

South Asia and the Fourth Wave of Democracy

By

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The Third Wave of Democracyⁱ swept through South Asia accompanied with apprehensions and anticipation about how democracy would treat South Asia and how South Asia would treat democracy. This exciting interaction led to helpful answers and new questions regarding the prospects of democracy in the developing countries. South Asia's reactions to the third wave and consequent developments can provide an insight into the design of the distinctive democratic models emerging across the globe. The third wave was characterised by five forms of regime change, three of which have been witnessed in South Asia. The relevant forms of regime change include:

1. Cyclical- alteration between democracy and authoritarianism
2. Second-Try Pattern: Weak democracy gives way to authoritarianism which is replaced by stronger democracy
3. Interrupted Democracy: Temporary suspension of democratic system and then its resumption

Without exception, all countries of the South Asia regionⁱⁱ have demonstrated one of the above patterns during their political evolution. The commonality running through these patterns has been a matter of grave regional and international concern: the lack of sustainable democracy in South Asia. Authoritarianism makes an unfortunate return at regular intervals in most of the regional states. Political reforms during the present decade

show encouraging signs of greater democratisation among the South Asian states. The trials and tribulations of the past experiments and the present challenges reveal certain interesting characteristics of the regional democratic endeavour. The uniqueness of the 'attempts at democracy' in South Asia is not only an analytical challenge but also a rare lesson in the consistent desire for democracy despite recurring failure. Perhaps the developments in South Asia mark the beginning of the fourth wave of democracy: trial and error democracy to evolve appropriate variants of Western liberal democracy. This wave is inspired by the failure to duplicate the popular tenets of Western democracies, the attempts to align demands of identity and freedom in new democracies, proper balance of state guidance and individual freedom and a process which while maintaining the distinctiveness of various ethnic, religious and cultural diversities successfully undertakes the nation-building endeavour.

Political developments in each of the eight states are specimens for comprehending the future of the fourth wave. The present discussion is not expected to be a historical narrative of democratic experiments in South Asia. It is an attempt to understand the democratic innovativeness, in response to national demands, and its consequent impact on the nature of the political systems in South Asia.

Afghanistan

The current phase of democratic transition in Afghanistan was inaugurated with the Bonn Conference of 2001, where the Afghan representatives met to create a transitional framework for governance. The Afghan Constitution Commission established under the Bonn Agreement, using the 1964 Constitution as the basis, drafted a new Constitution which was accepted by the loya jirga (Grand Council) in 2004. Afghanistan thus emerged as an Islamic State under a Presidential system of government. With Hamid Karzai's landslide victory in the October 2004 Presidential elections, the first 'democratic' government of the decade took office in Afghanistan. In the next five years the government was expected to strengthen democratic practices and institutions, undertake

tasks of economic reconstruction and align the socio-cultural system to the new democratic norms. The international community has been actively involved in the democratisation efforts of Afghanistan through Operation Enduring Freedom, International Security Assistance Force, Provincial Reconstruction Teams, USAID's Democracy and Governance Programme, Afghanistan National Development Strategy.

Sovereignty- external and internal- is one of the primary qualifications of modern democracies. Internal sovereignty implies the ability of the national government to make and implement laws for addressing the popular demands and serving national interest. External sovereignty is the recognition of the equal international rights and obligations of a state. Sovereignty, as a dimension of democracy, is being uniquely exercised in the context of Afghanistan. In receiving strategic, economic and political assistance from the international community, especially the United States, the sovereign authority of the Afghan government is expected to be restricted. General analysis would interpret the situation as pseudo-democratic, given the dominating role of the external forces in running the Afghan government. But in keeping with the trend of innovation underway in the region, Afghanistan has devised its own a unique form of political operations where indigenous and international concerns are balanced according to national needs. The government of Afghanistan takes cognizance of international pressures or traditional sensitivities, depending of the relative worth of each in a given situation. Neither are national sentiments made complete hostage to extra-national forces, nor is the limited, but emerging, political maturity of the Afghan population allowed to ride roughshod over important national decisions.

