
UNIT 3: DIVERSITY AND PLURALISM IN SOUTH ASIA

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

As a distinct regional entity situated in the southern part of Asian continent, South Asia is characterised by immeasurable diversity and plurality underpinning the life of its inhabitants. After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the concepts of diversity and pluralism
- Discern the patterns of diversity and pluralism in South Asia
- Explain the causes and consequences of diversity and pluralism in the region
- Discuss the working of diversity and pluralism in different countries

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Diversity is the law of nature whose civilisational manifestation is most visible in the patterns of plurality across the globe. However, among the various continents and subcontinents on this planet, the range and scale of diversity and pluralism in South Asia is unmistakably astounding. This diversity is rooted not only in the vast size and spatial distinctiveness of different constituent units of the subcontinent but also in the civilisational march that underpinned the socio-cultural evolutionary framework of this region. Moreover, the close interaction of the region with other parts of the world, particularly Central, West and East Asia, apart from the European countries also helped the inrise, growth and consolidation of diversity

and plurality in South Asia. At the same time, the rich and varying natural endowment, and fertile creative and philosophical faculties of its inhabitants irresistibly resulted into development of a large number of languages, life styles, literary creations, cultural heritage, crafts and artefacts, beliefs, rituals and practices. South Asia, thus, presents a mosaic underlined by social, economic, political, spatial, cultural, racial, religious, lineage, climatic, culinary, customary, and linguistic legacies and preferences of the people.

3.2 UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY AND PLURALISM

Before we move on to discuss the range and scale of diversity and pluralism in South Asia, it seems necessary to understand the two concepts and their interrelationships. Literally, diversity means variety. Taking an expansive view of the concept, the idea of diversity may also be extended to connotations implied by difference and dissimilarity. In other words, conceptually, diversity stands for the variety, differences or dissimilarities prevailing in a particular context of human or physical existence. For instance, while the diverse existence of human beings in a specific socio-political context is denoted by the terms like multiculturalism, in the physical realm the best way to describe the diverse co-existence of innumerable species is to fall back on the idea of bio-diversity. Nonetheless, outlining the dimensions of diversity in modern organisations, Litvin in sight fully demarcates diversity with six fundamental attribute: age, ethnicity, gender, physical aspects/abilities, race and sexual orientation. In their functional manifestation, the primary attributes are expressed in terms of eight fluid or secondary characteristics in terms of education, geographic location, income, marital status, military experience, parental status, religious beliefs and work experience. (Litvin: 1997) Needless to mention, these attributes of diversity are highly variable in terms of both degrees of visibility and uses by different actors.

Closely related but not identical to the idea of diversity is the concept of pluralism. Simply put, pluralism stands for existence of many entities within a given sphere. These entities may be diverse or not. But fundamental to the idea of pluralism is the existence of more than one or many actors in a particular arena. Thus what constitutes the core of the idea of pluralism is that whatever stands as a unit of analysis like family, group, community, organisation, society, country, and so on, is composed of more than one element. Equally important is that these elements stand in such a relationship with each other that their existence is external and autonomous. (Kaul and Salvatore: 2020) Further, the entirety of the organisation can never be eclipsed by any one of them. Clearly, pluralism is characterised by co-existence of different entities with one another in a way that nothing includes everything. In the democratic discourse, pluralism even discounts any sort of domination by one entity over another; and assumes equality among pluralities. In nutshell, thus, two characteristic features of pluralism are: the existence of many actors or entities within an organisation and; secondly, autonomous space for each of the entities You may consider the third assumption as well viz. equality of all the actors or entities. The actual functioning of pluralism in different parts of the world, however, differs considerably.

At both abstract and applied levels, diversity and pluralism may exist side by side. While much of diversity is usually ordained by nature, pluralism quite often becomes a **deliberate construct** on the part of civilised and democratic societies to offer autonomous functional space to different entities or the stakeholders. Accordingly, to work as a lasting socio-political arrangement, diversity is required to be seamlessly weaved into a framework of pluralism. In other words, proper and comprehensive accommodation of diversity becomes a sort of precondition for united and peaceful collective socio-political life in the countries like India. Let it be emphasised here: pluralism remains a **deliberate choice** that consolidates the civic culture in societies that value the norms of democracy, federalism, multiculturalism, liberty and free will of their people. This is precisely the reason that though South Asia is characterised by considerable diversity, pluralism has not been found to be universal value underpinning the socio-cultural and politico-administrative systems of different countries of the region. So many a time, political efforts are made to deny the existence of diversity in the name of primacy of religion, language and ethnicity.

3.3 PATTERNS OF DIVERSITY AND PLURALISM

Technically, South Asia is a geographical entity well defined by natural formations constructing its boundaries with rest of the world. Consisting of eight countries with significant spatial variations, the region is delimited by the Indian Ocean in the south and mighty mountain ranges of Himalayas, Karakoram and Pamir on the north. The scale of the geographical differences in the region can simply be understood from the fact that while it has totally landlocked countries like Afghanistan, Nepal and Bhutan, it too has island nations like Sri Lanka and Maldives that do not share land boundary with any other country. Similarly, the ethno-cultural variations in the region are equally enormous with majority, if not all, of the countries presenting the example of multicultural society. The most interesting fact, with regard to the diverse nature of many of these societies, is their inability to manage their diversities within democratic and multicultural frameworks. Resultantly, instead of securing a peaceful and contended life for their people, a number of these countries are plagued by continuing violence, insurgency, political instability, rivalry, and persistence of low levels of social and economic development. So, what we set on now is to fathom the patterns of diversity and pluralism with passing references to their causes and consequences.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer

ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit

1) What do you understand by diversity and pluralism?

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2) Discuss the patterns of diversity and pluralism in South Asia.

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3.3.1 Diversity of Space

Despite constituted majorly by the Indian plate, spatial diversity in the region is striking. As the largest country in the region, India stands out as a distinct space where all kinds of geomorphologic formations are manifested in one part of the country or the other. For instance, the geographical diversity of the country consists of the majestic Himalayas in the north, vast north Indian plains watered by a dense network of powerful rivers, Deccan plateau with its senile topography, Thar desert in the western Rajasthan, Rann of Kutch in Gujarat, and long coastal areas in east, west as well as south formed by Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean respectively. The Andaman and Nicobar, and Lakshdweep Islands further add to the spatial diversity of India. (Bradnock: 2012) In addition to India, Pakistan has also a lot of spatial diversity with many kinds of landforms and geographical formations dotting different parts of the country. Much spatial diversity is also visible in Afghanistan and Bangladesh though not of the scale and dimension of India and Pakistan. While the two have distinct geographical features dominating much of their territories, subtle differences in topography and climate in certain pockets bear testimony to their spatial diversity.

In contradistinction to the enormous geomorphologic diversities prevalent in countries like India and Pakistan, South Asia is also composed of countries with their own unique spatial standing which is quite uniform and monotonous at times. For instance, when one looks at the territorial characteristics of Nepal and Bhutan, one finds a large extent of uniform topography in their mainland. In other words, both Nepal and Bhutan are located in the main stretches of Himalayas ordaining a unique mountainous geomorphologic formation in the main. While Nepal does have large tract of plain land in its Terai region bordering India, Bhutan is primarily a hilly and mountainous country with very less, if any, variation in its geography. The two countries are completely landlocked having access to open seas through their neighbours mainly India only. On the contrary, both Sri Lanka and Maldives are island nations situated in the Indian Ocean. The two countries are not only having isolation in their geographical existence, the topographical diversity within their landmass is bare minimum. While Sri Lanka does have minor differences in its space in northern areas, Maldives is having, by and large, a uniform geographical formation in its small landmass.

The spatial diversity of South Asia is explained through the theory of plate tectonics. According to this theory, the region was initially part of the supercontinent Gondwana. In the course of time, this continent's collision with the Eurasian plate led to the creation of the mammoth Indian-Australian plate whose northern part is distinctively known as the Indian plate providing geological foundation to the subcontinent of South Asia. The fundamental geophysical formations of the region came into being quite late in comparison to other parts of the world. It is therefore not surprising that Himalayas are called the most youthful mountains of all. The long drawn geophysical processes have imparted the region one of the

most significant diversity in terms of space when we look at the spatial characteristics of other continents across the globe. Notwithstanding the massive geographical variations, much of South Asia was historically integrated around one political entity called India with considerable cultural exchanges among the different parts of the region. The existence of all kinds of geophysical formations makes the region self-dependent in most of the natural endowments and bounties of nature barring a very few like fossils fuels. However, the rapid rate of global warming poses an existential threat before certain countries like Maldives apart from causing other dislocations like massive floods and droughts in others.

3.3.2 Plurality of Culture and Religion

If South Asia can be geographically so diverse, how can the cultural and religious plurality remain far behind. So, it is a matter of celebration for the inhabitants of the subcontinent that it also happens to be culturally and religiously the most diverse and plural areas in the world. Illustratively bringing out the range and scale of cultural diversity in India, the cornerstone of the region, one of the pioneering federalists, Rasheeduddin Khan writes prophetically, 'India is a classic plural society and a massive federal polity. That indeed is its most distinctive characteristic, a hall-mark of its unique personality. India's plural-federal character is apparent in practically every major aspect of its collective life, be it social systems, economic formations, cultural-patterns; or language-dialect groupings, religious communities, castes, sub-castes and sects...and in rich tapestry of folklore, folk dance, music, cuisine, crafts and artefacts of life.' (Khan: 1995) Interestingly what Khan writes about India is true for many other, if not all, countries of the region, albeit in varying degrees. This cultural plurality gives the region a fascinating colourful look which is not so much visible in many other parts of the world. Thus right from Afghanistan in the northwest to the island of Maldives in the extreme south, South Asia's cultural diversity presents a medley which becomes a matter of joy and enjoyment not only for its own people but also for rest of the world.

The cultural plurality of the region is closely followed by the immense religious diversity whose perfect example is manifested by India. While the subcontinent has been the place of origin of a number of important religions of the world such as Hindism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism, the followers of Christianity and Islam are also in sizeable number. In other words, the subcontinent is home to not just the largest population of Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains, the followers of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam are also in huge numbers in the region. (Pechilis and Raj: 2012) Though overall religious diversity remains intact in the region, the same does not hold true regarding the internal situation in many of the countries. Sadly, the religious plurality existing in certain countries for long has been tried to be erased to establish exclusive domain for a particular religion only. Illustratively, while countries like India, Nepal and Sri Lanka continue to be religiously plural societies with ample opportunities for followers of different religions to follow and practice their faiths, the same has not remained the situation in countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. In these countries, the extremist Islamists have succeeded to a large extent in driving out or killing the believers in religions other than Islam in order to make their countries

exclusive preserve of Islam. Unsurprisingly, Bhutan and Maldives continue to be predominantly Buddhist and Islamic countries respectively.

The cultural and religious plurality of the region owes its origin to the close interactions of South Asia with the Central, West, East and Southeast Asia, in addition to the European colonizers. As pointed out, since the region has been the birthplace of the religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism, naturally, the followers of all these religions excepting Buddhism predominantly inhabit the region particularly India and Nepal. Predominance of Buddhism in Bhutan and Sri Lanka is also a function of historical processes during which Buddhist preachers from India established ties with these places and made Buddhism the popular faith in these countries. But the arrival of Islam in the subcontinent was facilitated by coming of people from Central and West Asia in the form of traders or victors who made the region their home and deep rooted Islam as an important religion. Given the proximity of northwestern part of the subcontinent to the Central and West Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan became predominantly Muslim countries, along with Bangladesh and Maldives where Islam travelled in the course of time. Christianity found its entry and foothold in the subcontinent mainly with the arrival of Europeans as traders and later colonizers and the massive proselytizing activities carried out by the Christian missionaries during the colonial period.

3.3.3 Linguistic Diversity

South Asia is also the hub of enormous linguistic diversity unlike many other continents and peoples. Like other diversities, India happens to be the country with the most diverse language base in the region. Though majority of Indians has Hindi as their mother tongue with varying dialects rooted in Hindi and Sanskrit, a large part of its population speaks languages other than Hindi. In this context, what is most amazing is the fact that India is home to languages like Sanskrit and Tamil that are considered as part of the earliest linguistic inventions in the world. It is therefore not surprising that almost all parts of the country are witness to its rich linguistic diversity. So, while northern and central parts of India are home to Hindi speakers with some pockets of Punjabi and other regional dialects, its southern states have linguistic distinction in terms of Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam. Likewise, if western states speak languages like Marathi, Konkani and Gujarati, the inhabitants of eastern part are mainly speakers of Bengali, Assamese, Nepali and Odiya languages. (Subbarao: 2012) Remarkably, most, if not all, of these languages are extremely rich in having not only their own scripts but also a body of literature. The 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution lists as many as 22 official languages.

In addition to India, many other South Asia countries are also the theatre of linguistic plurality though not of the scale found in India. For instance, Pakistan's linguistic diversity is quite noticeable with important languages like Punjabi, Urdu, Pashto, Sindhi and Saraiki having large number of speakers. But for the rest of the countries, their linguistic diversity is confined to just two to three languages spoken by their people and recognised by their governments. That way, Sri Lanka recognizes Sinhala and Tamil as its official languages which are also spoken by a substantial

number of its population. In Afghanistan, Pashto and Dari are the important languages spoken by majority of its population. Though Nepal also has a number of languages having good speakership, Nepali is recognised as the official language and is spoken and understood by majority of its people. The official language of Bhutan is Dzongkha having its native tradition of literary creation though some other languages also exist in the country. In Maldives, while Dhivehi is the official language and is spoken by a large number of its population, Arabic and English are also used by some people. Bangladesh is the only monolingual country of South Asia where more than 98% of its population speaks Bengali.

The linguistic plurality of South Asia owes its genesis to the distinct civilisational traditions from which the people draw their lineage and continue to abide by that. Thus the major linguistic traditions from which various languages of South Asia arose include Indo-Aryan, Indo-European, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, Sino-Tibetan, Austronesian, Indo-Iranian, Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Arabic, among others. The linguistic diversity has obviously helped in the creation of a rich treasure trove of literary traditions in these countries. However, language has also been the basis for much of political turmoil and reshaping of political boundaries in the region. While India's policy of managing its linguistic plurality has been the creation of linguistically homogenous states and constitutional recognition to certain other languages, the other countries which could not give due recognition to linguistically diverse populations faced political upheavals. For instance, long drawn civil war in Sri Lanka was primarily rooted in its linguistic plurality. So much so that Pakistan's inability to manage its language problem eventually led to its partition and creation of Bangladesh as an independent nation in 1971.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer

ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit

1) What do you understand by diversity of space?

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2) Describe the cultural and linguistic plurality in South Asia.

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3.3.4 Ethnic Landscape

Ethnic diversity in South Asia is as rich as other aspects of heterogeneous social and cultural life in different countries of the subcontinent. Logically, therefore, none of the societies in the region could claim ethnic homogeneity given the numerous ethnic stocks inhabiting them. Quite evidently, the ethnic configuration in India is most bewildering in comparison to other South Asian countries. Most of these ethnic groups have their own distinct languages as

well which makes them separate ethno-linguistic stocks and enable them to assert autonomous existence within their national frameworks. The major ethnic groups in India consist of Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman and Turko-Iranic whose localised articulation in innumerable subgroups is astonishing (Minaham: 2002). While the majority of population belonging to Indo-Aryan stock lives in the northern and western mainland, Dravidian populace inhabits mainly the southern parts of the country. Further, the people with Turko-Iranic ethnicities are mainly Muslims living in different parts of India whereas the Tibeto-Burman ethnic groups are primarily concentrated in the different states of northeastern India with numerous subdivisions even among themselves.

