

# **CHAPTER EIGHT**

## **South Asia**

### **CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

This chapter introduces a region that is physically well defined, but politically and culturally complex. Despite this complexity, there are unifying features: the experience of village life and the influence of British colonialism, which as elsewhere, brought both benefits and exploitation.

The British were not the first to invade South Asia. The Aryans were the first recorded invaders; they are thought to have instituted the caste system. Although the power of the caste system is decreasing with time and modernization, for some it still affects nearly every aspect of life.

Overall, the status of women in South Asia is low. However, as it improves, it is likely that the educational attainment of children and the health and nutrition of families will also improve. These improvements will encourage lower fertility and enhance human well-being overall; this is critical because rapid population growth has resulted in crowded urban areas, homelessness, and an overall decline in quality of life.

Economic contrasts are startling in this region, as the privileged minority is often favored over the poor majority. Some efforts have been made to improve agriculture; however, many small farmers and poor people do not benefit. Agriculture continues to be neglected in favor of industry, and structural adjustment policies have resulted in wider disparities in income.

Since countries in the region achieved independence, democracy has expanded steadily; however, a great deal of tension and instability still exists in the region. This is caused in part by religious nationalism. There are also regional political conflicts: regional ethnic and religious minorities are actively resisting the authority of national governments.

Because of the number of conflicts in the region and the low standards of living, it is no surprise that environmental issues are given a low priority. Deforestation is a major issue in this region, and the question of water is critical. Not only are countries battling over access to water, but they are also concerned about water purity, as industry and cultural traditions threaten it.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

After reading the chapter and working through the study guide, students should:

- Know how climate (especially monsoons) affects agriculture, the economy, health, and daily life.
- Be able to identify the residual positive and negative influences of British colonization and subsequent independence.
- Know why population is growing rapidly among the very poor majority. Understand the potential consequences of such rapid growth. Know what can be done to curtail this growth and increase quality of life.
- Understand the historical importance of the caste system and how its role has changed over time.
- Know the overall status of women and its effect on quality of life. Know why

- purdah is desired by some and not by others. Know how freeing women from purdah will affect them, their families, and their communities.
- Understand why there are such disparities of wealth in the region. Know what is being done to counteract these inequalities.
  - Know why, although often praised as a bastion of democracy, South Asia still has many tensions and potential for conflict.
  - Know some of the environmental issues facing South Asia and why they are so difficult to resolve.

## KEY TERMS

The following terms are in **bold** in the textbook. Students are given space in the workbook to fill in the definitions for reference or quiz themselves for exam review. Definitions are found in the glossary of the textbook.

Adivasis  
 agroecology  
 Aryans  
 Brahmins  
 bride price  
 Buddhism  
 caste  
 Chipko movement  
 civil disobedience  
 communal conflict  
 dowry  
 green revolution  
 Harappa culture  
 Harijans  
 hearth  
 Hindi  
 Hinduism  
 Indian diaspora  
 Indus Valley civilization  
 Jainism  
*jati*  
 Kshatriyas  
 microcredit  
 monsoon  
 Mughals  
 Parsis  
 Partition  
 purdah  
 regional conflict  
 religious nationalism  
 Sikhism  
 social forestry movement  
 subcontinent  
 Sudras  
 Taliban  
 Vaishyas

## **SUGGESTED LECTURE OUTLINE AND THEMES**

The following is an extended lecture outline to aid you in developing lectures or locating the sections in the textbook that refer to important terms, ideas, phrases, and concepts you want to cover. The heads in this section correspond to those in the text.

### **I. THE GEOGRAPHIC SETTING**

#### **A. Physical Patterns**

##### Landforms

- The Himalayas are the dramatic result of the collision of tectonic plates.
- River valleys and coastal zones are densely occupied; the uplands are slightly less dense.

##### Climate

- From mid-June to the end of October, monsoon rains cause low clouds, swollen rivers, and flooded villages. This moisture is the result of cooler, moisture-laden air moving from the ocean over the land. The rains feed the rivers and wear down the Himalayas, carrying silt, which is deposited and redeposited by successive floods. Agriculture is adapted to the ever-changing landscape.
- By November, cool, dry air pushes warm, wet air back to the Indian Ocean.
- In April and May, the end of the dry season, temperatures in the shade are often above 100 degrees, the soil is parched, tornadoes wreak havoc, and hunger is widespread.