The Presidential elections in Afghanistan in 2004 were driven by the need of the Bush Administration to score a tangible victory in the War on Terror, strengthening George W. Bush's Presidential Campaign for the second term. In accepting the U.S. determined election schedule, the Afghan government in no way offended domestic public opinion, as the latter was not adequately equipped for the task. Afghanistan has extended willing cooperation to various international efforts aimed at countering the strategic challenges confronting the nation. These include the DDR Programme - Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of the illegal militias; the DIAG - Disbandment of

Illegal Armed Groups, among others. On issues of economic reconstruction the Government works in consultation with the Afghan Reconstruction Group, a 15 member advisory group at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul. On issues ranging from narcotics control to Afghanistan National Army's operations with the 'Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams', Afghanistan has demonstrated enthusiastic cooperation and focused learning. The Afghan government has fully cooperated with the international community in efforts to realize the goal of democratic stability for the country.

The close monitoring and guidance by the international community has not led to the surrender of sovereign authority by the National government of Afghanistan. The Constitution declares Afghanistan to be an Islamic State, notwithstanding the U.S. reservations over the influence of Islamic ideology on political affairs. Inclusion of terms like 'rightful jihad' in the Constitution, acceptance of Islam as a State religion, provisions like "In Afghanistan, no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam" (Chapter 1, Article 3), the commitment of the members of the judicial system to support justice and righteousness in accordance with the provisions of the sacred religion of Islam and the provisions of the Constitution; clearly demonstrate the primacy of national aspirations over international reservations in drafting the Constitution of Afghanistan. The current Parliament, elected in 2005, includes former mujahedeen, Taliban members, communists, reformists, and Islamic fundamentalists.

Hamid Karzai, the President of Afghanistan has shown numerous signs of independent thinking leading to critical evaluation of international efforts. At the World Economic Forum in 2008, he candidly stated that the situation in Helmand deteriorated after the Afghan governor was replaced with British forces; In August 2008, President Karzai urged the Western States to change their strategy in the War on Terror and target extremist hideouts in Pakistan; the most vocal and recent demonstration of Afghan national authority was the statement by the government of Afghanistan to re-negotiate the terms of foreign forces in the country, after more than 90 civilians were allegedly killed in a bombing operation by the U.S. System of checks and balances appears to be operating impressively in Afghanistan, since the Parliament forced President Karzai to oust several major conservatives from the Supreme Court in favour of those with more

experience in modern jurisprudence. Thus the influence of Islamic philosophy on national politics is regulated by the national rather than international pressures.

Afghanistan perhaps, provides the best example of balancing international pressures, while adequately responding to national concerns. Afghanistan has successfully demonstrated how the processes of nation building can go hand in hand with international image building despite all obstacles. There is no claim to a new 'ism' or ideology, but simply the calculated balancing of national and international pressures, with minimum offence to either. *Afghanistan's contribution to the fourth wave is the juxtaposition of domestic opinion with international pressures for the purpose of serving national interest.* The technique of Afghanistan in this regard cannot be replicated elsewhere, since the demands confronting Afghanistan are different, but the statement of purpose can indeed serve as a model of inspiration. Sovereignty of Afghanistan is tailored to suit the national circumstances (which in turn can be imbibed by other third world countries) and does not necessarily confirm to the Western exposition of sovereignty.

Bangladesh

In the eight Parliamentary elections since its emergence in 1971, Bangladesh has witnessed one election in the current decade. In 2001, a coalition government led by Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) assumed political authority and governed, as expected till 2006. Since 2007 Bangladesh is being run by a Caretaker Government (CG) backed by the military. The country is currently under a declared state of emergency awaiting political reforms for free and fair elections to take place.

Political discipline, with accepted rules for voicing dissent holds the Western democracies together. Rules for elections, voting, campaigning, political opposition, judicial intervention are elaborated in the Constitution and are sacrosanctly followed in practice. For the new democracies in the third world, transition of political authority is

usually an agitated process. Politically motivated constitutional amendments and interpretations disallow the natural flow of political authority between elections. Bangladesh, like many third world countries, has for long been a victim of this 'democratic anomaly'. Rather than living with this anomaly and another era of flawed political verdicts, Bangladesh opted for a tedious process of reforms.