Despite belonging to the Turko-Iranic lineages, the ethnic diversity of Pakistan gets reflected in the major ethnic groups such as Punjabis, Pashtuns, Sindhis, Saraikis, Muhajirs, Balochs, Paharis and Hindkowanis, among others. The ethnic configuration of Afghanistan is more resembling to the central Asian ethnic groups prominent among which are Pashtuns, Hazaras, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Aimaqs, Turkmenis, Nuristanis, Pashayis, Durrani, Kochis, Pamiris, Ghiljis and Gurjars. The major ethnic configuration of Bangladesh is drawn from the neighbouring countries like India and Myanmar. The ethnicity of the country consists of Bengalis, Chakmas, Marmas, Santal, Garo, Khasi, Khumi, Rohingya, Tripuris, Kukis, Jumas and Pankhos. Similarly, the pattern of ethnicity in Sri Lanka also is a combination of its native as well as groups from neighbouring countries. Accordingly, the major ethnicities of Sri Lanka relate to Sinhalese, Tamils, Burgher, Veddas, Malayas, Chettis, Bharathas, and Pathans. Such massive ethnic diversity unquestionably imparts a distinct character to the social character of these countries which can be nothing but plural. The other countries of the subcontinent are, however, ethnically not as diverse as their neighbours. For instance, ethnic stock of Nepal consists mainly of Newars, Magars, Gurungs, Tharus, Sherpas and Madheshis. Likewise, in Bhutan, the people belong majorly to just three ethnic groups, namely, Bhutia, also known as Ngalop, Nepalese and the Sharchop. Further, the ethnic texture of the people of Maldives is also confined to just three overlapping stocks of Sinhalese, Dravidians and Arabs.

The ethnic diversity in the subcontinent has over the years served varying purposes. Its singular contribution in making the South Asian societies plural and multicultural has unmistakably added substance to the democratic credentials of some of them. However, at the same time, it has also acted as a major source of inter-community conflict which has at times led to division of a country as can be seen in the case of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Ethnic conflicts in the countries like Sri Lanka and Afghanistan have also resulted into long-drawn civil wars causing irreparable losses to them. So, accommodation of ethnic diversity through differential territorial and cultural autonomy arrangements has been key to the peaceful and united existence of majority of the countries in the region.

3.3.5 Social and Economic Variations

The massive social, economic and regional diversities in the region are also quite complex and disquieting. Age old customs, traditions and social

configurations had apparently produced kinds of social order which are underpinned by graded inequality, segmentation and marginalised positions of certain sections of society like women. These social orders, by and large, continue to subsist even in present times as well despite constitutional mandate and concerted efforts by governments and civil society organizations for modernisation and secularization of the social structures. For instance, caste continues to be an underlying feature of South Asian societies despite its intolerable function of creating graded inequality amongst people. While it basically is considered as a signifier of Hindu social order, its widespread prevalence in the Muslim societies of Pakistan and Bangladesh are also noticeable. Further, the unequal status of women and tribal populations is a common characteristic of almost all the societies of the subcontinent.

The level of economic development and income distribution in different countries of South Asia also varies a lot. This variation can be gauged from their standing in the Human Development Index (HDI) released by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) for 2020. In this global benchmark of human development, while Sri Lanka retains the top position in the region by standing at rank 73 due to its stellar performance in the spheres like education and health, Afghanistan has been placed at the bottom in the region at position 169 ostensibly due to the devastations caused by civil strife and consequent terrorism. The HDI ranking for other countries include Maldives (95), Bhutan (129), India (131), Bangladesh (133), Nepal (142) and Pakistan (154) (UN: 2021). Majority of these countries depend on agriculture, plantation and tourism for employment and income generation for their people. Besides, the pattern of regional development in the South Asian countries is also highly lop-sided putting considerable strains on their unity and integrity as nations.

India is one of the most unequal country in the world, with a small affluent elite surrounded by a vast multitude of poor. Though, the country boasts of a large middle class but, compared to other countries, its middle class is also relatively poor and deprived. The top one per cent of the population in India owns more than one-fifth of the national income. Studies do indicate that the high growth of the first decade of twenty-first century did not reduce inequality in South Asia. Rather, South Asia's share of global poor increased from 27.3 per cent in 1990 to 33.4 per cent in 2013.

The implications of the social and economic diversities in South Asia have played out differently in various countries. Interestingly, in majority, if not all, of these countries social plurality has been taken as negative factor of their communitarian life than as a matter of celebration and preservation. At the very outset, the traditional nature of these societies has tended to reinforce the primordial affinities of disparate ethnic groups leading to rise of communal tensions among them. The perpetuation of caste system has inevitably resulted in continuation of social and economic marginalisation of a large number of people from social mainstream. The disadvantaged position of women has essentially led to their marginal participation in different spheres of public life. At the same time, agrarian nature of their economies and lack of sufficient finances and state-of-the-art technology did not permit them to make rapid strides towards economic development. Moreover, regional imbalances in development have acted as strong pointer

towards autonomy movements ranging even to the extent of secessionism. The social and economic diversity of the subcontinent have, thus, produced varying repercussions for different countries of the region.

3.3.6 Political Pluralism

The numerous kinds of diversities in the countries of South Asia have indubitably set the tone for political pluralism as well. This can be seen in almost all the major aspects of political life of the people in these countries – right from the nature of their political systems to the conduct of day to day politics. For instance, massive regional and ethno-linguistic diversities have persuasively acted to make sure that majority of these countries go for a federal framework of polity. It is, therefore, not surprising to find that almost all the major countries of the region such as India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal have sooner or later adopted federalism as the founding feature of their political system. Even the countries where federalism has not been ingrained in their constitutional stipulations, their governments are de facto federal with lot of autonomy to their sub national and local governments. Differential territorial as well as non-territorial autonomy arrangements have, thus, emerged as the basic framework within which different countries have tried to manage their diversities.

A greater degree of plurality can also be seen in the governmental systems of different countries of the region. Insofar as nature of government is concerned, barring Bhutan which retains monarchy, all the South Asian countries have followed the republican form of government - Nepal being the latest entrant in this league. Further, given the fact that the subcontinent was under British colonial rule for a fairly long period of time, it was natural for them to be well versed with the British political traditions, customs and values. It was, therefore, quite obvious that after independence majority of these countries adopted the Westminster type of parliamentary system of government. While India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal have adopted the Westminster model in its pristine form, Bhutan and Sri Lanka have somewhat their own versions of parliamentary system of government. As for others, only Afghanistan and Maldives are the countries having Presidential form of government.

As far as constitutionalism and democratization in the region is concerned, South Asian countries present diverse patterns. Barring India, and to some extent Sri Lanka, all other countries appear to be quite deficient on the twin processes of constitutionalism and democratization. For instance, frequent military rules in Pakistan have not only severely bruised its quest for constitutionalism but also made army the final arbiter in political process of the country. What is true of Pakistan can also be argued in the case of Bangladesh which, of late, has shown remarkable resilience for constitutionalism and democracy. In the case of Nepal and Bhutan, democracy and constitutionalism are too new ideas to be assessed at current point of time. Significantly, in the case of Maldives, constitutionalism and democratization are processes still in a state of fragility that can be shattered at any point of time. For Afghanistan, establishment of lasting peace and tranquility seems to be far more important considerations than deep rooting the values of constitutionalism and democracy though regularity

of elections, no matter how deficient, in the country held some promise for future of democracy. The re-establishment of Taliban regime in Kabul once again raises serious misgivings about constitutionalism and rule of law in the country.

3.4 WORKING OF DIVERSITY AND PLURALISM

Working of diversity and pluralism over the years has produced mixed bag of results insofar as sustenance of various countries as nation-states and general peace and tranquility are concerned. The diversity of space has unquestionably put tremendous pressures on these countries to show great degree of ingenuity in accommodating all sorts of autonomy demands whose obvious reflection can be seen in federalism and other forms of power-sharing. Moreover, in the countries like India even federalism was to be attuned to the peculiar requirements of different territorial autonomy demands leading to so many asymmetries in the political system. But the countries that could not adequately manage or accommodate the territorial aspirations of its people such as Pakistan or Sri Lanka were to witness the painful process of partition or devastating long drawn civil wars respectively. For other countries, though geographical diversities presented big challenges before them, they appeared successful in managing these challenges and converted their diversities into boon for themselves.

More complex than the geographical diversities seemed to be the cultural pluralism in the South Asian countries getting reflected into languages, religions and ethnicities. Various countries have tried to fulfill the linguistic aspirations of different people by twin strategies of giving constitutional status or state recognition to the major languages, or creating separate territorial units on linguistic basis to set up an exclusive geographical space for people speaking a particular language. This formula has successfully worked in the countries like India, Sri Lanka and Nepal, among others. But the most glaring example of mismanagement of its linguistic pluralism in South Asia came from Pakistan whose brute attempts at marginalisation of Bengali speaking people of East Pakistan eventually resulted into full-fledged civil war that ended with the coming up of Bangladesh as an independent nation. Likewise, religious pluralism has also been taken as anathema, particularly by the orthodox puritan Islamists in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who have applied all kinds of cruel and violent means to marginalize or drive out the non-Muslims from their countries. But in other countries, religious pluralism is respected with equal space and opportunities for followers of all religions to follow and preach their religions and faiths.

The ethnic, social, economic and political diversities in different countries of South Asia have been a cause for concern given the unhelpful orientations of these tendencies. For instance, ethnic diversities in almost all the countries have led people to seek and gain not only recognition from the political system but also acted in competitive power play with other ethnic groups resulting invariably in clashes among different ethnic groups. While the countries like India have managed their ethnic plurality through various tools of constitutional accommodation and power sharing, the ones

that could not do so like Afghanistan have paid heavy price in terms of civil war and continued violence. On the contrary, social and economic diversities, though have not acted as forces seeking differential attention, their configuration in particular ways and working with incremental pace have made them roadblocks in the rise of the South Asian societies and economies as modern, developed and democratic entities. Further, regional disparities in development have tended to create instinctive tensions within many of these countries whose proper management becomes a challenging task. Finally, the political pluralism in different countries has naturally been a contextual articulation of political cultures and processes of each of the country. All sorts of diversities have, thus, worked in such a complex way in each of the South Asian country that very few, if any, general patterns could be discerned for the entire region.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer

ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit

1) What are the major ethnic groups in Pakistan and Sri Lanka?

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2) Describe the social and economic diversities in South Asia.

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3.5 LET US SUM UP

South Asia is one of those regions of the world that are experiencing great tumult and reconfiguration of many aspects of its collective life. For instance, while the natural diversities rooted in geomorphologic formations are beyond the reformulation of its inhabitants, they are likely to be redone by natural processes like climate change and other environmental threats. But the more subtle transformations can be anticipated in the religious, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, social, economic and political realms of its nations. It is precisely for this reason that the subcontinent is reckoned as one of the most violence hit regions in the world, apart from simmering tensions among various groups. The feeble attempt by its leaders to form a common platform in the form of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) could not go too long and now exist in redundancy than vibrancy. Ethnic challenges and violent autonomy movements have, to a large extent, got perverted into brutal terrorist organizations posing serious challenge to the general peace and tranquility in many countries. Unfortunately, therefore, the vast diversity and pluralism that could have been the beauty and attraction of the region have been turned into fault lines whose bridging seems quite difficult, if not impossible, in the near future.

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3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1. Conceptually, diversity stands for the variety, differences or dissimilarities prevailing in a particular context of human or physical existence. Next, fundamental to the idea of pluralism is the existence of more than one or many actors in a particular arena. Thus what constitutes the core of the idea of pluralism is that whatever stands as a unit of analysis like family, group, community, organisation, society, country, and so on, is composed of more than one element.
2. Patterns of diversity and pluralism in south Asia pertains to geographical differences, the ethno-cultural variations, ethnic differences, social, economic and political pluralism.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Diversity of space means variety of geographical formations. For instance, the geographical diversity of the country consists of the majestic Himalayas in the north, vast north Indian plains watered by a dense network of powerful rivers, Deccan plateau with its senile topography, Thar desert in the western Rajasthan, Rann of Kutch in Gujarat, and long coastal areas in east, west as well as south formed by Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean respectively. The Andaman and Nicobar, and Lakshdweep Islands further add to the spatial diversity of India.
2. South Asia is also the hub of enormous linguistic diversity unlike many other continents and peoples. Like other diversities, India happens to be the country with the most diverse language base in the region.

Check Your Progress 3

1. The major ethnic groups of Pakistan are Punjabis, Pashtuns, Sindhis, Saraikis, Muhajirs, Balochs, Paharis and Hindkowans, among others. The major ethnicities of Sri Lanka relate to Sinhalese, Tamils, Burgher, Veddass, Malayas, Chettis, Bharathas, and Pathans.
2. The massive social, economic and regional diversities in the region are also quite complex and disquieting. Age old customs, traditions and social configurations had apparently produced kinds of social order which are underpinned by graded inequality and marginalised positions of certain sections of society like women. The level of economic development and income distribution in different countries of South Asia also varies a lot. This variation can be gauged from their standing in the Human Development Index (HDI) released by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) for 2020.

UNIT 4: POLITICAL STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES IN INDIA, PAKISTAN AND BANGLADESH

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Constitutional Status
- 4.3 Status of Rights
- 4.4 Role of Judiciary
- 4.5 Role of Election Commission
- 4.6 Role of Army
- 4.7 Role of Media
- 4.8 Pressure Groups
- 4.9 Status of Minorities
- 4.10 Civil Society
- 4.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.12 References
- 4.13 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

4.0 OBJECTIVES:

To understand the political structures and processes of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, it is crucial to look at the politics of these nations from different angles. The three South Asian countries have democracies at present, but the texture and tenor of democracy vary from one country to another. In this Unit, an attempt has been made to discuss the political structure, the role of the judiciary, the status of the minorities, the role of the army, mass media and the civil society etc.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, now, three different nations of South Asia were once part of India; and since ages. These nations had not only a shared history, civilization, and culture but also the colonial experience under British who used the 'divide and rule' policy. Years of subjugation by Britishers produced several stalwarts of the Indian freedom movement whose aim was to defeat the British to end colonialism and to free the motherland India. The British partitioned the subcontinent on basis of failed two-nation theory into a Hindu-majority India and a Muslim-majority Pakistan. Pakistan, carved out on 14th August 1947, comprised two parts, separated physically and linguistically, one was *West Pakistan* and another in the form of *East Pakistan*. Later, the East Pakistan emerged as a separate state, Bangladesh, in 1971. Bangladesh's birth was possible due to India's direct and indirect

intervention, both diplomatically and militarily. Also, India became the first country to recognise Bangladesh as an independent nation.

4.2 CONSTITUTIONAL STATUS

With the promulgation of the Constitution in 1950, India became one of the largest democracies in the world and the greatest civilizational republic shaping it into a sovereign, democratic, republic. India has evolved since then steadfast to adopt the democratic constitutional values of secularism, and made rapid strides in the social, political, and economic domains imbibing socialism.

The Government of India Act of 1935 has been the strongest influence on India's Constitution, as many articles were taken from the act. Also, The Objectives Resolution of 1946 proclaimed "India as an independent sovereign republic and a union" of autonomous units wherein all power would be derived from the people. The Constitution of India, which came into effect on 26th January 1950, was prepared by a committee led by Dr B R Ambedkar. The Constitution recognises, defines and regulates several aspects of the state as well as the structure, powers and functions of the leading institutions under the three organs of the government– the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. It provides rights to its citizens and represents the nature of the relationship between citizens, the state and the government.