#### **B. Human Patterns over Time**

- There is a high level of cultural diversity in this region, making it one of the most contentious places in the world.

##### The Indus Valley Civilization

- The Indus Valley civilization, which appeared about 4500 years ago, is the foundation of modern South Asian religious beliefs, social organizations, linguistic diversity, and cultural traditions.
- Architecture and urban design were quite advanced, a large trade network and unique writing system existed, and much of the civilization's agricultural system survives today.

##### A Series of Invasions

- The first recorded invaders were the Aryans, who, along with the indigenous Harappa culture, are believed to have introduced the caste system.
- Islamic invaders, including the Mughals, left many legacies in architecture, art, and literature; there are more than 420 million Muslims now living in South Asia.

##### The Legacies of Colonial Rule

- The most recent influential invader was Great Britain. Even areas not directly ruled by the British felt their influence.

##### *Economic Influence*

- The British used the region's resources for their own benefit, often to the

detriment of South Asia.

- British industries often replaced South Asian industries, forcing citizens to find work as landless laborers; others migrated to emerging cities.
- It is argued that British influence encouraged population growth because people had more children for farm labor.
- Benefits of colonization included the expansion of trade and prosperity, rail transportation, English as a common language, and the introduction of democratic governments.

#### *Independence and Partition*

- Mohandas Gandhi led a peaceful resistance movement against British authority.
- In 1947, independence partitioned British India into Pakistan (predominantly Muslim) and India (predominantly Hindu). Fearing persecution, millions migrated across the new borders; families and communities were divided, and over a million people were killed.
- The legacy of Partition can be seen in repeated armed conflicts, strained relations, and an ongoing arms race between India and Pakistan.

#### *Since Independence*

- Democracy has expanded steadily, disadvantaged groups are less marginalized, agricultural advances have brought prosperity, and the information technology (IT) sector has grown.
- The region still suffers from poverty and low levels of economic development, and threats of violence from within are growing.

### **C. Population Patterns**

- South Asia is densely populated and still growing. As a result, migrants from the countryside flood cities.

#### Population Growth Factors in South Asia

- Rapid population growth impedes efforts to improve quality of life.
- Population continues to grow because a huge portion of the population is in the early reproductive years, and poor, rural, uneducated families see children as their only source of wealth. In addition, a premium on sons means that parents have more children to make sure they have sons.
- In the Indian state of Kerala, the population is better educated and health care is emphasized. Contraception is more widely used.

#### HIV-AIDS in South Asia

- HIV-AIDS is spreading because of low condom use, migration and mobility, the low status of women, and stigma, which discourages testing and treatment.
- However, the rate of infection is still comparatively low because of government involvement, education, and anti-HIV drugs that are developed, manufactured, and distributed in South Asia.

## **II. CURRENT GEOGRAPHIC ISSUES**

### **A. Sociocultural Issues**

#### Village Life

- Joypur, Bangladesh: This village is sleepy during the day as children play and women talk in the seclusion of their courtyards, but the village comes to life at dusk after the men return from the fields and settle in to talk.

- Ahraura, India: Women live in seclusion in extended family settings, while men tend to the fields.
- About 70 percent of South Asians live in villages such as these.

### City Life

- Cities are chaotic, crowded, violent, and overstressed; they are also full of creative, literary, multicultural, modern people.
- Beyond the main avenues, cities are actually thousands of compact villages.

### Language and Ethnicity

- In South Asia, everyone is a minority. Many of the distinct ethnic groups in this region have their own language – 18 languages are officially recognized in India alone. No Indian language is the first language of the majority.

### Religion

#### *Hinduism*

- Eight-hundred million of the world's 900 million practicing Hindus live in India.
- Hinduism is a complex belief system with a broad range of beliefs and practices; almost all Hindus, though, believe in reincarnation and participate in the caste system.