In an anti-corruption crackdown many political leaders were detained indefinitely, without trials by the CG. Deprivation of such rights is viewed as a challenge to the country's democratic polity, but the fact remains that Bangladesh has been rated as the third most corrupt country in the world. In dealing with corruption of such magnitude, extreme measures are required. The political leadership has created several legal loopholes to escape conviction and consequently the CG has resorted to such severe measures. Suspension of the freedoms of assembly and association has been widely criticized, but these freedoms have thus far only resulted in unruly mass rallies, street demonstrations and hartals. Democratic freedoms are designed to enlarge the arena for expression for the common public, but suspension of such freedoms is acceptable when the rules of engagement in the public arena are continuously flouted. Even the most advanced democratic nations, regulate public freedoms during times of national emergencies; Bangladesh's example should be viewed as a similar display of political discretion for checking the degeneration of democracy into mobocracy. The new Elections Commission (EC), entrusted with the task of electoral reforms, is largely non-partisan, but is allegedly under the influence of the army. Despite such criticisms the efforts of the EC are showing encouraging signs. The Representation of the People Ordinance 2008, approved by the Bangladesh cabinet has certain interesting features: provision of a 'no vote', bar on officials on contesting polls three years inside retirement, mandatory election fund accounts and determination of individual election expenditure. The proposals of the EC are expected to result in necessary internal reforms for the political parties for seeking to qualify for the general elections.

Certain decisions of the CG can be characterised as authoritarian, but the political parties have demonstrated similar traits of authoritarianism when in power. The underlying difference is the apparent motive; the political parties resorted to authoritarian measures

to strengthen its power and weaken the opposition, while the CG is doing so for reforming the national political process. The anti-hoarding policy of the government, attempts to check price rise and the onslaught on the Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) militants demonstrates the commitment of the CG at genuine reforms.

The initiation of these reforms by a military backed CG is expected to arouse suspicions, but the lack of political discipline in the country made it a necessity. Formal democracy characterized by political corruption, violent opposition, and disrespect for constitutional rule by the party in power, has for long been the form of government in Bangladesh. The CG along with the military has initiated a process for disciplining the political forces and creating a flexible, yet sustainable, system for regular transition of political authority in Bangladesh. *Bangladesh's contribution to the fourth wave of democracy is the insistence that temporary aberration of democracy is better than the continuation of a crisis ridden political system.* The military did not wrestle authority from the deserving representatives of the people; the conditions of political decay made way for tough decision-making, a task best performed by the military backed CG in Bangladesh.

Bhutan

The transition from hereditary to constitutional monarchy under a parliamentary system has been the single most quintessential development in the history of Bhutan. From King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's declaration of holding democratic elections in Bhutan in 2005 to the actual conduct of elections in 2008, Bhutan witnessed the smoothest democratic transitions in recent world history. The King of Bhutan continues to reign, while sovereign authority is vested in the elected representatives of the people.

Western democracies place premium on the efforts to create a single national identity out the multifarious sub-national identities in the country. Democracy in Bhutan is an example of political freedom with cultural governance. The democratic experiment is

designed to in no way hamper the cultural identity, so dear to the Bhutanese people. The State rather than relinquishing, assumes the guardianship for nurturing the culture of Bhutan. The State of Bhutan seeks to undertake the task of democratic nation-building by exploring the cultural connectivity among the people.

The culturally guided democracy in Bhutan displays certain interesting features: smoking is banned in the country, eligibility criteria for candidates to contest the Parliamentary elections is possession of university degree; 'Driglam namzha'ⁱⁱⁱ, the Royal edict to enforce the "One Nation one People" policy is still in place. The elections have thrown to the fore even more surprises: Bhutan People United Party led by Sigay Dorje, was disqualified on the ground that the party was not led by credible leadership and 80% of its members are school dropouts; attempts at creating regional and sectarian discord through political campaigning in the run-up to the elections was severely checked by the Election Commission, the opposition occupies merely two seats in 47 members Parliament. The accepted norms of representative democracy can conveniently brush aside Bhutan as a 'fake democracy'. But Bhutan has its own reasons for adopting democracy in its current manifestation. In keeping with the sentiment of the 'Last Shangri La', the cultural traditions are tirelessly preserved by the people of Bhutan. In countering the scepticism of the population with regard to democratic transition, the King has wisely allowed the cultural traditions to continue to dominate public life. The blurring of a distinct identity as a pre-condition of successful democracy is rejected by Bhutan. In the midst of this political transition, the people of Bhutan are allowed to find strength and reassert their identity through their cultural allegiance.