The Indian Constitution establish India as sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic, republic. India, also known as Bharat, is a Union of States. India follows the system of dual polity consisting of the centre and the state governments. The Constitution defines the organisational powers and limitations of both the governments. It provides for the Parliament, consisting of two houses e.g. Rajya Sabha (Council of States) an upper house representing the states and a lower house, the Lok Sabha (House of the People), representing the people of India as a whole. The Constitution provides a written constitution for a parliamentary form of government which is federal in structure with certain unitary features. The President of India is the head of the state, and the Prime Minister of India is the head of the government. The powers of the centre and the states are mentioned in the 7th schedule of the Constitution. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1993 added a third tier at the local level.

Pakistan's two constitutions of 1956 and 1962 failed to provide the desired political stability. Both were short-lived and were superseded with martial laws. Pakistan's present Constitution of 1973 declared Pakistan as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, recognizing Islam as the religion of the state. It was drafted by the Zulfikar Ali Bhutto government. The Constitution is parliamentary in nature, with a bicameral legislature. The Constitution defines the nature of the state, its citizens and their fundamental rights. The Constitution also includes clauses requiring the legal system to follow Islamic injunctions found in the Quran and Sunnah. It is the supreme law of the land and the sacrosanct instrument which reigns supreme in the governance of the state.

Pakistan is federation consisting of Punjab, Sindh, the North-West Frontier Province (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and Baluchistan. The 1973 Constitution of Pakistan established the federal structure by dividing the power between the national and provincial governments based on the principle of separation of powers. The President is the Head of the state, and the Prime Minister is the Head of the government. This constitution established the bicameral legislature consisting of the Senate (as Upper House) and National Assembly (as Lower House). The President was given the power by the Constitution Eighth Amendment Act of 1985 to dissolve the national and provincial legislatures and dismiss the elected governments at the federal and provincial levels. This amendment changed Pakistan's system of government from a parliamentary democracy to a semi-presidential system. The eighth amendment strengthened the authority of the President. Later, The Eighteenth Amendment of the Constitution of Pakistan was passed in 2010, removing the power of the President of Pakistan to dissolve the Parliament unilaterally, turning Pakistan from a semi-presidential to a parliamentary republic. The army is once again trying to change the 18th amendment to get more political control.

The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh is the supreme law. It defines the republic as a unitary, parliamentary democracy, with fundamental human rights and freedoms, an independent judiciary, democratic local government and a national bureaucracy. It invokes constitutional supremacy instead of parliamentary supremacy. Bangladesh's constitution came into effect on December 16, 1972. The state's religion is Islam – adopted through 8th Amendment in 1988. All powers in the republic belong to the people, and their exercise on their behalf shall be carried out solely under the authority of the constitution. Under the Constitution of Bangladesh, the Prime Minister is the head of government. The President is the head of the state, who exercises the powers and performs the duties conferred on him by the Constitution and any other law. The Parliament is called '*Jatiyo Shangsad*' in Bengali and '*House of the Nation*' in English. Parliament of Bangladesh is unicameral. According to Article 65 (3A) of the Constitution, of the 350 seats in Parliament, 50 are reserved for women. These women members are indirectly elected by political parties, and the number of total reserved seats is distributed between parties based on the proportion of seats they have in the parliament through the process of Single Transferable Vote system.

4.3 STATUS OF RIGHTS

Political rights are based on the principle of natural justice in law, such as the right to a fair trial, the right to seek legal remedy, the right to vote, rights to political participation, due process of law to be followed. These rights prohibit the government from arbitrarily acting against the rights of the individuals and provide a remedy if there is a violation of these rights in any form, either by state or by an individual. Therefore, a democratic state must ensure that individuals have certain rights which are to be followed by the government.

The leaders of India's freedom struggle realised the importance of rights. The visionary leaders and founders of India ensured that these rights must

be included and protected in the Constitution of India to avoid any kind of misuse or instability in governance. Therefore, these rights were enshrined in the Constitution of India in the form of 'fundamental rights' in Part III of the Indian Constitution from Article 13 to Article 35 under different categories of fundamental rights. Ordinary legal rights are protected and enforced by ordinary legislation, whereas Fundamental Rights are protected under Art. 32 of Indian Constitution. The rights are protected irrespective of caste, religion, region, sex, race, place of birth etc and provide equality of status and opportunity for all.

According to the Constitution of Pakistan, all citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law. The Constitution contains 25 rights in all. 15 of these articles discuss civil and political rights, whereas the rest of the ten articles discuss social and economic rights. Articles 8 to 28 of the constitution deals with all fundamental rights provided to the citizens of Pakistan.

The Constitution of Bangladesh provides fundamental rights that are aimed at overturning the inequalities of past social practices, prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, sex, colour, place of birth and forbids trafficking of human beings and forced labour. Other fundamental rights include freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of movement, freedom of assembly, and the right to education and public healthcare. These fundamental rights have been enumerated in the constitution from Articles 27 to 44 of the Constitution. All of these rights are civil and political rights.

4.4 ROLE OF JUDICIARY

In the modern democratic setup, judiciary is the essential organ of the state. A supreme and independent judiciary is sine-quo-non for a smooth political society and to protect the rights of the people enshrined in the constitution. An independent judiciary is a guarantor of fundamental rights of citizens and resolves the disputes between centre and state governments in a federal set-up. The function of the judiciary is to adjudicate between the citizens and state and between the citizens themselves. An independent and efficient judicial system is a cornerstone of the rule of law. The aim of the judicial system must be to ensure free, fair, impartial, transparent adjudication of disputes by upholding the rule of law and protecting the rights and liberties of the members of the society.

Judiciary plays a vital role in the Indian Constitution. Indian Constitution envisioned a single integrated system of the judiciary for the whole nation. In India, Supreme Court is the apex court that acts as the final interpreter and guardian of the Constitution. Its decision is binding as per constitutional provisions. It administers both the union and state laws. At the state level, there is a High Court to deal with state matters and lower courts called District Courts. Nyaya Panchayat, Panchayat Adalat, Gram Kachheri also functions in India at the grass-roots level based on the principle of natural justice.

In Pakistan, there exists a formal division between the judiciary and the executive branches of government with a three-tier judicial system. Pakistan's judiciary consists of the Supreme Court, the provincial High

Courts and district courts which works under High Courts' jurisdiction and supervision. These district courts hear civil cases and criminal cases. The Supreme Court is the highest court in the land and acts as a court of record with original, appellate and advisory jurisdictions. The judicial system of Pakistan focuses on religious dimensions with an inclination towards Islamic values. The court for Islamic Law (Shariah) is called the Federal Shariat Court, established in 1980. The primary purpose of this court is to ascertain whether the laws passed by the Parliament comply with Sharia law. The independence of the Judiciary in Pakistan has been tested at times. Since its formation as an independent nation, there have been three occasions when military coups have toppled the democratic government. Under such circumstances, the judicial system of Pakistan not only failed to check the extra-constitutional regime but also endorsed and supported the illegally gained power. President Pervez Musharraf government in 2007 had ensured that politics trumped the rule of law when he replaced the Chief Justice and other judges who challenged his constitutional legitimacy.

Theoretically, Pakistan's judicial system operates independently of the executive branch. However, the reality is different, as the establishment wields significant influence over the judicial branch. As a result, there are doubts concerning the competence, fairness, and reliability of Pakistan's judicial system. However, fear of contempt of court proceedings inhibit businesses and the public generally from reporting on perceived weaknesses of the judicial process. Although the higher courts are widely viewed as more credible, lower courts are often considered corrupt, inefficient, and subject to pressure from prominent wealthy, religious, political figures and the establishment. Political involvement in judicial appointments increases the government's influence over the court system.

The 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh provided the structure and functions of the Supreme Court and the subordinate judiciary. By the separation declaration in 2007, the subordinate judiciary particularly judicial magistrate courts were separated from the executive, but effective separation is yet to be established. Articles 115 and 116 of the Constitution have empowered the President to make appointments of judges and judicial magistrates of the subordinate judiciary and to deal with the posting, promotion and discipline of judicial officers in consultation with the Supreme Court. In fact, under these two articles, the executive can control and interfere with the lower judiciary regarding the posting, promotion and discipline of judicial officers despite the judiciary being separated from the executive on paper. The President has limitations on the exercise of all his functions, as he has to act according to the directions of the Prime Minister as per view of Article 48(3), which means that the President can exercise all of his functions at the desire of the Prime Minister, who is the executive head.

4.5 ROLE OF ELECTION COMMISSION

To hold free and fair election where eligible citizens are able to exercise their vote without fear and favour is a hallmark of modern liberal democracy. The Election Commission of India is an autonomous and permanent constitutional body responsible for organising free and fair elections for Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha and the state legislative assembly. The Constitution of India has

empowered the Election Commission for direction, superintendence, and control of elections to Parliament, state legislatures, the office of President of India, and vice-president of India. Elections to Municipalities and Panchayats are conducted by the State Election Commission. Article 324 of the Constitution of India mentions the provisions to safeguard and ensure the independent and impartial functioning of the Election Commission. The Election Commission is a three-member body. The President appoints the Chief Election Commissioner and other election commissioners.

Election Commission of India is known for conducting the world's most extensive democratic exercise in free, fair and transparent manner. 17th General Elections for Lok Sabha conducted by the Commission in 2019 were the largest democratic exercise in the world which witnessed the participation of 61 crore voters at 10 lakh polling stations in diverse geographical terrains encompassing deserts, mountains, forests. It ensures that even a single voter should be able to cast his/her vote without any hurdles. Also, in an historical move in order to conduct free and fair election, recently the Lok Sabha has passed the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 to "curb the menace of multiple enrolment of the same person in different places". This bill not only aims to purify the electoral rolls but also promises to reduce the electoral malpractices.

The Election Commission of Pakistan is an autonomous, independent and permanent established body responsible for organizing and conducting elections to the national Parliament, provincial legislatures, local governments, and the office of President of Pakistan. The Commission performs its functions and conducts nationwide general elections, as well as for the by-elections decided by the Election Commission itself. But, the Commission suffers from low credibility due to its structural inability to effectively monitor and control political funding in the country, checking the issues of booth capturing and low voter turnout. Other major issue in Pakistan is to select the five members Election Commission which is a challenge due to lack of consensus between the Prime Minister and the opposition parties of Pakistan.

The Bangladesh Election Commission is an independent constitutional body responsible for conducting elections in a free and fair manner. Article 118 of the Constitution of Bangladesh provides for setting up an Election Commission for the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for election to the office of the President and the Parliament. The President appoints the Chief Election Commissioner and other election commissioners. Recently, election Commission of Bangladesh had drawn heavy criticisms from its citizens due to attacks on opposition party members, voter intimidation, vote rigging and partisan behaviour by election officials in the pre-election period and on the day of election.

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer

ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the Unit

Check Your Progress 1.

- 3) Write a brief note on the fundamental rights in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

- 4) Explain the importance and role of Election Commission of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

- 5) Critically examine the role of judiciary in a democracy.

4.6 ROLE OF MILITARY

The study of the military's intervention into politics has been a subject of intense academic discourse. The participation of the military in politics is a characteristic of weak democratic institutions.

The civil-military relations in post-colonial India is a model example for other countries where there has been a significant increase in military capacity without any threat to political setup. The Indian military is apolitical, which owes its loyalty not to any individual but to the Constitution of India that is symbolised in the President, who is the supreme commander of the armed forces. The military is an essential pillar of Indian democracy, which remains a formidable public institution of the country. India's military has played a vital role not only in defending the nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and providing disaster relief but also played a significant role in holding essential values of secularism, discipline, integrity and loyalty. It has remained independent and indifferent to the party politics of the nation, unlike armed forces in India's immediate neighbourhood where there have been consistent instances of sabre rattling and the coup.

In most democracies, civil-military relations are subject to laid-down guidelines and protocol, with the armed forces being responsible to the executive. In Pakistan's hybrid democracy, however, civil-military relations have been the central issue in governance with the army dominating the civilian governments including national resources. Pakistan's army has a long history of intervening in country's politics. There was a military dictatorship from the period of 1958 to 1969 under the leadership of General Ayub Khan. After a tumultuous period with intervention from several army generals such as General Yahya Khan in 1969 to General Zia ul-Huq's martial rule of 1977, there was again a military intervention in Pakistan in 1999 in the form of a coup by General Pervez Musharraf. Thus, the army has been at the forefront of disrupting the democratic process in Pakistan. During the military regimes the army personnel were given lands, licenses for businesses, they were heads of the big corporations and business houses. These military officers had emerged as the new class of

landlords and wealthy businessmen. The benefits that were shared by the military personnel were never given to the middle class.

In present scenario also, it is widely claimed that the Pakistan army controls the democratically-elected government led by Prime Minister Imran Khan. Indirectly citing the position of army in Pakistan, Roedad Khan in his book *Pakistan: A Dream Gone Sour* writes that “whatever be the constitutional position, one thing is clear that in the final analysis, political sovereignty in Pakistan resides ... where the coercive power resides... which is the ultimate authority in the decision-making process in Pakistan. They decide when to abrogate the Constitution; when it should be held in abeyance; when elected governments should be sacked; and when democracy should be given a chance. Behind the scenes, they also decide whether an elected prime minister shall live or die. Military in Pakistan also referred as ‘a state above the state.’”

Bangladesh has changed its course from militarised politics to a politicised military. The killing of the first President, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of Bangladesh, by the direct involvement of army officials led to the establishment of military rule under the leadership of General Zia-ur-Rahman. In 1976, General Zia Rahman became the Chief Martial Law Administrator (CMLA).

Further, the next coup took place in 1982, when General Muhammad Ershad imposed martial rule by banning all political activities and suspended the Constitution. By imposing military dictatorship, he became the Chief Martial Law Administrator (CMLA) and later served as the President of Bangladesh from 1983 to 1990. Later on, the popular uprising changed the political situation, which defeated the autocratic rule. The armed forces’ role in aiding civil administration is also controversial. Bangladesh enacted a law in 1996 introducing a system for the supervision of polls by a neutral caretaker government but in 2011, this system for elections were scrapped through the Fifteenth Amendment. Also, Awami League government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina criticised the army for its role in prolonging the duration of the caretaker government and jailing politicians including herself and her Bangladesh Nationalist Party rival Begum Khaleda Zia.

4.7 ROLE OF MEDIA

Media and society influence and form each other. Media are also directly linked to politics. The socio-political, economic and cultural bearing of the media is such that it can decisively support the development and stability of a country by shaping the public opinion. Internet based new media have radically altered the way that government institutions operate, the way political leaders communicate, the manner in which elections are contested, and citizens’ engagement.

India’s media played a significant role in awakening the masses against colonial rule during the national movement. The broadcasting of news resulted in massive mass movements regarding the progress of the nationalist movement in India. Post-independence media, mainly the free press, played a significant part in building of a democratic India. The media, fourth pillar of democracy, plays pivotal role in generating *Voxpopuli* (the voice

of the people). The constant contribution of modern technology created an enormous opportunity for media in strengthening society through information, and education. Internet including Facebook, twitter, instagram, e-mails and blogs, television, radio, newspapers play a crucial role within the formation of outlooks and critiques of the general public. The media has helped to shape the democratic society by giving emphasis to issues such as human rights, corruption, child birth, child care, domestic violence, and sexual harassment. This gives rise to virtuous cycle of transparent policy making, clean government, curbing corruption, and faster economic growth.