#### *Geographic Patterns in Religious Beliefs*

- Most Hindus live in India; the Ganga Plain is considered the hearth of Hinduism.
- Buddhism's origins are in northern India. Only 1 percent of the region's population is Buddhist, but they form the majority in Bhutan and Sri Lanka.
- Muslims form the majority in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Maldives; they are an important minority in India.
- Sikhs, whose beliefs were inspired by Hindu as well as Islamic ideas, live mainly in Punjab in northwest India. More Sikhs live in diaspora communities around the world than in India itself.
- Jains are found mainly in western India and in large urban centers. They are known for their educational achievements, nonviolence, and vegetarianism.
- Parsis, who are descended from Persian Zoroastrian migrants, are a highly visible minority in India's western cities.
- Christians are an important minority along the west coast of India. In some places in northeast India, more than half the descendants of the ancient aboriginal inhabitants are Christian.
- Small communities of Jews are found along the Malabar Coast and in major cities.
- Animism is practiced throughout South Asia, especially in central and northeastern India where the indigenous inhabitants have occupied the area so long they are considered aboriginal.

#### *The Hindu-Muslim Relationship*

- The various religious traditions in this region have deeply affected one another; the political and social dynamics between Hindus and Muslims are complex.
- Hindus and Muslims may share social space in some places; however, in Indian villages, Hindus have been known to regard Muslims as members of a low-status caste. This "us"-and-"them" attitude can disintegrate into communal conflict.

## Caste

- The caste system is primarily associated with Hindu India. Individual are born into a given subcaste (*jati*).
- In modern economies, *jatis* are more symbolic than real, yet members do tend to segregate residentially and dress and speak alike.
- Familiarity and cohesion within *jatis* and attachment to place help to explain the persistence of the caste system. Class and caste are less connected than previously, and much discrimination has been eradicated.
- Mohandas Gandhi began what became an official effort to eliminate the caste system. After independence, India instituted an affirmative action program, reserving a portion of government jobs, higher education spaces, and parliamentary seats for lower castes.

## Geographic and Social Patterns in the Status of Women

- The overall status of women in South Asia is notably lower than that of men; however, their relative well-being varies across region, caste, religion, class, and age.

### *Culturally Enforced Gender Inequity*

- Women in Afghanistan have the most difficult lives in the region because of the Taliban.
- The observance of purdah varies by location, religion, and caste. It is sometimes a mark of prestige because the ability to seclude women signifies wealth.
- A dowry is common in arranged marriages. The bride goes to live in her husband's family compound, where her power increases with motherhood.

### *Bride Burning and Female Infanticide*

- Bride burning, or dowry killing, enables the widower to marry again and collect another dowry.
- Until the last several decades, in the lower castes a groom paid a bride price to the bride's family.
- Dowries originated as an exchange of wealth among high-caste families, but the dowry is now a symbol of status and has economically crippled poor families who must pay to get their daughters married. The practice is officially banned by the Indian government.
- Female infanticide sometimes occurs in poor families because of the high economic cost of daughters.

### *Education, Earning Power, and the Status of Women*

- Freeing women from seclusion encourages lower fertility and allows women to improve the health, nutrition, and educational attainment of themselves and their children.

### *Gender Equality at the Village Level and Beyond*

- A strong activist movement in India has led to more enthusiastic enforcement of constitutional protections. In the 1980s, *panchayati raj* (village governing councils) were introduced to encourage gender equality in village life: 30 percent of the seats are reserved for women.
- In Indian cities, the number of professional women is growing.
- India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan have all had women heads of state.

## **B. Economic Issues**

- South Asia is a region of startling economic contrasts that result from the propensity of South Asian economies to favor the interests of a privileged

minority over those of the poor majority.

#### Agriculture and the Green Revolution

- Until recently, agriculture remained mainly based on traditional small-scale systems; however, these subsistence systems did not produce enough for the needs of growing cities.
- In the late 1960s, a green revolution boosted grain harvests. Some countries even began exporting.
- However, those most in need were not the ones who prospered. Only farmers who can afford the new technologies are benefiting; others are often forced off their land.
- Environmental damage reduced the utility of many crops for the rural poor; however, agroecology is a potential remedy.

#### Industry over Agriculture: A Vision of Self-Sufficiency

- Agriculture was neglected after independence because it was thought incapable of supplying the growth and innovation poor countries needed.
- South Asian leaders took control of industries they believed would foster a strong economy. These policies were ill-suited for countries that had been primarily agricultural.

