

Unit –I

Understanding South Asia as a region

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What constitutes South Asia?

MAP...



Countries



Afghanistan



Bangladesh



Bhutan



India



Maldives



Nepal



Pakistan



Sri Lanka

Study of South Asia...

The term 'South Asia' is indeed interesting for several reasons.

- ✓ First, it refers to a region where several religions, that may be identified with different civilizations, have been interacting, potentially challenging the idea that a region forms a cultural realm.
- ✓ Second is the ambivalent role of British colonization, which on the one hand laid the foundations (partly started by the Mughals) for a mental representation of the region, through its unification policies, and on the other hand, contributed to create divisions between distinct states and across common cultures at the time of independence.
- ✓ Third, the Indian Subcontinent, a more familiar term for 'South Asia' has been characterized by a tragic history that witnessed several partitions rendering notions of 'region' and 'regionalism' particularly sensitive.
- ✓ Fourth is the peculiar dominating position of a single country, India, and the specific nature of another one, Pakistan, which is established in the name of religion. This gives region and regionalism a unique flavour as compared to regional constructions in other parts of the world.

Common issues...

- Colonial rule
- Anti-colonial movements
- Nationalism
- Creation of Modern India, Pakistan and Bangladesh
- The post- colonial nation state
- Social movements
- Religious identity
- Involvement of United States in the region
- Economic development

The distinctiveness...

- The mighty Himalayas in the north and the vast Indian Ocean , the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal in the South, west and east respectively provide a natural insularity to the region , which is largely responsible for the linguistic, social and cultural distinctiveness of the subcontinent.
- The boundaries of the region are not as clear in the east and west , as they are in the north and the south.

The Diversity...

- South Asia stands for diversity in every sense and yet constitutes one geo-political space.
- China is an important player but it is not considered to be a part of the region.
- The various countries in South Asia do not have the same kind of political system.
- Despite many problems and limitations , a recent survey of the attitudes of the people showed that there is widespread support for democracy in all these countries.

Historical and Colonial Legacy

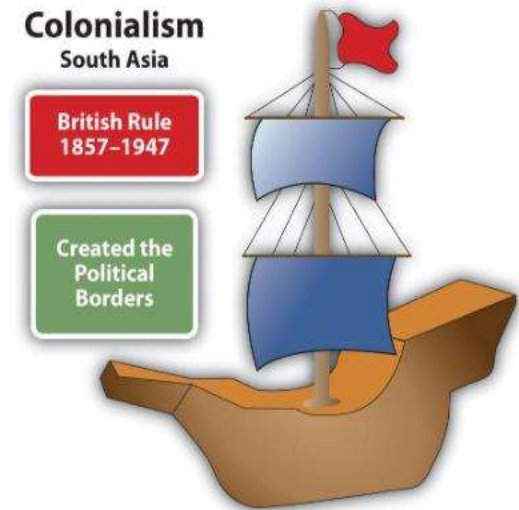
- 94 percent of what territorially constitutes South Asia today was governed by the British empire. So, this part derives its coherence partly to the colonial past.
- The reason behind grouping the states of South Asia into a single category was a result of the common cultural identity they shared.

Early Civilizations...

- South Asian civilization began with the **Indus valley civilization** (2500-1500 BC), which flourished in the region around the Indus river.
- Invasions by outsiders have the potential effect of bringing with them the influx of new ideas , concepts, and technology .
- The **Mauryan Empire** existed between 322 and 185 BCE and was one of the most extensive and powerful political and military empires in ancient India.
- Muslim dynasties or kingdoms , collectively referred as the **Delhi Sultanate**, ruled India between 1206 and 1526.
- The Islamic **Mughal Empire** ruled over much of northern and central India till the middle of the 19th century.
- After 1725, it began to decline rapidly because of a combination of factors, with **European colonialism** adding the finishing touch.

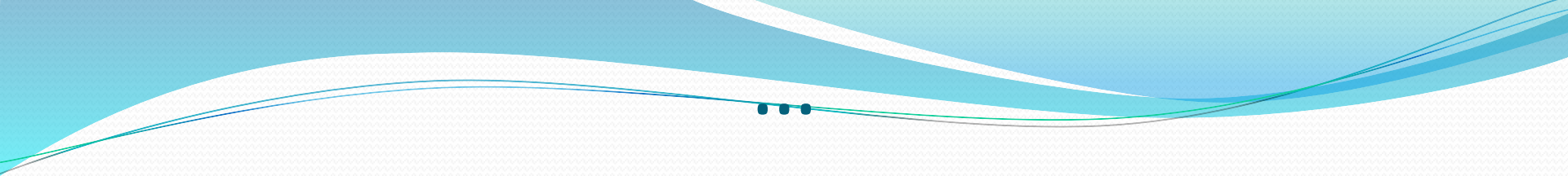
Colonialism in South Asia

The force of colonialism was felt around the world, including in South Asia. From the 16th century onwards, ships from colonial Europe began to arrive in South Asia to conduct trade. Later to take advantage of conflicts and bitter rivalries between kingdoms, European powers began to establish colonies. Britain controlled South Asia from 1857 to 1947.



British Colonial links with South Asian nations

- All South Asian nations have a direct link with British colonialism. From 1849 to 1947, the British Indian Empire – popularly called “India” – included what we now know as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In 1947, the departing British created two entities, India and Pakistan, by partitioning those areas of India under their direct control: Muslim-majority areas became Pakistan; the other areas stayed as India. The princely rulers of areas over which the British had indirect control could choose to join India or Pakistan. For geographic reasons, most rulers chose India. The Hindu ruler of Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir vacillated, creating an ongoing contest between India and Pakistan for possession of this entity. This is the called “Kashmir dispute”.

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- When Pakistan was created in 1947 it comprised two wings , East and West Pakistan , separated by India. In 1971 , ethnic Banglas/Bengalis, the dominant ethnic group in East Pakistan, with Indian army assistance , won independence for their new nation, Bangladesh. West Pakistan then reverted simply to being Pakistan.
 - In the Himalayas , the British had a Resident or Envoy in Nepal from 1819-1947. Bhutan was a protectorate from 1907 -1947 .These arrangements enabled the British to control both kingdoms' external relations.
 - In the south ,Sri Lanka was a British colony called Ceylon from 1815 to 1948 .The Maldives was a British protectorate from 1887 to 1965 .
 - Westwards , the British never directly ruled Afghanistan , although they did fight the Afghans in 1839-42 ,1878-80 and 1919. They also controlled Afghanistan's foreign policy from 1879-1919.

Conclusion...

When India and Pakistan joined the club of nuclear powers, South Asia suddenly became the focus of global attention. There are pending border and water sharing disputes between the states of the region. Besides , there are conflicts arising out of insurgency , ethnic strife and resource sharing. This makes the region very turbulent.

At the same time, it is believed that this region can develop and prosper if the states of the region cooperate with each other.



Thank you...