The primacy of a single cultural tradition can be viewed as the negation of Western democratic principles, but Bhutan's democracy is erecting its foundations on the strongest pillar of Bhutanese society: cultural linkages.^{iv} Democracy is an attempt to empower the people, which can be realized while asserting their traditional moorings, even if these involve prominence of a single cultural pattern. Bhutan's democratic experiment has demonstrated that creation of a 'melting pot' does not necessarily translate into better democratic governance. *Bhutan's contribution of the fourth wave of democratization is the realisation that democracy is essentially not the abandonment of*

the sub-national identities. Democratic freedoms can be realized under conditions of cultural supervision.

India

The current decade in India opened with a non-Congress Coalition government in power, the first such combination to complete a full term in office. The 2004 general elections surprisingly resulted in Congress securing the largest number of Parliamentary seats. United Progressive Alliance, led by the Congress Party assumed power in 2004. For the first time in the nation's history the Communists were able to secure 43 seats in the Parliament and became a member of the ruling coalition at the centre.^v With general elections due in 2009, India appears poised for making another successful democratic transition of political authority.

If democracy is defined as the ability of the common people to express multiple views and the enjoyment of genuine freedoms, India stands to score impressively, given the diversity of population and recentness of the democratic process in the country. The democratic experiment in India is viewed as a successful model of the Westminster system of government in a Third World country. In the transition from one-party dominance to coalition politics, democracy in India has demonstrated resilience and stability.

India has been able to make the difficult transition from formal to real democracy. Governance through popular representation, multi-party system, freedom of press, judicial independence, institutional system of checks and balances are the characteristics of formal democracy, which operate with relative success in India. It is the expression of popular concern, avenues to voice complaints against the authorities, co-existence of multiple identities which accounts for the real successes of democracy in the country. More appropriately, India has made the transition from democratic polity to democratic society. The democratic functioning is far from perfect, but the imperfections are not brushed under the carpet, but opportunity for expression and reconciliation is widely

available. Several recent events exemplify this sentiment. The refusal of footballer Baichung Bhutia to carry the Olympic torch through the Capital in protest against the crackdown by the Chinese authorities in Tibet; the intervention of Supreme Court, in response to popular protests, to disallow Clemenceau, a French ship laden with asbestos from entering the Indian waters; the appointment and ensuing discussions of the Sachar Committee report on the status of Muslims in India, the primacy of dialogue and dissent have characterised the democratic process in India. India has demonstrated that democracy does not entail absence of disagreements and homogenisation, but involves articulation of disagreements and co-existence of diversity.

The demands for minority reservation, women's representation in the legislative bodies, popular protests on issues ranging from special economic zones to dam constructions, appreciation and criticism of judicial activism, the vitality of democracy in India is remarkable. *India's contribution to the fourth wave is the assertion that despite the absence of the socio-economic adherents considered so vital to Western democracies, third world countries can emerge as successful democratic models.* Democracy in India has evolved to manage multiple challenges like lack of economic development, socio-regional diversities, poverty, illiteracy, existence of separatist groups. India's record in attending to the pre-conditions of democracy may be flawed, but India has certainly countered the popular arguments regarding the doom of democracy as a model of governance in the developing or under-developed countries.

Nepal

From King Gyanendra's dissolution of the National Assembly and imposition of emergency, citing the inability of the political parties to deal with Maoist insurgency to the termination of the institution of Monarchy in Nepal by the combined efforts of the political forces and Maoists in 2008, Nepal was undergone the most unexpected political transformation of the current century. The ushering in of a new era of democracy in Nepal not only witnessed the abolition of the 250 year old institution of Monarchy, but

also allowed the former guerrilla group, Nepali Maoists, to join and head the new Government.

No Western democracy has thus far attempted to restructure the traditional lines of political authority in the manner that Nepal has done. Western democracies aspire to thrive on the continuity to their political institutions and rarely appreciate a break in political traditions. Armed opposition against political authority is considered highly undemocratic and such groups rarely, if ever, join the political mainstream.^{vi} The democratic experiment in Nepal, if successful, will be the best example of democratic evolution by involving the separatist forces.