#### Economic Reform: Achieving Global Competitiveness

- SAPs increased productivity in the export and industry sectors, but are producing a wider disparity in income.
- The service economy has been expanding. Although only 20 to 40 percent of the region's workforce is in services, this sector accounts for over 50 percent of GDP. The service sector is seen as having the best chance of competing in the global economy.
- A number of pharmaceutical and high tech American jobs are being outsourced to India, which has a large, college-educated, low-cost workforce.

#### *Differing Views of Globalization*

- Some desire global connection to the marketplace because it is expected to increase the number of high-paying jobs, raise standards of living, and fuel local production.
- Others fear globalization because it may negatively affect the environment or cause a breakdown of traditional social and economic relationships.

#### *Economic Development and Poverty Rates*

- Despite all the policy efforts that have reduced poverty over the years, population growth has outstripped economic growth.

#### *Innovative Help for the Poor*

- Microcredit makes small loans available to poor entrepreneurs who have little collateral. Such lending seems risky, but risk is overcome by arranging potential borrowers into groups that are collectively responsible for paying back the loans.
- The Grameen Bank has been quite successful, lending nearly \$6 billion to more than 6 million people.

### **C. Political Issues**

- Democracy has resolved many conflicts and nurtured public debate; however, there is tension in the region because of corruption, demagogic leadership, and violence.

### Caste and Democracy

- Caste has been a defining yet contradictory factor in local and national politics; its role seems to be increasing, creating and maintaining tension.

### Religious Nationalism

- Many people frustrated by government inefficiency and corruption are joining religious nationalist movements.
- Nationalist movements have brought on conflicts that threaten overall peace.

### Regional Political Conflicts

- The most intense armed conflicts occur over national boundaries or minority resistance to the authority of a national government. These conflicts have a high potential to destabilize the region.

#### *Conflict in Punjab*

- The Sikh community is longing for greater political autonomy and recognition of its distinct religious and ethnic identity.
- Tensions between Sikhs and Hindus continue over access to water and land and the control of religious sites.

#### *Conflict in Kashmir*

- At Partition, both India and Pakistan claimed Kashmir, which had a heavily Muslim population and a Hindu maharaja.
- The maharaja elected to join India; a brief war and a cease-fire line followed. India resisted a popular vote, and one was never held.
- India and Pakistan are technically still waiting for a UN decision on where the final border between the two countries will be, but Pakistan has effective control.
- Many Kashmiris want independence from both India and Pakistan
- Civil war has erupted repeatedly and sporadic fighting continues along the boundary line. Both India and Pakistan have nuclear weapons.

### War and Reconstruction in Afghanistan

- The Soviets, with the support of some urban elites, invaded Afghanistan in 1979; they were finally defeated 10 years later by mujahedeen, led by conservative religious leaders, who were threatened by the elites' industrial and democratic reforms.
- The Taliban emerged from the mujahedeen; they enforced shari'a and attempted to rid their society of non-Muslim influences. By 2001, they controlled 95 percent of the country.
- After the events of September 11, 2001, in an attempt to capture Osama bin Laden, the United States assisted the Northern Alliance resistance movement in overthrowing the Taliban.
- Today Afghanistan faces the need for postwar reconstruction and the challenges of diversity, disparity, and the continuing influence of the Taliban. The country held a national election in 2004, making a step toward a democratic society.

### The Future of Democracy

- Signs that democracy is on the rise in India include the emergence of a competitive multiparty system, voters who are less tolerant of corruption and violence, more peaceful and fairer elections, and more opportunities for disadvantaged groups.

- Elsewhere in the region, some countries have held regular democratic elections since independence, though not without difficulties.

#### **D. Environmental Issues**

##### Deforestation

- Deforestation is not new to South Asia, as early agricultural expansion, the expansion of new Hindu kingdoms after the Aryan invasion, and developments during British colonialism all contributed to deforestation.
- In India, women took a dramatic step to protect environmental quality – they became, literally, “tree huggers.” Their actions led to the “Chipko movement,” which has slowed deforestation and increased ecological awareness.
- Some argue that the management of forests should be turned over to local communities. However, local populations themselves carry out much of the deforestation, for firewood and animal fodder.