Since the inception of Pakistan in 1947, no stable democratic system has been established. In the last decades, Pakistani media have experienced many restrictions. Pakistani media only amplifies the various societal problems and hesitates in discussing the critical government policy freely and issues related to cross-border terrorism. Journalists in Pakistan face increasingly repressive environment who are often on the receiving end of hate, threats and abuse for publishing, writing work online. In June 2021, a draft ordinance was proposed for forming a government entity called the Pakistani Media Development Authority (PMDA) having the sole power for regulation of media in Pakistan. The powers include to grant or cancel license to all kinds of media including print, electronic, digital, film, and online media; to regulate electronic, print, digital, online platforms, films, and OTT distribution services; determine the circulation of print media and ratings of electronic and digital media; investigate whole range of punishments; audit advertisement revenues, monitor ethics content; investigate, summon and prosecute any person; confiscate equipment and make arrests etc. The ordinance also prohibits any content defaming the head of the state, or members of the armed forces, or legislative or judicial organs of the state. It is widely seen as the government's attempt to build a draconian censorship regime in Pakistan.

In Bangladesh, the role of media dates back to the war of independence. In its liberation war, media, mainly the radio, played an essential role in inspiring the freedom fighters to go forward with bravery. After the independence, media played a vital role in the development of politics during the political crisis in different military regimes. The situation changed with the curtailment of freedom of media since the last decade. Digital Security Act (DSA), passed by Bangladesh in 2018, raised criticisms for controlling democratic rights and freedom of speech. Journalists and human rights activists fear that freedom of expression and media will be increasingly restricted. There are other different kinds of oppression over media with control of media houses by the ruling groups and too much control on social media by law enforcement agencies. Therefore, these policies have created a hostile environment in Bangladesh for democratic thinkers and freedom lovers.

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer

ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the Unit

Check Your Progress 2.

6) Write a brief note on the role of military in the politics of Pakistan

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- 7) Media is the fourth pillar of democracy. Discuss the role of media in the working of democracy in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

4.8 PRESSURE GROUPS

Pressure groups are political socialisation agents because they influence people's attitudes toward the political process. These organisations are critical as two-way communication conduits between the people and the government.

In a vibrant democratic country like India, pressure groups have played a crucial role in shaping the politics of the country. India's pressure groups are agents of political socialisation, helps in formulation of public opinion, lobbying with the bureaucracy to influence the process of policy implementation, and help in improving the quality of the government. Pressure groups also enable new concerns and issues to reach the political agenda, thereby facilitating social progress and preventing social stagnation. They also increase social cohesion and political stability by providing a 'safety-valve' outlet for individual and collective grievances and demands. India's pressure groups complement the work of opposition political parties by exposing the wrongdoings of the government. Pressure groups thereby improve the accountability of decision makers to electorates.

Following the establishment of Pakistan, various pressure groups representing the big landholders and business established their primacy in the political process, which manifested in active participation in the political setup, and penetration into policy-making and political processes. The religious leaders, called the *Ulemas* and their conclaves have always held an influential position in Pakistan politics. The Pakistani institutions have increasingly exchanged violence for the implementation of Islamic law. Islam became the ideology of the state and a tool for strengthening the national identity and religious leaders gradually became more powerful. There are 'mafia' groups, well-organised and deeply embedded in the political economy of the country which make it very difficult for governments to bring about economic reforms so as to promote inclusive and sustainable development.

The military in Pakistan, alongside the Intelligence, have been extremely authoritarian, ruling for almost half of the history of the country. Overall, there are three major intersecting fault lines in Pakistan's political scene: between civilians and the military, amongst different ethnic and provincial groups, and between Islamists and secularists. The military is increasingly influenced by the Islamic thoughts of the religious leaders. Religious groups have repeatedly sought for different types of reward, ranging from the amnesty of members, to financial incentives, to the implementation of an Islamic

agenda. The religious groups have shown a great capacity for mobilizing street power and launching massive campaigns, especially to discredit the government. *Ulemas*, i.e. the religious leaders especially the prayer leaders, for instance, who hold the lectern of Friday prayers, have emerged as potent pressure groups. In the provinces where they hold the majority in the legislative assemblies, religious groups have successfully moved towards the implementation of an Islamic laws. By way of illustration, after provincial elections' successes, the local parliament of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa passed laws prohibiting bank interest (2016), enforcing the use of scarves (2019), banning male doctors and trainers for the female society, and forbidding film industry in 2003. Pakistan has also issued a stringent dress code for both male and women teachers in 2021 under pressures from fundamentalist groups. For years, they also established an Islamic punitive commission that launched stoning, whipping, amputation of limbs and capital punishment for blasphemy. In addition, they passed a ban on dance and music in 2018. At national levels, the Islamist groups influence government's agenda with their exchanges over Kashmir, Afghanistan, on Taliban, on cross-border terrorism, and most favoured nation's (MFN) status to India under the South Asian free trade agreement (SAFTA) etc.

The overwhelming effect of some pressure organisations is conspicuously visible in Bangladesh. In the evolution of independent Bangladesh, students' contributions and their supreme sacrifices are to be reckoned. Other who play influential role are: Bangladesh Centre for Worker Solidarity or BCWS, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee or BRAC, Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry or FBCCI, associations of madrasa teachers, development and advocacy NGOs associated with the Grameen Bank, environmentalists, labour rights advocacy groups, NGOs focused on poverty alleviation, and international trade, religious leaders etc.

4.9 STATUS OF MINORITIES

A minority group is a group which is disadvantaged, in relative or absolute terms, in accessing economic opportunities and political power on grounds such as its ethnicity, religion, race, gender, birth etc. A minority can be in terms of its religious, linguistics and ethnic or racial background.

The Indian Constitution recognises religious and linguistic minorities through Articles 29 and 30. Indian Constitution provides separate and special provisions for the rights of the minorities in terms of conservation of their language, script and culture. There is a separate ministry in India for minorities called as Ministry of Minority Affairs. Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jain and Zoroastrians (Parsis) have been notified as minority communities in India. Minorities constitute 19.3 per cent of the country's total population as per Census 2011. The Indian government is treating all sections of society equally where all minority groups are equal partners in the political and developmental process.

In Pakistan, minorities can be categorised based on religion, as 96 per cent of the population of Pakistan is Muslim. Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians, Parsis, Shias, Bahais and Ahmadis are minorities in Pakistan, representing the remaining 4 per cent of the population. Hindus and other minorities are

very much vulnerable in Pakistan due to their religious beliefs. From 23% in 1947 in both the then West and East Pakistan, Pakistan's minorities today constitute a mere 3-4% of the population. The 2017 census data suggests Hindus account for 1.73% and Christians 1.27% of the total population of Pakistan. The number of Sikhs has come down to just few thousands. Unlike India, minorities in Pakistan have a negligible presence in key public institutions of the country. It makes minorities, particularly Hindus, vulnerable, subject to continuous violence, forced conversions of non-Muslims girls, and enforced disappearances. Sikh community is equally vulnerable in Pakistan due to forced conversion of underage girls and marrying them to Muslim men. Human rights groups, including Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, have spoken about forced conversion of women belonging to minority communities in Pakistan. It has also been alleged that authorities deliberately undercount minority groups in census reports.

Minorities in Bangladesh consists of Hindus, Buddhists and Christian. As per 2011 data, Hindus constitute 8.5 per cent, Buddhists 0.6 per cent, and Christians 0.3 per cent of the population. Based on the trajectory of Bangladesh in the decades since independence, there has also been a decline of religious minorities from 23.1 per cent of the population in 1971 to 9.6 per cent, which is a massive contraction due to the mass exodus of the Hindu population. Minorities have minimal representation in the Parliament and cabinet. There is no government department dedicated to minority affairs. Bangladesh needs to offer more inclusive state policies that incorporate all people, including political dissents and religious minorities. Also, the situation of Hindus in Bangladesh is very critical due to continuous discrimination and violence against them in everyday life.

4.10 CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society refers to the interaction between a community and the state intending to strengthen the democratic principle in society. Unlike political parties, civil society groups don't seek access to government power, yet would campaign and mobilize for governments to concede to their demands. These are voluntary groups such as the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), human rights activists, intellectuals, academicians, journalists and formal associations, and informal associations who all form part of civil society. They operate independently of the state with the intention of fulfilling the aspirations of the nation. The success or failure of civil society organisations largely depends on the nature of the regime and the social milieu in which they operate. A free and independent civil society is considered essential for good governance and an accountable democracy.

Civil society in India mainly derives its strength from the Gandhian principle of volunteerism. A recent successful example of the involvement of civil society is the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) which emerged as the largest behaviour change programme in the world. It is the largest *janandolan*, India has witnessed in years. Further, civil society has a significant role in protecting the rights of the minority, depressed class, along with individual rights of freedom, liberty and the spirit of diversity in India. Voluntary groups have campaigned and promoted the cause of environmental protection,

rights of the tribals and conservation of local and indigenous knowledge systems. There exists a harmonious co-existence of both the state and the civil society in India who work together to protect the interests of both the government and the citizens.

Since Pakistan's independence in 1947, the structural dynamics of state formation, legitimization, and consolidation have hampered the emergence of civil society. With national security considerations influencing political decision-making from the beginning, the state has traditionally used centralised, authoritarian power structures. When Pakistan was formed, it was a nation in the process of becoming unified. Despite the fact that the intensity of the independence movement produced a sense of solidarity. Unfortunately, nation development has been sacrificed on the altar of state-building under the guise of pressing crises and state insecurity. As a result, the state was strengthened with the help of bureaucratic authority at the expense of civil society. Civil society in Pakistan struggles to raise its voice for pro-people legislation because of the authoritarian regime under the implicit influence of military. In recent years, there were instances when Pakistan government suspended several civil society organisations. These actions reflect the further restrictions on the already repressed civic space of Pakistan.

In Bangladesh, the civil society has played a vibrant role which has a direct positive impact on the country. The role of civil society in the independence movement of 1971 was phenomenal. In 1972, Fazle Hasan Abed founded the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) to resettle returning refugees who had fled to India during the independence war. Bangladesh's civil society is also involved in grassroots legal reform to target and empower the most vulnerable segments of the people. As a result of the legal vacuum that prevents vulnerable people from enforcing their rights, civil society has taken on a broader role in addressing legal and political issues beyond their traditional focus, such as bolstering economic and social programmes. Since the 2018 elections, the space of civil-society is shrinking due to heavy crackdown and criticism by the government which has resulted in the deterioration of the domestic polity of the country. The Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Law 2016 passed by the Parliament for regulating work and activities of foreign groups have given unhindered access to control and restrict a significant source of support for civil society groups who are not politically aligned with the government. Civil society of Bangladesh have adopted a 'see-no-evil' strategy to survive as most prefers to stay silent in order to protect themselves from the crackdown by the government.

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer
ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the Unit

Check Your Progress 3.

- 1) Critically examine the status of minorities in Pakistan and Bangladesh

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- 2) What is the importance of civil society?

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4.11 LET US SUM UP

To sum up the discussion, it can be argued that all three nations have written constitutions, which resulted from their long history of struggle and their fight for independence. The analyses of the formal political structure of these three states show that both Pakistan and Bangladesh have institutional imbalances. Both the countries periodically witness a surge of religious extremism jeopardizing the progress of the country. Both the countries have also seen parliamentary system, military coups, assassinations, and military regime time and again challenging the basic fabric of their existence. Bangladesh succeeded in correcting the imbalance to some extent but still, the formal political structures remain fragile. The Indian political system relies on a democratic structure which has evolved with the spread of democratic ideas, competitive citizen-based politics, and universal suffrage. The constitutional principles guide the country and its people for claiming its due status in the global order and pave development with rights for the excluded and subordinate groups. The parliamentary democracy based political structure of India is continuously strengthening since independence.

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4.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

1. Disuses the political structure of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.
2. Critically examine the role of judiciary in a democracy.
3. Describe the role of pressure group in India and Pakistan.
4. Write a short note on status of media in Pakistan and Bangladesh.
5. Compare in short the role of army in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.
6. Critically examine the status of minorities in Pakistan and Bangladesh.
7. Discuss the role of election commission in India.
8. What is the importance of Civil Society?

UNIT 5: POLITICAL STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES IN SRI LANKA AND THE MALDIVES

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Sri Lanka
 - 5.2.1 Political Structures in Sri Lanka
 - 5.2.2 Political Processes in Sri Lanka
- 5.3 Maldives
 - 5.3.1 Political Structures in Maldives
 - 5.3.2 Political Processes in Maldives
- 5.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.5 References
- 5.6 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise

5.0 OBJECTIVES

As part of understanding society and polity in South Asia, we discussed political structures and processes in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in the previous Unit. Taking it forward, this Unit will discuss in detail political structures and processes in two island countries of South Asia: Sri Lanka and Maldives. Through this Unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the concept of political structures and processes;
- Comprehend political structures and processes in Sri Lanka; and
- Understand political structures and processes in Maldives; and

5.1 INTRODUCTION

‘Political System’, David Easton defines as “that system of interaction in any society through which binding or authoritative allocations are made.” Such a political system, according to Gabriel Almond and James Coleman, has three core functions:

- maintaining the integration of society by determining norms;
- adapting and changing elements of social, economic, and religious systems necessary for achieving collective (political) goals; and
- protecting the integrity of the political system from outside threats.

Political system includes political structures and processes. The kind of political structures and processes that a country adopts directly impinge on its activities, stability, growth and interaction with the external environment. The political system should be in a position to make binding decisions based on demands and support received and should be in a position to enforce

such decisions. At the same time, the system should be sensitive enough to the feedback received on its decisions.

It is in this conceptual backdrop that political structures and processes of Sri Lanka and Maldives are seen and described here. Both countries are classic cases of how two former British colonies, and presently developing nations, face challenges to create and sustain credible and functional political structures and processes.

5.2 SRI LANKA

Once called as ‘Ceylon’, Sri Lanka is a small island state (65,600 sqkms of area and 22 mn population) situated 30 kms to the southeast of the Indian peninsula. Sri Lanka is considered as the “oceanic cockpit of Asia”, as it acted as “an entry point, a midpoint meeting place, a harbour, an emporium for international merchandise, and a landfall.” As a result, the island attracted attention of major powers of the world from time-to-time. Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic society with 75 percent Sinhalese, 11 percent Sri Lankan Tamils, 9 percent Muslims, 4 percent Plantation Tamils and one percent others.

5.2.1 Political Structures in Sri Lanka

A former British colony that got independence on 04 February 1948, Sri Lanka’s present political structures and processes are guided by its third Constitution that was enacted in 1978 (earlier ones were in 1947 and 1972) and amended 20 times so far. But Sri Lanka has a long constitutional history starting from 1833 Colebrooke Commission, Crew-McCallum constitutional reforms of 1910, Manning Constitutional Reforms of 1920, Manning-Devonshire Reforms of 1924, Donoughmore Constitution of 1931, and Soulbury Constitutional Reforms of 1947.

The 1978 Constitution that is presently in vogue declared Sri Lanka as a ‘Democratic Republic’ with a hybrid mix of Presidential and Parliamentary form of government on the lines of the French 5th Republic. Before 1978, Sri Lanka had a Westminster-style parliamentary form of government. Unlike India, Sri Lankan polity is unitary in nature, divided into nine provinces and 25 administrative districts. Buddhism is given the “foremost place” under the Constitution. Sinhala and Tamil are recognised as ‘official’ and ‘national’ languages with English as the ‘link’ language.