The disparate political groups of Nepal joined hands with the separatist Maoist forces in a bid to challenge the greater evil: Monarchy. The occasional disagreements notwithstanding, through this endeavour, Nepal has come to redefine the basics of political competition in an attempt to restore democracy. The peace monitoring process by the United Nations, including the arms management of the People's Liberation Army proved largely successful. The victory of the Maoists in winning the maximum number of seats in the Constituent Assembly reflects the popular support for the induction of the Maoists into the political mainstream. On the other hand, the top leadership of parties like Nepali Congress and CPN-UML failed to win the elections reflecting the desire of the people for change, a primary qualification for a viable democracy. The current political process is also expected to impact the highly feudal society of Nepal, thereby making political revolution an instrument of social transformation. The insistence of the Maoists on re-negotiating the India-Nepal Treaty of 1950, visit by Prachanda, the P.M. of Nepal to China and the upcoming visit to India, efforts at de-politicisation of the education sector in the country, The Judicial Council's circular to judges to submit their property details reflects the pursuance of the cause of national interests by the new leadership of Nepal.

Nepal is currently under the process of drafting a new constitution for providing wider democratic freedoms to the people. *Nepal's contribution to the fourth wave of democracy is the recognition that a break from traditional political systems and proper involvement*

of dissident sections within the political mainstream can enhance the quality of democratic governance. Political transformations cannot always be accomplished through constitutional amendments; constitutional evolution can also imply a new constitutional framework to respond to unexpected political developments.

Maldives

After holding political authority for 30 years, President Gayoom of Maldives has become the longest serving political leader of Asia. The death of a detainee in Maafushi Island prison in September 2003, sparked anti-Gayoom protests, leading to the creation of a Special Majlis in 2004, entrusted with drafting a new constitution for the country. Under the new constitution ratified by the President in August 2008, the first multi-party Presidential elections were held on October 8, 2008. As no candidate gained more than 50% of the vote, there will be a runoff round on October 29, 2008 between the two candidates who secured the top two positions in the first round, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom and Mohamed Nasheed. The implementation of reforms under the new constitution and the composition of Independent Commissions designated to run the judiciary, police and conduct elections continues to remain a matter of grave concern for the new political parties in Maldives.

Adoption of a Constitution and representative form of government, periodic elections, and promise of reforms qualify a country as democratic in the minimal sense of the term. The system of checks and balances, freedom of press, multi-party political competition, and independent judiciary are the more refined qualities of a democratic system. Most of the third world countries continue to exist in the minimal domain of democracy without arousing much international concern. Graduation from the minimal conditions of democracy to a thriving democratic polity and society is the greatest challenge faced by the third world countries.

For two decades, Maldives has experienced free and fair elections for the Presidency, but still cannot be qualified as a successful democracy. With a single candidate in a ‘yes’ –

'no' referendum the democratic credentials of the political authority are naturally questionable. Democratic essentials like the party system, freedom of speech have been recently introduced in the country. President Gayoom's insistence of economic growth as a counter to democratic restrictions has few takers in Maldives. President Gayoom has been involved in the arrest and torture of political opponents and nepotism is his highest rated political quality. The activities of a group dedicated to promoting Wahhabism- a particular version of Islam, is gaining strength due the lack of political commitment on the part of the government. American Ambassador accredited to the Maldives, Mr. Jeffrey Lunstead in 2005 had praised the democratic reforms in Maldives despite the continued autocratic style of President Gayoom; the new British High Commissioner to Maldives, Dominick Chilcott in a Keynote address in 2006 referred to Maldives as set on a path that will lead to the achievement of a liberal democratic society, Maldivian Democratic Party's leader and presidential candidate, Mohammed Nasheed's visit to India for lobbying support in favour of the democratic reforms failed in galvanising the pressure any pressure from the world's largest democracy. These developments took place despite the fact that even today political dissent is equated with terrorism in Maldives and 50% of the country's newspaper staff is facing charges of criminal prosecution.

The pseudo-democratic politics of Maldives reflects the wider challenge confronting the third world during the fourth wave. *The contribution of Maldives to the fourth wave is the realization that democratic evolution in many states is stalled under the cover of existence formal democratic structures.* There is need to distinguish between structural and procedural democracy. Appreciation of structural democracy can adversely impinge on the efforts to develop the politico-social practices leading to substantive democracy.