##### Water Issues

###### *Conflicts over Ganga River Water*

- India and Bangladesh are battling over access to the Ganga River. Because India has diverted 60 percent of it, less water is available for irrigation in Bangladesh, salt water is penetrating inland, and the coastline is changing.
- A solution is difficult to achieve because the affected population is rural, poor, and located in a different region from the politicians.

###### *Water Purity of the Ganga River*

- Millions of people each year are cremated and have their ashes scattered over the Ganga River. The Indian government is making successful efforts to reduce levels of unburned human remains in the river.
- Of greater concern is the industrial waste and sewage dumped into the river. Unconventional methods use India’s heat and monsoons to help clean the water.

##### Industrial Pollution

- Emissions from vehicles and industry are so bad that breathing Delhi’s air is equivalent to smoking 20 cigarettes a day.
- Acid rain is destroying farmland and monuments, including the Taj Mahal.
- The Indian government, however, has launched an ambitious campaign to clean up poorly regulated factories.

#### **E. Measures of Human Well-Being**

- GDP is very low; however, South Asians practice frugality and resourcefulness in order to survive, thus achieving a somewhat higher standard of living than GDP figures indicate.
- HDI rankings have advanced to the lowest ranks in the medium range, which is an accomplishment because of the huge population involved. However, the number of poor people is still staggering and it is likely that the gap between rich and poor will grow.

### **CLASS DEBATE AND DISCUSSION TOPICS**

Debate and discussion encourage students to think about the issues addressed in the textbook. These topics will stimulate in-class discussion to encourage thinking about the textbook material and current events as students are asked to refute or

defend arguments.

### **1. Colonization and independence**

Colonization had many long-term effects in South Asia. Although many were eager for independence, it often had unexpected and even negative consequences.

- What were some of the benefits and drawbacks of British colonization in this region?
- What are some of the benefits and drawbacks of independence from colonial rule?
- In which situation do you think this region would be most prosperous today: 1) if it had always been independent; 2) if it were still a British colony; or 3) in its current state – independent after years of colonization, yet facing internal instability? Defend your answer with specific examples.
- Do you think it was the right decision for the British to partition India into India and Pakistan? Defend your answer.

### **2. Should children work?**

For thousands of years in this region, children have learned weaving and have worked in shops. Working is often a positive experience because children learn various skills and become part of a family “production unit.” Child labor can have significant psychological and economic benefits; however, abuses in factories must be eliminated and children now need to attend school to learn skills that will serve them in contemporary society. See Box 8.2 “Should Children Work?”:

- Is the use of child labor in South Asia a problem? Can you accept different cultural views of childhood?
- When you buy goods made by children, are you supporting family values or greedy factory owners and middlemen? How would you know?
- To what extent is child labor an issue of poverty, exploitation, or cultural difference?

### **3. The future of Kashmir**

The conflict between Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir is more than 60 years old. Civil war has erupted repeatedly and as many as 100,000 have been killed in fighting along the boundary line.

- India and Pakistan are technically still waiting for a UN decision on where the final border should be. How do you think the boundary should be decided? Where should it be drawn?
- Should Kashmir be independent? What challenges would it face?
- Both India and Pakistan have nuclear weapons. Some argue that this dispute is the one most likely to result in the use of nuclear weapons. How do you think this situation will be resolved? Should other countries, such as the United States and Britain, step in to control this potentially global catastrophe?

### **4. Deforestation and forest conservation**

Deforestation is not new to the region, but it is becoming especially problematic because the demand for forest products and cleared land continues to increase.

- Consider this issue from both the rural and urban perspective. Who is causing the deforestation? Is it rural or urban populations or both?
- What groups are in charge of conservation efforts in the region? What groups should be? Why does each of these various groups want to be involved in conservation efforts?

- What difficulties would be faced if all these groups shared control of conservation policies?
- Is the Chipko Movement enough to stop deforestation in India? If not, what else is needed?
- Investigate how your own consumption contributes to this deforestation. How can we all become better consumers?

### **5. The battle over water rights**

India and Bangladesh are battling over access to the Ganga River. India is diverting much of the water, depriving Bangladesh of normal flow.

- What are the positive and negative effects of India's water diversion on both India and Bangladesh?
- Which country has the primary right to the water? Why?
- How can this conflict be resolved? Why is it so difficult to come up with a solution? Should there be international intervention?