Executive power is exercised by the President, who is both head of the state, head of the government and commander-in-chief of Sri Lankan armed forces. Elected directly by the people for a term of five years, President is also vested with wide legislative, judicial, diplomatic, military and ceremonial powers. The 20th Amendment to the Constitution (October 2020) has further strengthened the office of the President. S/he has the right to attend, address and send messages to Parliament at any time and is entitled to all the privileges, immunities and powers of a Member of Parliament other than the right to vote. The President can summon, prorogue and dissolve the House and even call for a referendum as per the requirement. As the chief of the Executive and Head of the Cabinet of Ministers, s/he appoints the Prime Minister and all other ministers from among the Members of Parliament and presides all Cabinet meetings. President has the power to

assign or change portfolios of ministries from time-to-time. But irrespective of dissolution of Cabinet of Ministers and Parliament, President continues in office unless impeached on the grounds of “intentional violation of the Constitution, treason, bribery, misconduct or corruption involving the abuse of the powers of his office, or any offence under any law, involving moral turpitude.”

President is vested with the Public Seal of the country and represents Sri Lanka in all heads of states meetings at the international level. S/he receives and accredits Ambassadors, High Commissioners, Plenipotentiaries and other diplomatic agents. S/he is the sole authority to declare war and peace. Apart from appointing the Chief Justice and other Judges of the Supreme Court, judicial powers of the President include power to grant pardon, respite, lower or remit the whole or any part of punishment imposed by the judiciary. President also appoints chairpersons of five key independent commissions – Election Commission, Public Services Commission, National Police Commission, Finance Commission and Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery and Corruption – though with the approval of the Parliamentary Council.

Prime Minister is considered as the number two in the Executive hierarchy, but s/he should enjoy majority in Parliament. Apart from having a portfolio allotted by the President, Prime Minister steps in if the President is unable to perform her/his duties due to illness or absence from the country. But with the passage of 20th Amendment to the Constitution, Presidential powers have been enhanced making the role of Prime Minister more or less ceremonial.

Legislative power of Sri Lanka is vested with the people, but exercised by a unicameral Parliament. Modelled on the British House of Commons, it is a 225-member body (196 elected by multi-member constituencies and 29 picked from the national list) elected every five years. The presiding officer of Parliament is the Speaker who is responsible for the conduct of the business of the house. He is assisted by a Deputy Speaker. Although legislative power of Sri Lankans is exercised by their representatives in Parliament, there is a unique provision of a referendum which President exercises by submitting before the people “any matter” of “national importance”. Parliament can be dissolved by the President after two-and-half-years of its election unlike earlier provision of four-and-half years. Sri Lanka follows a proportional representation system to elect its parliamentarians. The whole country is divided into 22 electoral districts and seats are allotted based on the population to each district by the Election Commission headed by the Commissioner-General of Elections.

Judicial power is exercised by people through various courts. At the apex of judiciary is Supreme Court followed by Court of Appeal, Provincial High Courts and then subordinate courts in that order. The Supreme Court is “the highest and final superior court of record and is empowered to exercise its powers, subject to the provisions of the Constitution. Its rulings take precedence over all lower Courts.” It has the sole power of constitutional review. In the two-tiered appellate structure of Sri Lanka, the Court of Appeal is vested with the appellate jurisdiction operating as a court of first appeal from other lower courts. The power of second appeal lies with the

Supreme Court. Subordinate courts include District Courts, and Magistrate Courts. Judicial Service Commission consisting of Chief Justice and two other judges of the Supreme Court is responsible for recruitment, transfer, promotion, training and disciplinary control of judges and other judicial officers of lower courts.

Apart from the national level, there are two other levels of government in Sri Lanka. At the middle level is Provincial Councils. The whole country is divided into nine provinces: Central, North Western, North Central, Uva, Sabaragamuwa, Western, Southern, Northern and Eastern. Though the island was divided into provinces even during the colonial period, the Provincial Councils Act 1987, through 13th Constitutional Amendment, provided constitutional guarantee to the arrangement. At the local level, there are 18 municipal councils, 42 urban councils and 270 Pradeshiya Sabhas. Devolution of powers to Provinces are laid out in the 9th Schedule of the Constitution in the form of three lists. List I (Provincial Councils List) comprises 37 subjects concerning the provinces that Provincial Councils can legislate. List II (Reserved List) consists of powers solely belong to the Centre. List III (Concurrent List) has 36 items that both the Centre and Provinces can legislate.

Sri Lanka's party system can be traced back to the introduction of universal adult franchise in 1931. Interestingly, the first to enter into the political arena were Communist parties like Lanka SamaSamaja Party and Ceylon Communist Party. The country has a multi-party system, though two parties – United National Party and Sri Lanka Freedom Party – dominate the political process at the national level since independence. However, each of the ethnic minority group has political parties to represent its interests. While Sri Lanka Muslim Congress and All Ceylon Makkal Congress represent Muslim interests, Ceylon Workers Congress, Democratic People's Front, Up-Country People's Front, and National Union of Workers take care of Plantation Tamils. Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, Jathika Hela Urumaya, Pivithuru Hela Urumaya, and National Freedom Front are considered Sinhala nationalist parties. Sri Lankan Tamil community has parties like Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi, Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Organisation, People's Liberation Organisation for Tamil Eelam, Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation, Eelam People's Democratic Party, and Tamil National People's Front. Overall, there are closer to 50 political parties reflecting various shades of opinions and interests. Reason for the proliferation of parties lies partly with the introduction of proportional representation system in 1978. It should be noted that Sri Lanka is known for high proportion of membership in trade unions and women's organisations.

5.2.2 Political Processes in Sri Lanka

Despite at one point being dubbed as a "model of Third World Democracy", Sri Lankan political process has been a roller coaster. It was one of the few countries to get used to parliamentary form of governance and adopt universal adult franchise much before its independence. At the same time, the Sri Lankan polity has been confronted by majoritarianism, ethnic conflict, youth radicalisation, and elite domination.

Although a multi-ethnic society, majoritarianism has been a dominant character of Sri Lankan political system. Since the very beginning, Sinhala-dominated state pursued policies that alienated minorities. It started with Plantation Tamils in the form of the Citizenship Act of 1948. Later, Sinhala Only Act of 1956 and 'Standardisation Act' of 1972 targeted Sri Lankan Tamils. By ascribing "Buddhism the foremost place" in the Constitution, the message was very clear: that Buddhism has state support and patronage. Notably, the post-independence Sri Lankan state imitated Britishers' 'divide and rule' strategy on various ethnic lines to make sure that minority communities did not gang up on a common platform. Introduction of partial proportional representation system in the 1978 Constitution and later 15th Amendment to the Constitution encouraged the schisms among the communities. There is an incentive to split votes on community lines and gain power.



Rise of Radicalism: Due to the inability of successive Sri Lankan governments to address the socio-political and economic grievances of the youth, the country witnessed three radical movements: Sinhala, Tamil and Islamic. They turned violent in an organised manner as political structures of the island state perceived them as just 'law and order' problems. A basic distinction, however, among these radical movements is while Tamil radical movement was ethno-nationalistic the other two were ideological.

Sinhala Militancy: Represented by Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), Sinhala militancy rose in 1960s as a result of the then existing socio-economic crisis. The failure of moderate political groups in articulating interests especially of the Sinhala youth led to radical groups like JVP. The JVP claimed to represent leftist ideology ranging from Marx to Che Guevara and latter 'Trotskyism without Trotsky' and advocated populist welfarism and anti-globalisation. At the same time, JVP appealed to Sinhala nationalism and displayed a sense of exclusion towards minorities. Most of the active members of the group were rural Sinhala educated

unemployed mostly from poor and middle class—the “Fourth Person”. JVP viewed that it “should arm itself to confront the potential threat of a neo-colonial dictatorial regime.” Dominating students’ unions of major Sri Lankan universities at one point, the group was able to establish some contacts within the armed forces as well. Its organisation was marked by ‘bureaucratic centralism’ and motivation of the cadre derived largely from the famous “five lectures” consisting of ‘capitalist economic crisis’, ‘Indian expansionism’, ‘Independence’, ‘Left movement’ and ‘path of the Sri Lankan revolution’. The JVP went on to indulge in two armed uprisings.

It followed ‘blitzkrieg’ tactics during its April 1971 insurrection: swift, short and fierce. The *modus operandi* was to create confusion by capturing all police stations and in turn capture power. Between 5-11 April 1971, the JVP men were able to attack 93 police stations. The group, however, could not go beyond because of various factors. Firstly, there was some confusion in the rank and file on the date and timing of the attack. Secondly, aided with specific intelligence inputs, the state took preventive measures by imposing Emergency and arresting top leaders. Thirdly, the JVP failed to create enough mass base before going in for the attack. Fourthly, external military help from India was readily available for the then Sirimavo Bandaranaike government to safeguard vital installations in the capital city from falling into the hands of the rebels. JVP organised its 1987-89 rebellion mainly on anti-India agenda. It tried to project “Indian expansionism” as a threat to Sri Lanka when the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) landed on the Island. The agenda gradually shifted to rallying against provincial council elections, which JVP argued would divide the country. It issued death threats to those who would participate in the elections and imposed “curfews” to prevent people from going to vote. Those who violated the “curfew” were killed. The strategy worked to the satisfaction of the group. The group then turned against political leaders and members and did not hesitate to align with criminal elements to achieve the objective. To cap it all, the JVP decided to take on the security forces head on. In August 1989, it gave an ultimatum to all the security forces personnel to abandon their posts or get killed along with their family members. This provided space for the security forces to put an end to JVP as a radical group. At a later date, the group transformed itself as a political party.

Tamil Militancy: Ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka turned violent due to the insensitivity of the State in addressing the genuine grievances of the Tamil community and the consequent resort to arms by the frustrated and radicalised Sri Lankan Tamil youth. They organised themselves in groups and started indulging in attacking symbols of state power, assassination of pro-government personnel, bank robberies, and ambush of security personnel in the Northeast. At the height of the Tamil insurgency in the mid-1980s, there were five major and nearly 30 splinter militant groups; prominent among them was the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Belief in militancy and sympathy for the militants gradually arose among the Tamils after the ethnic riots of 1983. With the massive exodus of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees to Tamil Nadu after the 1983 riots, India could not “remain unaffected by the events.” New Delhi offered its good offices to resolve the conflict to ensure its national security interests and stability in

the region. Meanwhile, the Tamil militants took on the Sri Lankan forces in what was known as 'Eelam Wars'. After the failure of various peace initiatives, India finally entered an accord with Sri Lanka in July 1987 "to establish peace and normalcy" in the Island.

In terms of the Accord, India sent its troops (IPKF) to Sri Lanka that got embroiled in the conflict. In a surprising turn of events, the Sri Lankan state turned against India and began to secretly help the LTTE against the IPKF. However, a short while after the IPKF's withdrawal in March 1990, 'Eelam War-II' broke out between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan security forces in June 1990. In its determination to achieve peace by annihilating the LTTE, the Sri Lankan government undertook the aerial bombing of civilian areas and an economic blockade of the Jaffna peninsula. The 'Eelam War – II' ended in a stalemate. In 1994, the new Sri Lankan government under Chandrika Kumaratunga initiated talks with the LTTE based on a comprehensive devolution package. The talks, however, broke down due to the LTTE's obduracy resulting in 'Eelam War-III'. Gradually, Chandrika became convinced of the rightness of the 'war-for-peace' programme after the security forces achieved some spectacular victories in 1995 and early 1996 that included wresting of Jaffna from the LTTE. Thereafter, an impasse prevailed on the military front, with the LTTE ensconced in the Wanni region. On 22 February 2002 a ceasefire agreement (CFA) was signed following Norwegian facilitation between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. It led to six rounds of talks leading to a brief spell of peace. However, in due course, the conflicting parties got back to their old habit of mutual suspicions and arm-twisting, relegating the CFA to oblivion. The LTTE's suicide and air attacks triggered an 'open confrontation' between the two antagonists in August 2006. The Sri Lankan government under Mahinda Rajapaksa unilaterally abrogated the CFA in January 2008 and vowed to "finish the LTTE". The 'Eelam War – IV' formally broke out, and by January 2009, the government forces captured Kilinochchi, the administrative capital of the Tigers. By mid-May 2009, the LTTE was decimated and the government announced its victory in the three-decade-old civil war. As of 2021, the possibility of the LTTE regrouping looks impossible, although Tiger remnants and Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora wishes to keep up the dream of Eelam alive. The Tamil moderates in the island have been demanding for more autonomy, while the Sinhala-dominated Sri Lankan government has been dilly-dallying.

Islamic Militancy: Islamic militancy that got manifested in terror attacks (famously called "Easter attacks") in April 2019 had been gradual. Internally, although there had been eco-space for radicalisation in the island, it was the rise of Sinhala ultra-nationalism after 2009 termination of Eelam War-IV that acted as a breaking point. The underlying context is "minority complex" of the majority Sinhala community. Sinhala religious and political leaders have displayed a threat perception from minority groups. Tamils and Muslims are the 'other' who cannot be trusted and are deemed anti-national. After the Eelam War-IV, this primary 'other' shifted from Tamils to Muslims. Vis-à-vis Sri Lankan Tamils, the insecurity feeling of the Sinhalese rose when Tamils in India (Tamil Nadu) were combined together. Similar kind of insecurity feeling was fanned by certain Sinhalese

hardliners citing the growing demographics of Sri Lankan Muslims and the generic apprehension of their economic domination especially, in the eastern parts of the island. Rumours like “fertility jihad” was rife. All these resulted in Sinhala-Muslim schisms that in due course manifested in the form of inter-community violence since 2012. A cycle of violence and counter-violence from both communities erupted.

Some of the key Sinhala Buddhist nationalist groups at the forefront spearheading inter-ethnic tensions include BoduBalaSena (BBS), Sinhala Rawaya, MahasohonaBalakaya and RawanaBalaya that successfully appealed to young Buddhist monks and Sinhala youth. The core justification was “Sri Lanka is a Buddhist nation that must be protected from all threats even if that involves violence.” Monks like BBS chief GalagodaAththeGnanasara claimed themselves as the “historical owners” of Sri Lanka and “the guardians of Buddhism for 2,500 years”. One could see, the rise of anti-Muslim attacks coincided with the rise of such groups. Some of the Sinhala-Buddhist groups have links with an anti-Muslim group of Myanmar called ‘969’ and in fact invited AshinWirathu, a Myanmar Buddhist monk known for his anti-Rohingya stance, to sustain the campaign of “protect Buddhism”.

Overall, the political process of Sri Lanka was mired by constitutions and amendments and ensuing resistance in moderate and militant forms. Rise of nationalistic populism is one of the curses of Sri Lankan democratic polity. Due to unbridled powers to the Executive President, there is a persistent issue with the separation of powers. Prime Minister is reduced, it is said, “to a peon and the Parliament to a cipher.” Judiciary is not in a position to assert itself as a guardian of the Constitution. Various independent commissions, set up to act as ‘watch towers’, are helpless. Though Sri Lanka is known for its vibrant civil society, it is not united. Political parties, media, NGOs, and other civil society groups tend not to have a national perspective on issues pertaining to the concerned ethnic community. Even within each community, civil society is divided on the stand to be taken on community issues. The Sri Lankan civil society is also weak due mainly to the state’s unfriendly attitude. Those who are critical are stamped as “anti-national”, “unpatriotic” and “traitors”. As a result, funding for these groups from international agencies have also dried up. This does not auger well for a healthy political process on the island.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit

1) Provide an outline of political structure of Sri Lanka.

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2) How did issues of Sri Lanka’s political structures and process led to militancy in the country from time-to-time?

