematic representation of the life cycle of a sub-national movement in the chapter (Figure 2.1) indicates the various points at which the nature and course of the movement is affected by the political context within which it is placed.

Using some of these notions, 'Sub-national Movements in South Asia' raises a number of questions as the first steps towards the elaboration of a comprehensive and general model of the politics of sub-nationalism. The first of these relates to the temporality of a sub-nationalist movement. When do political entrepreneurs join a sub-national movement? In the beginning in each of these movements, there appear some visionary exponents who seek to give greater salience to the cultural objectives of sub-nationalism in everyday life. The next stage of the sub-national movement usually witnesses the induction of a new group of politicians who act as the interface between the symbols of cultural nationalism

8

and mainstream political institutions and processes. It is not entirely accidental that the movement becomes strident as the power of the central state weakens, turns unsure of itself or comes under internal or external pressure to relent to the demands for separate statehood. The ambiguous reaction of India to Bengali nationalism in East Pakistan and to the Tamil Eelam movement in Sri Lanka exacerbated the problem for those states. The Indian state faced the retribution in the 1980s in the sub-nationalist movements in Kashmir and Punjab, helped in no small measure by covert support from India's neighbours.

When the movement gathers sufficient support for its demand for power-sharing within the framework of the national state, it will have crossed a critical threshold. Beyond this point, the separatist movement begins to attract support from groups which are firmly committed to the 'two-track' strategy of investing in conventional political parties while at the same time seeking to establish a bridge-head with the separatists. The economic analogy here is one of diversi-fication of portfolios. In this strategy people seek to maximise total gains and minimise total risks by investing both in low yielding but guaranteed municipal bonds and high yielding but risky stocks, the proportion of the mix being a function of the individuals perception of and aversion to risk. The equivalent of the high risk stocks here is the new political structure — a Sikh or Tamil state that would confer greater identity, communal solidarity and greater economic benefits to the members of the imagined community by restricting access to desired resources only to full members of the new state.

Once an autonomous territory based on the cultural ideals of the sub-nationalist movement has emerged, a change takes place in the nature of political competition within the new political arena. Politics of values yields place to the more mundane, transactional politics of 'who gets what and how.' Or, in other words, as Arun Swamy argues in 'Sense, Sentiment and Populist Coalitions: The Strange Career of Cultural Nationalism in Tamil Nadu,' success leads to the banalisation of politics. Political parties in the conventional sense, with a national orientation will rise out of the ashes of the mass movements spawned by the separatist groups. Separatist politics qua separatist politics will disappear from the political horizon. As Swamy goes on to argue, when two sections of the sub-nationalist movement challenge one another, the solidarity elements cancel each another out. Political choice then reverts to the more mundane issues of material benefits for competing groups and economic issues (the midday meal scheme in Tamil Nadu for example) gain salience. The nature and progression of the movement is subsequently influenced by the economic content of sub-nationalism and, the responsiveness of the political system to demands for cultural autonomy.

The archetypal sub-nationalist presents himself as an agent of history's unfinished business. This standard rhetoric is by no means confined to South Asia. The fact, however, that sub-nationlist movements follow different trajec-tories is explained by the variation in the historical contexts in which they appear. Two of the salient factors that influence the nature and trajectory of sub-

nationlist movements, namely, the relationship of the society and the economy, and, the society and the state can be represented using a matrix that stratifies countries into four broad categories (see Table 1.1).

**TABLE 1.1 The Spatio-temporal Context
of Sub-national Movements**

		Society-State Realtions: Regime Types	
		liberal-democratic	authoritarian
Society-Economy Relations		(1)	(2)
	Early	UK, Canada Belgium Switzerland	Japan, Italy, Spain, Germany (Third Reich)
Historical sequence of industrialisation and entry into into national and international market economy			
		(3)	(4)
	Late	India Sri Lanka	Pakistan (since 1956) former Soviet Union

The first major variable of classification, namely society-economy relations, helps stratify countries into two broad groups. In the first category are countries where social change, induced by transistion from the agrarian economy to the industrial, 'pulverises' the traditional social networks and provides new institutions in their place before political representation is available to all social and economic actors. In the second category are countries where social forces acquire the status of political actors even before their internal structures and the norms governing them have been transformed by the forces of the capitalist market. The second variable helps distinguish between countries where all social forces are by definition political actors as well; and, the second, where some social forces have a legitimate role in politics and others are excluded through the manipulation of the constitution, culture, morality or outright force. The two variables yield four broad ideal types which have been illustrated by exemplars with significant proto-nationalist movements within them. Whether these movements reach their objective or get accommodated within the national political agenda is influenced

by these two variables, namely, historical mobilisation of social forces and the institutional opportunities for them to participate in politics. These variables can be operationalised in terms of explanatory hypotheses (see below) which have been discussed in detail in the second chapter.

To broadly illustrate the cases thus, in the first category of states (e.g. the UK), an early integration with the national and international market and a representative political system forged close links among competing elites and helps specify material interest as the prime concern of politics. Remnants of sub-nationalism may however survive by latching on to the nostalgia of a unique cultural past. In the second category of cases, the state itself seeks to embody the symbolic aspects of cultural nationalism, leaving little scope for sub-nationalism. In the third category of cases, sub-nationalism has the potential for becoming a major problem for the national state. However, the availability of functioning democratic institutions makes it possible for adversaries to seek a negotiated solution. In the fourth group are countries in which separatist tendencies fester and eventually undermine the 'tyrannical' rule of the central government.