## **STUDENT ASSIGNMENTS AND EXERCISES**

In addition to the Critical Thinking Exercises section in the student workbook, below are several suggestions of exercises that can be assigned to students to be turned in to the instructor.

### **1. Conflicting images of life in South Asia**

Any statement made about a region as politically and culturally complex as South Asia can be countered with an opposite statement that is equally true. There are massive cities – the rural population is huge; many people have no phones – information technology is flourishing; there is much religious conflict – the region is a center for religious enlightenment; the status of women is generally low – 50 percent of the countries in this region have had women heads of state.

- Choose such a contradiction and research both aspects.
- Write an essay that summarizes both aspects of the contradiction.
- Predict which will prevail in the future of this region. Defend your prediction.

### **2. Population growth and patterns**

Although South Asia has experienced some success in reducing birth rates, the population continues to boom.

- Find India's current population pyramid summary (2000) and the predicted pyramids for 2025 and 2050 at the U.S. Census Bureau's Web site: [www.census.gov/ipc/www/idb](http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idb). Next, run the "dynamic" output to see the population structure of India as it grows over time.
- Write an essay describing the differences you observed from 2000 to 2025 to 2050. What was your reaction as you watched the population estimates grow over the 50-year span? What observations can you make about age and gender structures over time?
- What are some of the reasons experts have predicted this trend?
- Why is the population still booming despite moderately successful efforts to reduce births?

### **3. Arranged marriages and the caste system**

A majority of marriages in India are arranged, and caste plays a role. Even for many who have migrated from India, arranged marriages are still very important. To a

Westerner, arranged marriages can sound similar to a business proposition; however, many Westerners choose their partners on the basis of factors that could also be viewed as business principles.

- Thanks to current information technology, there are numerous Indian matrimonial sites on the Internet. Perform a search with the search engine of your choice for “Indian matrimonial and dating.”
  - Really explore several of these sites. Some may not be as helpful, as you may have to “register” as a user – you should skip these and look to the many other existing Web sites.
  - Make a list of the different criteria and options you can enter to find a mate on the various Indian sites. Which of these criteria do you think are different from ones you would typically find in the “personals” of a typical Western newspaper?
- Next, find a “personals” page from a Western newspaper or magazine. Make a list of some of the criteria used by Westerners that could resemble caste characteristics.
- Are the two types of ads very different? Your answer will depend on the Web sites you examined, so be sure to also explain your answer.

#### **4. Agricultural development and globalization**

South Asian economies tend to favor the privileged minority, leaving the poor majority behind. Industrial development was favored over agricultural development even though agriculture employs a majority of the population. Even the green revolution has tended to favor higher-income farmers. SAPs are also benefiting mainly the middle class, while poverty is increasing.

- What kinds of strategies or programs would you recommend to improve agriculture in the region? Consider local versus international, innovative versus traditional, community-based versus government development. What would be the resulting impacts on village life?
- How do you think increased economic globalization will affect your recommendations? How can globalization be used to the advantage of agriculture and village life?

#### **5. Regional political conflicts and the future of democracy**

Many political and even armed conflicts, based on ethnic or religious differences, have the potential to destabilize this region. However, democracy appears to be on the rise in South Asia. Attention is being given to nurturing a competitive multiparty arena, reducing corruption and violence, and giving more opportunities to disadvantaged groups.

- Choose a subregion or country in South Asia with an ongoing regional political conflict.
- Find at least three different reports, speeches, commentaries, or articles on this conflict, including information on organizations, leaders, and other countries that are involved. Be sure to use at least one source from the country you are researching. Write an essay based on this research that addresses these aspects of the situation:
  - The nature of the conflict today (e.g., threat of war, reaching peace, ongoing for decades, etc.)
  - The nature of the political arena (e.g., multiple political parties, one dominant ruling group, prevalent political corruption, etc.)
  - Religious nationalism (Is this a concern? If so, what are the reasons for its rise?)

- Prospects for the future: considering the country's history (e.g., invasions, colonialism, conflict, etc.), it is likely that this country will be able to develop or maintain a peaceful democracy? What factors favor this transition? What is holding it back?