5.3 THE MALDIVES

Maldives is the smallest of all South Asian countries that got independence from Britain on 26 July 1965. Though dispersed widely with 1192 coral islands grouped into 26 atolls, the country's actual land area is just 300 sqkms and has a population of about 550,000. Maldives is strategically located in the Indian Ocean, Southwest of India. It is a unitary state and declared itself, through 2008 Constitution, a "democratic republic" with a presidential form of government. As a protectorate under Dutch and later under British, the Maldives has a long constitutional history starting from 1932, then 1953, 1968, 1998 and finally in 2008. The national language of the Maldives is Dhivehi and Islam the state religion.

5.3.1 Political Structures in The Maldives

The present political structure of the Maldives is stipulated under 2008 Constitution that was drafted based on the "Roadmap for the Reform Agenda" published by the then government in 2006. There were eight broad categories of reforms that were identified:

- i. strengthening the system of governance;
- ii. promoting and strengthening the protection of human rights;
- iii. enhancing the independence of the judiciary;
- iv. developing the multiparty political system;
- v. strengthening the civil service;
- vi. modernizing the electoral system;
- vii. enhancing the role of the media; and
- viii. strengthening key institutions and civil society.

The executive power is vested with the President elected directly by an absolute majority popular vote for a term of five years. There is a provision for run-off elections if none of the candidates gets 50 percent plus one votes. With a maximum cap of two terms, the president is both head of the state and the government. As commander-in-chief of the Maldives National Defense Force, he enjoys power to declare war or peace concerning the state. He is responsible to "determine, conduct and oversee the foreign policy of the country" and to "enter into general treaties and agreements with foreign states and international organizations." Apart from appointing members of diplomatic missions to foreign countries, he receives and recognises the credentials of diplomatic and consular representatives to Maldives. In terms of judicial powers, the President appoints judges to the Supreme Court and can grant pardons or reduction of sentences. As head of the executive, he constitutes the Cabinet, subject to approval by Parliament, and is responsible for efficient and harmonious conduct of all government departments. On

the lines of the United States, Maldives Constitution provides for a Vice President to assist the President in discharging his duties and responsibilities. However, though the Vice President is part of the Cabinet, there is no need for Parliament's confirmation for his appointment. At the same time, he cannot be removed at the discretion of the President. Both the President and the Vice President "shall be answerable in law for any alleged criminal offence" to Parliament. The members of the Cabinet are answerable both to the President and Parliament.

All legislative power in the Maldives is vested with Parliament known as the "People's Majlis". It is a unicameral house with 87 members elected to serve for a term of five years directly by a simple majority in single-seat constituencies. Membership of Parliament is pegged to population and hence dynamic. People's Majlis has the authority "to enact, amend, and revise laws aside from the constitution." The power of purse lies with the Majlis. On the lines of US Senate, Maldives Parliament has wide powers of confirmation and has to approve the President's authorisation of use of military force. The Cabinet is responsible to Parliament. Auditor General, Prosecutor General and members of independent commissions like the Election Commission, the Civil Service Commission, the Human Rights Commission and Anti-Corruption Commission can be only appointed on the approval by the Majlis. The state of emergency declared by the President is subject to approval of the Majlis. Parliamentary proceedings are presided over by the Speaker, or in his absence, the Deputy Speaker. The Speaker also has certain special powers like stepping in as President in case of unavailability of both President and Vice President, power of information from the President or Vice President of their unavailability and is a key member of Judicial Service Commission (JSC).

The judicial power is vested in the Supreme Court at the apex, followed by the High Court and lower courts. Lower courts include Magistrate's Court in each inhabited island and four kinds of "superior courts" that are functional-specific: the Civil Court, the Criminal Court, the Family Court and the Juvenile Court. But unlike Magistrate's Courts, Superior Courts sit only in capital Malé. Before appointing judges to the Supreme Court, the President has to consult the JSC, and get confirmation from the Peoples' Majlis. The power to appoint, promote and transfer Judges other than the Chief Justice and Judges of the Supreme Court lies with the JSC.

Decentralised administration is stipulated in Article 230 of the Constitution. Accordingly, the Decentralization Act was enacted in 2010 with the aim "to allow island communities to make their own decisions in a democratic and accountable manner; to improve people's living standards through social, economic and cultural development; and to create an environment conducive for peace and prosperity." The country was divided into 189 "islands", 18 "atolls" and 4 "cities" to be administered by respective councils (Island Councils, Atoll Councils and City Councils) at each level. These Councils are mandated to take care of local issues like roads, education, social services and so on. A Local Government Authority (LGA) was established for effective coordination among the decentralised bodies, their budget, and jurisdiction. Members of these councils are democratically elected for a term of three years.

Sunni Islam forms the basis of all the laws of the country. Thus, the Maldives has a combination of Islamic law and English common law. Although the English common law generally applies to business matters, all laws have to conform to the tenets of Islam. To qualify for any state position, apart from other qualifications laid out, a person must be Muslim and a follower of Sunni school of Islam. A non-Muslim cannot be a citizen. Even fundamental rights are subjected to the tenets of Islam.

Constitutionally, every citizen of Maldives “has the right to establish and to participate in the activities of political parties.” Multiple parties are presently operational in the atoll state. Some of the key parties are Maldivian Democratic Party, the first registered political party of the country; Progressive Party of the Maldives; Jumhooree Party; Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party; Maldives Labor Party; Islamic Democratic Party; Adhaalath Party; Maldives Reform Movement; and People’s National Congress. Alliance formation among political parties is normal depending on the political situation and at the time of government formation.

5.3.2 Political Processes in The Maldives

Though started with a good promise in 2008 multi-party elections, Maldives is still settling down with democratic institutions conceptualised by the 2008 Constitution. Maldives has experimented with a mix of US and UK models in the 2008 Constitution. Looking around in the South Asian context, to avoid political instability, it was thought that a presidential form would be apt for the atoll state instead of a parliamentary one. The idea also received immense support from the people through a referendum. At the same time, due to the bitter experience of over three-decade long authoritarian rule under Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, the Constitution makers did not want a president with unlimited powers. Therefore, to give a balance, two other pillars of the government, most particularly the legislature, was empowered to keep a constant check on the presidency. However, going by the operational experience, if the president of the day has super majority in Parliament, the system tends to descend into authoritarianism. This has happened more than once.



Checks and balances are ineffective and mostly bickering. Independence of judiciary, a key component of any constitutional government, is not up to the mark. There is constant interference from either the Executive or the Legislature. At the same time, the Judiciary has failed to assert itself using constitutional provisions, both individually and institutionally. It is pertinent to recall core pronouncement made by the Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct that was adopted by the Maldives way back in 2009: “Judicial independence is a pre-requisite to the rule of law and a fundamental guarantee of a fair trial. A judge shall therefore uphold and exemplify judicial independence in both its individual and institutional aspects.” Significantly, there is also tensions within the judiciary where lower courts and higher courts are not functioning in a harmonious manner as one institution. Financial independence is yet another major issue confronted by the Maldivian judiciary. The work environment of judges is not free from threats and intimidations. Unfortunately, an authoritarian political culture that persisted for decades before 2008 rears its head on and off. Local government system, in practice, is yet to experience decentralisation of political and economic powers as stipulated in the Constitution. This is due to a lack of an adequate legal framework. The most worrying is severe under representation of women both in the political structures and processes.

Notably, people of the country have matured democratically, though political parties and leadership are found wanting. Alliances and counter-alliances and tensions among political parties aimed at power sharing has become order of the day. Decentralization is yet to get rooted firmly in the country. Though there is decentralisation on paper, Councils at every level (island, atoll and city) are not financially, politically and administratively independent. A 2015 amendment to the Decentralisation Act further slashed their autonomy. In this regard, the frustration of President Ibrahim Solih is worth quoting: “What power do the [island] councils have? What choice do the councils have? When the council’s powers are stripped away by a centralized government, isn’t the role of the councils meaningless? This is not how the decentralization policies I know work.” The fact that the country is geographically dispersed, decentralisation should be a natural way of governance. The present Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) government, having majority in the Majlis, can make use of the opportunity to strengthen the local administration. Creditably, 8th Amendment to the Decentralization Act was ratified to financially empower the local bodies by allocating to all councils a percentage of the state budget and a percentage of income generated by the councils themselves. It is also appreciable that one-third of the councillors are reserved for women in the new amendment. However, implementation is key to realising the decentralised democracy, apart from pushing reforms in other domains.

Due to issues in political structures and processes, over the past decade or so, Islamic radicalization has reared its head in this Sunni-majority state. The number of Maldivians drawn towards ISIS and Pakistan-based madrasas and jihadist groups has risen. Protests by Islamists bearing ISIS flags have become common on the island. According to a Government of Maldives report, about 200 Maldivian citizens had reportedly travelled to Syria and fought with the ISIS; double that number did try to sneak out, but were

impeded. In terms of proportion to population, this number is quite high compared to other Muslim-majority Asian countries. Notably, those who returned from Syria indulge in radicalization and recruitment of unemployed youth on behalf of the ISIS through Furqan and Noor mosques. Political uncertainty and socio-economic issues, post the 2004 tsunami, were the main drivers that fuelled Islamic radicalism in the atoll state. Consequently, the country, which is known for its tourist attraction, has been witnessing on-and-off violent attacks in the past decade. First major terror attack took place in 2007 in Malé's Sultan Park resulting in 12 casualties. Dr Afrasheem Ali, a member of parliament, was assassinated in October 2012 for his anti-radicalisation stance. In August 2014, a local al Qaeda affiliate group claimed to have killed Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla, a noted journalist critical of Islamic radicalism in the country. In February 2020, three foreign tourists were attacked on the island of Hulhumalé. In April 2020, the ISIS claimed that it was responsible for the attack on Mahibadhoo harbour. In May 2021, Majlis speaker and former President, Mohamed Nasheed, was attacked and nearly killed, probably to seek revenge on his criticism and personal push for counter measures against Islamic radicalisation in the country. Notably, 17 jihadist organisations were banned in Maldives on the recommendations by the Parliamentary Committee on National Security that fall within the purview of Nasheed as the speaker of *Majlis*.

The Civil society of the Maldives has potential to perform its task, but is stifled by the existing security structures. In the light of about a decade of experience of the present Constitution, certain of its provisions need a revisit. Judiciary should not be partisan and other independent institutions like Election Commission, Judicial Service Commission must be freed from political clutches so that they could function autonomously. There are serious inconsistencies and gaps in the Maldives' legislation that has forced the legal system to rely on pre-2008 laws. Unless these loopholes are plugged, political structures and processes in Maldives will continue to be undemocratic and unstable. On the positive side, irrespective of the domestic situation, the Maldives is constantly engaged with regional and global institutions that promote democracy and human rights. It is one among those countries that have signed and ratified a large number of international treaties, conventions and protocols.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit

1) In what manner the 2008 Constitution of Maldives has paved way for democratization in the country?

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2) What are the various reasons for rise of radicalisation in the Maldives?

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5.4 LET US SUM UP

Two island countries – Sri Lanka and the Maldives – are strategically located in the Indian Ocean just south of Indian peninsula. In terms of political structure, Sri Lanka has a hybrid mix of presidential and parliamentary form, but dominated by a powerful president. In the case of the Maldives, there is a presidential form, but its parliament is more powerful. Notably, in both countries, there is an issue of judicial freedom and free functioning of independent commissions. Decentralization is present in both countries, but their functioning is stifled by a strong central government. Multiple political parties operate in both countries, though dominated by two strong parties. Sri Lanka and the Maldives are known for vibrant civil societies, but restricted in their functioning from time-to-time. Significantly, both countries have been facing radicalisation in some form or the other due to failure of governance.

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5.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISE

Check Your Progress 1

The present political structure of Sri Lanka is provided in its 1978 Constitution. It is a hybrid mix of Presidential and Parliamentary form, with the President wielding enormous executive, legislature and judicial powers. The Prime Minister is like a rubber stamp. Judiciary is structure

in four tiers: Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, High Courts and lower courts. Decentralised administration is taken care by Provincial Councils, Municipal Councils, Urban Councils and PradeshiyaSabhas.

Sri Lanka witnessed radicalism among Sinhala, Sri Lankan Tamil and Muslim youth since 1960s. It was basically due to mismanagement of the existing Sri Lankan political structures and process to address socio-economic and political needs and sentiments of these communities. Majoritarianism, elite domination, ethnic discrimination, and power struggles are some of the reasons that created fissures in the political structures.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The 2008 Constitution of the Maldives was outcome of the democratisation movement during that time. As a result, the Constitution made sure that authoritarianism would not be repeated in the governing structures. Although presidential form of government was adopted, legislature and judiciary were made powerful to keep a check on the presidency. Moreover, several independent institutions were created to act as “balancers”. Multiparty system was permitted for pervasive articulation and aggregation of interests.
- 2) Radicalisation in the Maldives rose mainly because of the failure of the political structures to address the rising aspirations of the youth. Political instability, use of Islam for electoral purposes, youth unemployment, economic downturn, and penetration of jihadist forces also acted as contributing factors.

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UNIT 6: POLITICAL STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES IN AFGHANISTAN, BHUTAN AND NEPAL

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Similarities and Difference between Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal
 - 6.2.1 Bhutan and Nepal
 - 6.2.2 Afghanistan and Nepal
- 6.3 Afghanistan
 - 6.3.1 Geography
 - 6.3.2 The Great Game in Afghanistan
 - 6.3.3 Recent History of Afghanistan
 - 6.3.4 The 'Global War on Terror'
 - 6.3.5 Recent Developments
- 6.4 Bhutan
 - 6.4.1 Geography
 - 6.4.2 Recent History
 - 6.4.3 Political Reform and Modernization
 - 6.4.4 Gross National Happiness Index
 - 6.4.5 Elections in Bhutan
- 6.5 Nepal
 - 6.5.1 Geography
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 - 6.5.3 Contemporary History
 - 6.5.4 Recent Developments
- 6.6 Lets Sum up
- 6.7 References
- 6.8 Answers to Check your Progress Exercises

6.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit will introduce to the political structures and processes of the three land-locked states of South Asia viz. Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal. After going through the Unit you will get to know the following:

- The geographical features of the geopolitical significance of these land-locked states;
- Contemporary political developments in terms of their political processes and structures; and
- Political trends and prospects

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The three countries of Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal are part of South Asia and members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). While Bhutan and Nepal joined the Association when it was established in 1985, Afghanistan was inducted into it in 2007. Bhutan and Nepal are also members of the BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) and BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal) sub-regional groupings. Afghanistan being situated in a different geographical territory is not a member of these groupings.

For a long time, Afghanistan was considered to be a part of Central Asia. Today it is seen to belong both to South and Central Asia and is in fact considered to be a bridge between the two regions. It is seen to be in an important position to provide rail, road and energy connectivity between the two regions.

All the three countries have been deeply influenced by the culture, cuisine, religion, thoughts, ideas, customs and traditions of India as they have been closely associated with the developments in the country over the last several millennia. Nepal is predominantly Hindu, Bhutan predominantly Buddhist, and Afghanistan Muslim though with many ethnically diverse elements. Their political structures are also widely different. Bhutan is a democratic, constitutional monarchy with a population of approximately 700,000. Nepal is a sovereign, inclusive, secular, federal and republican country. The 2015 Constitution states that the country comprises of multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious people living in diversified geographical regions. The population of Nepal is around 2.96 crore. Currently Afghanistan is controlled by the Taliban who have put in place, in early September 2021, a care-taker administration principally comprising of elements of the Taliban and Haqqani network who have been proscribed by the United Nations as well as several governments. They describe their regime as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The approximate population of Afghanistan is 3.7 crore people. Considerable uncertainty and anxiety prevails in the region regarding the future of Afghanistan and its impact on the neighboring countries.