The above schema helps provide an integrated understanding of the South Asian experience within a broadly comparative framework. Against the back-cloth of the broad classification suggested above, the following factors leading to the development of sub-nationalism can be suggested:
- the distance between the dominant values of the central state and those salient for the sub-nationalist movement;
- the disparity in levels of material living between the territory claimed by sub-nationalists and the rest of the nation-state;
- the exclusion of regional elite from the ranks of the national ruling elite;

The following are sufficient to facilitate the rapid evolution of sub-nationalism as a political movement:
- weakening central rule;
- geopolitical conditions helpful to separatists, a social network with pre-industrial roots that facilitates coordination and acts as a vigilante organisation to punish defectors

These factors are cumulative, i.e., the probability of the growth of sub-nationalism is increased by a combination of several factors, and, conversely, decreased by the absence of some factors or by the cross-cutting or mutual cancellation of different factors.

Rather than imposing an editorial straight-jacket on the contributors of this volume, we have invited them to present their narratives in their own fashion, in the hope that any theoretical neatness sacrificed in the process will be more than compensated by the richness of the material presented here. Readers will undoubtedly draw their own inferences. We believe that some of these insights will contribute to future research in this field.

The case-studies presented in this volume are from South Asia, but the model that is empirically illustrated with the help of these specific examples is intended to be applicable to other regions of the world as well. Even though there is no self-

conscious sampling process which underpins our selection of cases, the intention behind the volume is to promote intra-regional and inter-regional comparisons. The approach addresses an important lacuna in the field with the help of South Asian case studies. In the absence of theoretically informed and comparatively oriented research, studies of sub-nationalism tend to consist of either the description of specific cases or of the lumping together of all challenges to the national state under the broad label of balkanisation, criminalisation and growing violence. Hyper-specific description and uncritical aggregation are equally counter-productive; neither can inform academic research on the ubiquitous problem or help advance concrete solutions. The book makes a case for the creation of broader comparative theory; the empirical case studies presented here are intended to provide the backbone of such a task.

Notes

1. The reference here is to the 'most similar systems' design. See Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune, *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry* (New York: John Wiley; 1970), pp. 32-34.

2. Edward Said's *Orientialism* (New York: Vintage Books; 1979) is a powerful indictment of the tendency to lump non-western societies in a manner that denies their specific histories and cultural roots.

3. Ernst Haas, personal communication (1994).

4. Ernst Haas expresses this ambiguity in his seminal article on nationalism: 'National identities are chosen, not genetically implanted, and they are subject to change. Yet none of this denies that nationalist convictions are sometimes held tenaciously...' (emphasis added). Ernst Haas, 'Nationalism: An Instrumental Social Construction', *Millenium: Journal of International Studies* vol 22(3), p. 505.

SOUTH ASIA
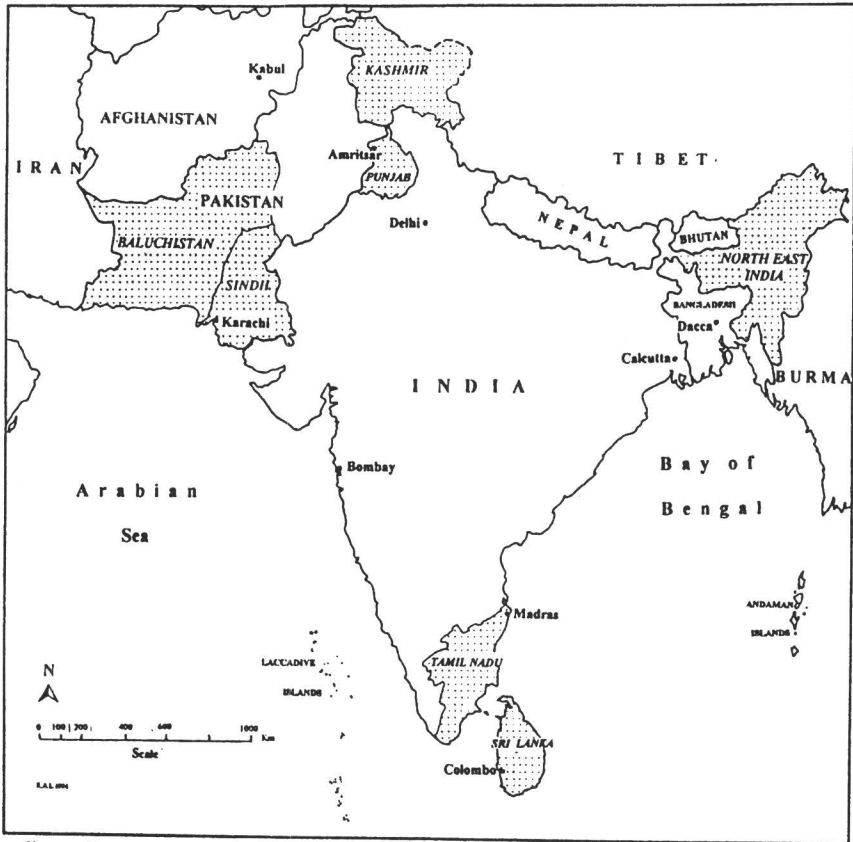
Names and boundary representation
are not necessarily authoritative

13