6.2 SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AFGHANISTAN, BHUTAN AND NEPAL

These three countries have huge similarities as also differences amongst them.

6.2.1 Bhutan and Nepal

Firstly between Nepal and Bhutan, both are landlocked countries, both are situated between India and China, both are located in the Himalayas, neither of them was ever occupied by any foreign power, both of them rely heavily on tourism for employment as well as support to their economies, both the countries have entered into consular arrangements with India by which the

citizens of the two countries can travel to each other's territory without visas or passports etc.

There are also huge differences between the two countries. Some of these include the cultural complexion of the two nations which are entirely different. While Nepal shares many cultural affinities with India, Bhutan has predominant Tibetan influences. In addition, Nepal is a predominantly Hindu nation with minority Muslim and Buddhist population while Bhutan has a predominant Buddhist population with a significant Hindu minority. Bhutan continues to be a constitutional monarchy in which the king has bestowed much power and authority to the parliament. The King is the Head of State and executive power is vested in the cabinet headed by a Prime Minister. On the other hand, Nepal was a constitutional monarchy from 1990 till 2008 when it became a Republic after abolishing the monarchy. Today Nepal is a parliamentary democracy. Bhutan is a Buddhist country while Nepal has been secular since 2006. Its State religion used to be Hinduism but that was changed in 2006 when the newly constituted House of Representatives proclaimed the country to be secular leading to the creation of the new secular Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal. Nepal is a much larger country than Bhutan in terms of land area as well as population. Nepal has practically no strictly enforceable environmental policies. It is easy to see large quantities of uncleared trash in cities, towns and villages as well as on trekking trails and on the slopes of mountains. It is only recently that cleanup operations have been put in place. On the contrary, Bhutan has a highly developed and conscientious environmental policy due to which tourists are required to be on strictly controlled tours. Also Bhutan permits only high-end tourists to come to its country and does not promote the backpacking culture that Nepal used to in the '70s and '80s. Bhutan's environment policy ensures that the landscapes are protected and maintained as close to natural as possible, even to the extent of proclaiming that no less than 65% of the country must be natural forests or grassland at all times. Deforestation is only permitted in Bhutan with special permission from the royal government.

6.2.2 Afghanistan and Nepal:

Both Afghanistan and Nepal are mountainous countries situated on the west and east ranges of the Himalayas respectively. While the Himalayas on the Nepalese side acted as a barrier till recently between India and Tibet, on the western side they were never able to stop the invading forces from Greece (Alexander invaded India by crossing the Hindu Kush mountains in 326 BCE) or West Asia. Babar came from the present day Uzbekistan to establish his kingdom in India in 1526 CE. Afghanistan is very richly endowed with mineral and natural resources but has not been able to exploit them due to lack of peace and stability over the last more than 40 years. The take-over by the Taliban in August, 2021 has created further insecurity and instability in Afghanistan and the region. In terms of human development indices, Nepal and Bhutan are much better off than Afghanistan although all of them are included in the category of least developed countries. For instance, life expectancy in Afghanistan is 53 years while in Nepal it is 72 years. The literacy rate in Afghanistan is 43% and in Nepal it is 63.9%.

This pattern is repeated in other indicators also like per capita GDP, level of unemployment, poverty line etc.

All the three countries viz Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal are land-locked, least developed countries.

6.3 AFGHANISTAN:

6.3.1 Geography:

Afghanistan is situated at the cross-roads of Asia. It is often called the ‘‘Heart of Asia.’’ At around 6,52,000 sq km, it is slightly bigger than France but smaller than Myanmar. Afghanistan shares its longest land border (the Durand Line) with Pakistan to the east and south, followed by borders with Tajikistan to the north-east, Iran to the west, Turkmenistan to the north-west, Uzbekistan to the north and China to the north-east. No Afghan government has recognized the Durand line border with Pakistan. India considers the Gilgit-Baltistan area as part of its Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, illegally occupied by Pakistan, and hence justifiably claims that it shares a border with Afghanistan. Afghanistan is mostly mountainous and rugged, with some unusual mountain ridges accompanied by plateaus and river basins. It is dominated by the Hindu Kush range, the western extension of the Himalayas that stretches to eastern Tibet via the Pamir Mountains and Karakoram Mountains in Afghanistan’s far north-east. Most of the highest points are in the east consisting of fertile mountain valleys, often considered part of the «Roof of the World». Despite having numerous rivers and reservoirs, large parts of the country are dry. The Amu Darya rises at the north of the Hindu Kush. To the south and west of the Hindu Kush flow a number of streams that are tributaries of the Indus River such as the Helmand River. One exception is the Kabul River which flows in an easterly direction to the Indus ending at the Indian Ocean. Afghanistan receives heavy snow during the winter in the Hindu Kush and Pamir Mountains, and the melting snow in the spring season enters the rivers, lakes, and streams. However, two-thirds of the country’s water flows into the neighboring countries of Iran, Pakistan, and Turkmenistan. The state needs more than US\$2 billion to rehabilitate its irrigation system. In the past, the Amu Darya discharged into the Aral Sea, but the diversion of river water in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan for agriculture, especially cotton, in the 20th and 21st centuries has contributed to the shrinking of the Aral Sea and ensured that the river no longer reaches its historic terminus.

6.3.2 The Great Game in Afghanistan

The term Great Game was used to describe the rivalry between Great Britain and Russia. Britain tried to retain its sphere of influence in India, Turkestan (located in south of current day Kazakhstan) and Persia. This brought the two powers into conflict in South-Central Asia. The Great Game began in 1830 and lasted throughout the 19th century. The British were concerned about Russian advances in Central Asia. England used Afghanistan as a buffer state to protect all approaches to British India from a Russian invasion. British concern about the Russian influence in Afghanistan led to the First Anglo-Afghan War (from 1838 to 1842) and the Second Anglo-Afghan War (from 1878 to 1880). The Third Anglo-Afghan War began in May 1919 and

lasted for a month. Great Britain no longer had control of Afghanistan's foreign affairs after an armistice was signed on August 8, 1919.

Afghanistan was at an important crossroads, dominated by other civilizations throughout its history. By 522 BCE, Darius the Great extended the boundaries of the Persian Empire into most of the region that is now Afghanistan. By 330 BCE, Alexander conquered Persia and Afghanistan. After centuries of invasions the nation finally began to take shape during the 18th century under the leadership of Ahmad Shah Durrani who extended Afghanistan's borders into India during the 1760s. During the 1860s Russia continued its southeastern advances. At the end of the second Afghan war, a Treaty was signed which committed the Afghan ruler to conduct his foreign relations with advice from British authorities. In return, the British Government promised to assist the Afghan ruler against acts of foreign aggression.

6.3.3 Recent History of Afghanistan:

In 1973, Mohammed Daoud assumed the Presidency of Afghanistan after a military coup. He abolished the monarchy and sent the then ruling King Zahir Shah into exile. In 1974-1978, Opposition to Daoud increased among a large cross-section of Islamic and Communist factions. In April 1978, Daoud was assassinated and replaced by a junta led by Nur Mohammed Taraki/Hafizullah Amin. In Dec 1979 Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan to install a friendly government. From 1980-1989, armed mujahideen groups fought Soviet and government forces. Hundreds of thousands of Afghans got killed in the struggle while millions became refugees. In 1986 President Mohammed Najibullah took charge of office. In 1988 Geneva Accords were signed which outlined a plan for the withdrawal of Soviet troops. In Feb 1989, Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan. From Feb 1989-Apr 1992, there was increased conflict between government and opposition forces. In April 1992, President Najibullah was replaced by a four-member council under a UN plan. In late April 1992, an interim government led by Professor Sibghatollah Mojadidi assumed power. The Mujahadeen, a group already beginning to fracture as warlords fought over the future of Afghanistan, formed a largely Islamic state with professor Burhannudin Rabbani as president. In 1995, the newly formed Islamic militia, the Taliban, rose to power on promises of peace. Most Afghans, exhausted by years of drought, famine and war, approved of the Taliban for upholding traditional Islamic values. The Taliban outlawed cultivation of poppies for the opium trade, cracked down on crime, and curtailed the education and employment of women. Women were required to be fully veiled and were not allowed outside alone. Islamic law was enforced via public executions and amputations. Barring a few countries, the world refused to recognize the authority of the Taliban. In 1995-1999, the continuing drought devastated farmers and made many rural areas uninhabitable. More than 1 million Afghans fled to neighbouring Pakistan, where they languished in squalid refugee camps. In 1997, the Taliban publicly executed Najibullah. Ethnic groups in the north, under Masood's Northern Alliance, and the south, aided in part by Hamid Karzai, continued to battle the Taliban for control of the country. By 2,000 CE, Osama bin Laden was considered an international terrorist. He was widely believed to be hiding in Afghanistan, where he groomed thousands of followers in terrorist training camps. The United States demanded that

bin Laden be extradited to stand trial for his terrorist actions. The Taliban refused. In March 2001, ignoring international protests, the Taliban carried out their threat to destroy Buddhist statues in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, saying they are an affront to Islam. On Sept. 11, 2001, hijackers commandeered four commercial airplanes and crashed them into the World Trade Center Towers in New York, the Pentagon outside Washington, D.C., and a Pennsylvania field, killing thousands. Days later, U.S. officials said bin Laden, the Saudi exile believed to be hiding in Afghanistan, is the prime suspect in the attack.

6.3.4 The ‘Global War on Terror’

This term GWOT is used to describe the American-led global counterterrorism campaign launched as an answer to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. It represented a new phase in global political relations and has had important consequences for security, human rights, international law, cooperation, and governance. It was a multidimensional campaign of almost limitless scope. Its military dimension involved major wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, covert operations in Yemen and elsewhere, large-scale military-assistance programmes for cooperative regimes, and major increases in military spending. Hundreds of captured terrorists or suspects were incarcerated in Guantanamo military prison with no protection of American law. Its diplomatic dimension included continuing efforts to construct and maintain a global coalition of partner states and organizations and an extensive public diplomacy campaign to counter anti-Americanism in the Middle East. Its intelligence dimension comprised institutional reorganization and considerable increases in the funding of America’s intelligence-gathering capabilities, a global programme of capturing terrorist suspects, expanded cooperation with foreign intelligence agencies, and the tracking and interception of terrorist financing. The domestic dimension of the U.S. war on terrorism entailed new antiterrorism legislation, such as the USA PATRIOT Act; new security institutions, such as the Department of Homeland Security and many more. The successes of the first years of the war on terrorism included the arrest of hundreds of terrorist suspects around the world, the prevention of further large-scale terrorist attacks on the American mainland, the toppling of the Taliban regime and subsequent closure of terrorist-training camps in Afghanistan, the capture or elimination of many of al-Qaeda’s senior members, and increased levels of international cooperation in global counterterrorism efforts. However, critics claim that the failures of America’s counterterrorism campaign outweighed its successes. They contended that the war in Afghanistan had effectively scattered the al-Qaeda network, thereby making it even harder to counteract, and that the attacks in Afghanistan and Iraq had increased anti-Americanism among the world’s Muslims, thereby amplifying the message of militant Islam and uniting disparate groups in a common cause. Other critics alleged that the war on terrorism was a contrived smokescreen for the pursuit of a larger U.S. geopolitical agenda that included controlling global oil reserves, increasing defense spending, expanding the country’s international military presence, and countering the strategic challenge posed by various regional powers. By the time of U.S. President George W. Bush’s reelection in 2004, the drawbacks of the war on terrorism had already started becoming apparent. Barack Obama who was elected President in 2008 brought down curtains

on this policy by first resorting to a significant surge in armed personnel in Afghanistan and then announcing that he would withdraw completely from Afghanistan in 2014. Donald Trump slightly increased the number of troops in the Afghan theatre of operations but soon realized the futility of continuing the war and decided in end-2018 to withdraw from Afghanistan. His decision was to a significant extent dictated by his own electoral considerations as Presidential elections were to be held in November, 2020.

6.3.5 Recent Developments:

The Doha Agreement signed between the US government and the Taliban on 29th February, 2020 paved the way for pull out of the US and NATO forces from Afghanistan. The Taliban assumed power on 15th August, 2021 with the then President Ashraf Ghani and his Advisors fled the country for Dubai the previous evening.

The Taliban had promised that once they came to power they would install an inclusive government with representation of all minorities like the Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, Shias etc, would safeguard and protect the rights of women, allow them to work, allow girls to go to school and not allow its territory to be used for terror attacks against Afghanistan's neighbours and beyond. The Taliban has failed to fulfill any of its commitments. A large number of international and regional Conferences have been held. All of them have reiterated the same demands. There is a huge humanitarian crisis of shortage of food and essential medical supplies. Many countries have offered immediate help. India has offered 50,000 tonnes of wheat but Pakistan has been creating obstacles in its direct delivery to Afghanistan. India has also provided emergency medical support by air.

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer
ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the Unit

Check Your Progress 1.

- 8) Describe the 'Great Game' in Afghanistan.

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- 9) Discuss the US-led 'Global War on Terror' in Afghanistan.

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6.4 BHUTAN

6.4.1 Geography

Bhutan is on the southern slopes of the eastern Himalayas, landlocked between the Tibet Autonomous Region of China to the north and the Indian states of Sikkim, West Bengal, Assam to west and south and the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh to the east.

The land consists mostly of steep and high mountains crisscrossed by a network of swift rivers that form deep valleys before draining into the Indian plains. Elevation rises from 200m in the southern foothills to more than 7,000m in the north. This great geographical diversity combined with equally diverse climate conditions contributes to Bhutan's outstanding range of biodiversity and ecosystems.

Bhutan's northern region consists of an arc of Eastern Himalayan alpine shrub and meadows reaching up to glaciated mountain peaks with an extremely cold climate at the highest elevations. Watered by snow-fed rivers, alpine valleys in this region provide pasture for livestock, tended by a sparse population of migratory shepherds.

The Black Mountains in Bhutan's central region form a watershed between two major river systems: the Mo Chhu and the Drangme Chhu. Fast-flowing rivers have carved out deep gorges in the lower mountain areas. The forests of the central Bhutan mountains consist of Eastern Himalayan sub-alpine conifer forests in higher elevations and Eastern Himalayan broadleaf forests in lower elevations. Woodlands of the central region provide most of Bhutan's forest production. The Torsa, Raidak, Sankosh, and Manas are Bhutan's main rivers, flowing through this region. Most of the population lives in the central highlands.

In the south, the Shiwalik Hills are covered with dense Himalayan subtropical broadleaf forests, alluvial lowland river valleys, and mountains up to around 1,500m above sea level. The foothills descend into the subtropical Duars Plain, which is the eponymous gateway to strategic mountain passes also known as dwars or dooars. Most of the duars lie in India, but a 10 to 15 km-wide strip extends into Bhutan.

6.4.2 Recent History

In the 18th century, the Bhutanese invaded and occupied the kingdom of Koch Bihar. In 1772, the Maharaja of Koch Bihar appealed to the British East India Company which assisted by ousting the Bhutanese and later in attacking Bhutan itself in 1774. A peace treaty was signed in which Bhutan agreed to retreat to its pre-1730 borders. However, the peace was tenuous, and border skirmishes with the British were to continue for the next hundred years. The skirmishes eventually led to the Duar War (1864–65), a confrontation for control of the Bengal Duars. After Bhutan lost the war, the Treaty of Sinchula was signed between British India and Bhutan. As part of the war reparations, the Duars were ceded to the British Indian authorities in exchange for a rent of Rs. 50,000. The treaty ended all hostilities between British India and Bhutan.

In 1907, Ugyen Wangchuck was unanimously chosen as the hereditary king of the country by the Council of Ministers comprising of leading Buddhist monks, government officials, and heads of important families. The British government promptly recognized the new monarchy, and in 1910 Bhutan signed the Treaty of Punakha, a subsidiary alliance which gave the British control of Bhutan's foreign affairs and meant that Bhutan was treated as an Indian princely state. This had little real effect, given Bhutan's historical reticence, and also did not appear to affect Bhutan's traditional relations with Tibet. After the new Union of India gained independence from Great

Britain on 15 August 1947, Bhutan became one of the first countries to recognize India's independence. On 8 August 1949, a treaty similar to that of 1910, in which Britain had gained power over Bhutan's foreign relations, was signed with the newly independent India.

In 1953, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck established the country's legislature – a 130-member National Assembly – to promote a more democratic form of governance. In 1965, he set up a Royal Advisory Council, and in 1968 he formed a Cabinet. In 1971, Bhutan was admitted to the United Nations, having held observer status for three years. In July 1972, Jigme Singye Wangchuck ascended to the throne at the age of sixteen after the death of his father Dorji Wangchuck.

In 1988 Bhutan conducted a census in southern Bhutan to guard against illegal immigration, a constant threat in the south where borders with India are porous. Previously issued citizenship cards were no longer accepted as proof of citizenship. Alarmed by these measures, many began to protest for civil and cultural rights, and demanded a total change to be brought to the political system that existed since 1907. As protests and related violence swept across southern Bhutan, the government in turn increased its resistance. People present at protests were labeled “anti-national terrorists”. After the demonstrations, the Bhutanese army and police began the task of identifying participants and supporters engaged in the violence against the state and people. They were arrested and held for months without trial. Soon the Bhutanese government arbitrarily reported that its census operations had detected the presence in southern Bhutan of over 100,000 “illegal immigrants.” This number is often debated. The census operations, thus, was used as a tool for the identification, eviction and banishment of dissidents who were involved in the uprising against the state. Military and other security forces were deployed for forceful deportations of between 80,000 - 100, 000 Lhotshampas (a heterogeneous Bhutanese people of Nepalese descent) accused of using widespread violence, torture, rape and killing. The evicted Lhotshampas became refugees in camps in southern Nepal. Since 2008, many Western countries, such as Canada, Norway, the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States, have allowed resettlement of majority of the Lhotshampa refugees.

6.4.3 Political Reform and Modernization:

Bhutan's political system has recently changed from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck transferred most of his administrative powers to the Council of Cabinet Ministers and allowed for impeachment of the King by a two-thirds majority of the National Assembly.

In 1999, the government lifted a ban on television and internet, making Bhutan one of the last countries to introduce television. In his speech, the King said that television was a critical step to the modernization of Bhutan as well as a major contributor to the country's gross national happiness, but warned that the “misuse” of this new technology could erode traditional Bhutanese values.

A new constitution was presented in early 2005. In December 2005, King Wangchuck announced that he would abdicate the throne in his son's favour

in 2008. On 9 December 2006, he announced that he would be abdicating immediately. This was followed by the first national parliamentary elections in December 2007 and March 2008.

On 6 November 2008, 28-year-old Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck was crowned king.

6.4.4 Gross National Happiness Index:

It is a philosophy that guides the government of Bhutan to measure the collective happiness and well-being of a population. Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index is instituted as the goal of the government of Bhutan in the Constitution of Bhutan, enacted on 18 July 2008.

The idea of GNH was initiated by the 4th King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuk by saying that it is more important than the Gross Domestic Product. The concept implies that sustainable development should take a holistic approach towards notions of progress and give equal importance to non-economic aspects of wellbeing. In 2011, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution “Happiness: towards a holistic approach to development” urging member nations to follow the example of Bhutan and measure happiness and well-being and calling happiness a “fundamental human goal.”

In 2012, Bhutan’s Prime Minister Jigme Thinley and the Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon of the United Nations convened the High Level Meeting: Well-being and Happiness: Defining a New Economic Paradigm to encourage the spread of Bhutan’s GNH philosophy. At the High Level meeting, the first World Happiness Report was issued. Shortly afterward, 20th March was declared to be International Day of Happiness by the UN in 2012.

GNH is distinguishable from Gross Domestic Product by valuing collective happiness as the goal of governance, by emphasizing harmony with nature and traditional values as expressed in the 9 domains of happiness and 4 pillars of GNH. According to the Bhutanese government, the four pillars of GNH are:

1. sustainable and equitable socio-economic development;
2. environmental conservation;
3. preservation and promotion of culture; and
4. good governance.

The nine domains of GNH are psychological well-being, health, time use, education, cultural diversity and resilience, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and resilience, and living standards.

6.4.5 Elections in Bhutan:

Bhutan has a national bicameral parliamentary legislature. The National Assembly of Bhutan is the lower house of Parliament and has 47 members. The maximum number of seats at any time is 55, with each member representing a single-seat constituency. Between 2008 and 2013, 45 seats were won by the ruling Bhutan Peace and Prosperity Party (DPT) and 2 were taken by the opposition People’s Democratic Party (PDP).

The National Council of Bhutan, the upper house of Parliament, has 20 nonpartisan members popularly elected by each dzongkhag and 5 members

appointed by the King of Bhutan. The National Council was first elected on 31 December 2007.

Prior to 2007, Bhutan had a unicameral national parliament known as the Tshogdu. Parliament became bicameral under the Constitution of Kingdom of Bhutan 2008 and with the kingdom's first National Assembly election the same year. The most recent National Assembly elections were held in 2018. The ruling People's Democratic Party of former Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay came third in the first round of voting, unexpectedly failing to advance to the second round and resulting in it losing all 32 seats. The second round was a contest between the Druk Phuensum Tshogpa, the only other party with parliamentary representation, and the unrepresented Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa, which received the most votes in the first round. In the second round, Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa garnered 31.85% of the votes cast and won 30 out of the 47 seats. The other Party Druk Phuensum Tshogpa won 30.92% of the votes and the rest of the 17 seats in the Assembly. Lotay Tshering, leader of DNT became the new Prime Minister. The elections registered a 71.5% turnout of the voters. This is strong evidence that democracy in Bhutan is developing strong roots.

The victory of the DNT showed that the 2018 elections were primarily a vote for change as was the case with the earlier elections. Thus far, in the three National Assembly elections held since 2008, the Bhutanese people chose three different parties to form the governments. In the 2013-elections, the voters had chosen the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) over the incumbent DPT in the second round, with support from DNT. However, in 2018, the same ruling party (PDP) was unable to even qualify for the second round, being relegated to the third position with 27.2% of the votes in the primary round in September 2018.

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer
ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the Unit

Check Your Progress 2.

- 10) Discuss and describe the process of political evolution in Bhutan and its progress towards democracy.

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- 11) Describe the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH)?

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6.5 NEPAL

6.5.1 Geography

Nepal is roughly the shape of a trapezoid, about 800 kms long and 200 kms wide, with an area of 148,000 sq km.

Mount Everest, the highest peak on earth, lies on the Nepal–China border.

Nepal is divided into three principal physiographic belts known as Himal–Pahad–Terai. Himal is the mountain region containing snow and situated in the Great Himalayan Range; it makes up the northern part of Nepal. It contains the highest elevations in the world including 8,848.86m high Mount Everest on the border with China. Seven other of the world’s “eight-thousanders” are in Nepal or on its border with Tibet: Lhotse, Makalu, Cho Oyu, Kangchenjunga, Dhaulagiri, Annapurna and Manaslu. Pahad is the mountain region that does not generally contain snow. The mountains vary from 800m to 4,000m in altitude, with progression from subtropical climates below 1,200m to alpine climates above 3,600m. The Lower Himalayan Range, reaching 1,500 to 3,000m is the southern limit of this region, with subtropical river valleys and “hills” alternating to the north of this range. Population density is high in valleys but notably less above 2,000m and very low above 2,500m where snow occasionally falls in winter. The southern lowland plains or Terai bordering India are part of the northern rim of the Indo-Gangetic Plain. Terai is the lowland region containing some hill ranges. The plains were formed and are fed by three major Himalayan rivers: the Kosi, the Narayani, and the Karnali as well as smaller rivers rising below the permanent snowline. This region has a subtropical to tropical climate. The outermost range of the foothills called Shivalik Hills or Churia Range, cresting at 700 to 1,000m, marks the limits of the Gangetic Plain. The Indian plate continues to move north relative to Asia at about 50mm per year. This makes Nepal an earthquake prone-zone, and periodic earthquakes that have devastating consequences present a significant hurdle to development. Erosion of the Himalayas is a very important source of sediment, which flows to the Indian Ocean. Saptakoshi, in particular, carries a huge amount of silt out of Nepal but sees extreme drop in gradient in Bihar, causing severe floods and course changes, and is, therefore, known as the ‘sorrow of Bihar’. Severe flooding and landslides cause deaths and disease, destroy farmlands and cripple the transport infrastructure of the country, during the monsoon season each year.

6.5.2 Recent History:

In the mid-18th century, Prithvi Narayan Shah, a Gorkha king, set out to put together what would become present-day Nepal. He embarked on his mission by securing the neutrality of the bordering mountain kingdoms. After several bloody battles and sieges, notably the Battle of Kirtipur, he managed to conquer the Kathmandu Valley in 1769.

The Gorkha control reached its height when the Kumaon and Garhwal Kingdoms in the west to Sikkim in the east came under Nepalese control. A dispute with Tibet over the control of mountain passes and inner Tingri valleys of Tibet prompted the Qing Emperor of China to start the Sino-Nepali War compelling the Nepalese to retreat to their own borders in the north. The rivalry between the Kingdom of Nepal and the East India Company over the control of states bordering Nepal eventually led to the Anglo-Nepali War (1815–16). At first, the British underestimated the Nepali and were soundly defeated until committing more military resources than they had anticipated needing. Thus began the reputation of Gurkhas as fierce and

ruthless soldiers. The war ended in the Sugauli Treaty, under which Nepal ceded recently captured lands.

Factionalism inside the royal family led to a period of instability. In 1846, a plot was discovered revealing that the reigning queen had planned to overthrow Jung Bahadur Kunwar, a fast-rising military leader. This led to the Kot massacre; armed clashes between military personnel and administrators loyal to the queen led to the execution of several hundred princes and chieftains around the country. Bir Narsingh Kunwar emerged victorious and founded the Rana dynasty, and came to be known as Jung Bahadur Rana. The king was made a titular figure, and the post of Prime Minister was made powerful and hereditary. The Ranas were staunchly pro-British and assisted them during the First War of Indian Independence of 1857 (and later in both World Wars). In 1860 some parts of the western Terai region were gifted to Nepal by the British (known as Naya Muluk, 'new country') as a friendly gesture because of its military help to sustain British control in India during the rebellion. In 1923, the United Kingdom and Nepal formally signed an agreement of friendship that superseded the Sugauli Treaty of 1816.

The Hindu practice of Sati, in which a widow sacrificed herself in the funeral pyre of her husband, was banned in 1919, and slavery was officially abolished in 1924. The Rana rule was marked by tyranny, debauchery, economic exploitation and religious persecution.

6.5.3 Contemporary History:

In the late 1940s, newly emerging pro-democracy movements and political parties in Nepal were critical of the Rana autocracy. Following the success of Indian Independence Movement which Nepalese activists had taken part in, with India's support and cooperation of King Tribhuvan, Nepali Congress was successful in toppling the Rana regime, establishing a parliamentary democracy. After a decade of power wrangling between the king and the government, King Mahendra (1955–1972) scrapped the democratic experiment in 1960, and a "partyless" Panchayat system was made to govern Nepal. The political parties were banned and politicians imprisoned or exiled. The Panchayat rule modernised the country, introducing reforms and developing infrastructure, but curtailed liberties and imposed heavy censorship. In 1990, the People's Movement forced King Birendra (1972–2001) to accept constitutional reforms and to establish a multiparty democracy.

In 1996, the Maoist Party started a violent bid to replace the royal parliamentary system with a people's republic. This led to the long Nepali Civil War and more than 16,000 deaths. With the death of both the King and the Crown Prince in a massacre in the royal palace, King Birendra's brother Gyanendra inherited the throne in 2001 and subsequently assumed full executive powers aiming to quash the Maoist insurgency himself.

The Maoist Party joined mainstream politics following the success of the peaceful democratic revolution of 2006; Nepal became a secular state, and on 28 May 2008, it was declared a Federal Republic, ending its time-honoured status as the world's only Hindu Kingdom. After a decade of instability and internal strife which saw two constituent assembly elections, the new

constitution was promulgated on 20 September 2015, making Nepal a federal democratic republic divided into seven provinces.

6.5.4 Recent Developments:

Nepalese prime minister K.P. Sharma Oli of the United Marxist Leninist (UML) Party won a landslide victory in the 2017 elections held on the basis of a new Nepali constitution. But his government was from the beginning plagued by uncertainties due to a power struggle between him and former Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal, also known as Prachanda. The recent uncertainty was sparked by Oli being unable to secure the confidence of the Nepalese parliament. The opposition parties, the Nepali Congress (NC) and the NCP (Maoist Centre), voted against him, and others belonging to the Madhav Nepal faction of the UML and a faction of the Terai-based Janata Samajwadi Party (JSP) absented themselves during the vote.

Though Oli lost the confidence vote, the opposition parties, the NC and the NCP (Maoist Centre) were unable to muster the requisite numbers to form a government immediately, with the JSP divided. Given this, Bhandari again appointed Oli prime minister in his capacity as the leader of the single-largest party in Parliament in accordance with the constitution. Instead of seeking a fresh vote of confidence, Oli recommended to the president that another provision of the constitution be invoked, that is to identify a member of parliament who could gain majority support and form a government. The Nepali opposition mustered 149 signatures, a comfortable majority, with Deuba staking claim for leadership. But Oli too staked claim, stating that he had the support of 153 MPs. The president on her part decided to reject both applications and on the advice of the Oli Cabinet, dissolved the House late on 21 May with fresh elections scheduled for November 2021. The Supreme Court of Nepal, in yet another landmark verdict, overturned Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli's May 21 decision to dissolve the House of Representatives and ordered immediate appointment of Sher Bahadur Deuba, Nepali Congress president, as prime minister. The five-member Constitutional Bench said that Oli's claim to the post of prime minister as per Article 76 (5) was unconstitutional. Reinstating the House yet again—the court had restored the House earlier on February 23 after Oli dissolved it on December 20—the bench has ordered to make arrangements for holding the House meeting by July 18. This verdict ended months of political turbulence in the country.

India has refrained to come out with a strong public statement on developments in Nepal, despite the instability in the close neighbour, as it does not wish to be seen as interfering in the internal affairs of that country as China has been. All through the recent periods of the political tug of war, India maintained a low profile, focusing on humanitarian and development activities such as building schools and hospitals and donating covid-19 medicines to the Nepalese army. India said “As a neighbour and friend, India remains unwavering in its support for Nepal and its people on their journey toward progress, peace, stability and development.”

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer

ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the Unit

Check Your Progress 3.

**Political Structures and
Processes in Afghanistan,
Bhutan and Nepal**

- 12) Discuss the process of democratisation in Nepal.

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- 13) Write a note on the geographic features of Nepal.

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