Pakistan

For seven years of the current decade Pakistan remained under military rule, with President Pervez Musharraf controlling political authority. The elections in February 2008 and President Musharraf's resignation almost six months later has opened the way for political parties to restore popular authority for governing Pakistan. In the midst of an early split in the political coalition and the task of balancing national concerns with international pressures, the challenges confronting the rejuvenated democracy of Pakistan appear immense.

Western democracies allow a regulated process of exchange between the established political institutions and personalities occupying these institutions at a given time. Personalities shape the institutions to some extent and in turn get influenced by the institutional norms allowing the political process to grow and mature with the demands of time. One of the gravest challenges confronting third world democracies is the personalisation rather than institutionalisation of democracy. The political occupants redesign the democratic institutions during their tenure thereby disallowing democracy to take roots. The ensuing occupant in an attempt to undo the wrong committed by the predecessor lends a different, but equally personalized interpretation to the role of the given political institution.

In holding the dual office of the Army Chief and President, Pervez Musharraf inaugurated another era of military rule in Pakistan in 2001. From the widely criticised 2002 referendum to extend his Presidency for another five years to the 2007 declaration of Emergency President Musharraf has left an inedible imprint on every political institution of Pakistan. His attempts to out rightly attack the independency of the Judiciary precipitated the looming crisis in Pakistan and alliances to remove him from power gained momentum. In another legally baffling, but politically serving decision President Musharraf in 2007 issued a National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO). The NRO dropped corruption charges against ex-Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, but the legal

technicalities of the Ordinance did not offer amnesty to Musharraf's predecessor Nawaz Sharif.^{vii} Continuing with these arbitrary decisions of the Musharraf's regime the new government in Pakistan is showing signs of political vendetta. In the politically motivated legal waiver granted by the NRO, Asif Ali Zardari, widower of Benazir Bhutto, now stands to gain the most as Pakistan's new President. Recently, the National Accountability Bureau, headed by President Zardari has re-opened corruption cases against Nawaz Sharif, continuing the policy of imprisoning political opponents. Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani's formula for ensuring democratic stability by allowing members of the same political party to occupy the offices of the President and the Prime Minister appears largely self-serving.^{viii} The P.M. has also hinted at a new mechanism being devised to ensure the accountability of the judiciary and military. Depending upon the composition of the new body it is likely to impact the autonomy of the judiciary and leave the military in suspicion of the new authorities. After promising to reinstate the judges on assuming power, President Zardari has in fact lashed the country's judiciary on the charge of failing to deal with his case impartially while he was held in prison for politically motivated charges. The commitment to building a moderate, stable and democratic Pakistan has been the convincing rationale of the personalisation attempts in Pakistan.

Dominance of personality based politics in Pakistan has resulted in the emergence of fragile democracy. With regular alternations in the nature of government (alternating between military rule and party-based politics) the institutional strength of democracy is continuously strained. *Pakistan's contribution to the fourth wave of democracy is the realisation that weak institutions run by strong personalities results in the fragility of democratic practices.* Charismatic personalities can make a positive contribution to the democratic process only when its institutions are strongly anchored.

Sri Lanka

With Mahinda Rajapakse's election as the President of Sri Lanka in 2005 and Ratnasiri Wrickramanayaka as Prime Minister, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) once again dominated national politics in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has been credited with running a successful political system through the current century characterized by regular elections and smooth transfer of power. Existence of a strong political opposition and viable party system has been referred to as the apparent strengths of the Sri Lankan democracy.

Democracy is pompously referred to as the rule of the majority in Western nations; rule by minority is viewed as some form of authoritarianism. Sri Lankan democracy has over-enthusiastically applied this definition of democracy to the national political process, thereby completely sidelining the Tamil minority from mainstream politics. The rule by the Sinhala majority, with the domination of Sinhalese culture has transformed into an alleged authoritarianism for the minority population.

The national political parties in Sri Lanka are representative of the Sinhala majority on the Island. Political authority has alternated between coalitions led by the two largest national parties: United National Party (UNP), Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). Therefore change of government through the much appraised democratic process of popular elections holds little promise for the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka. Tamil National Alliance (TNA), considered to be the political arm of the LTTE, was formed in 2001 to represent the political interests of the Tamils through the democratic process. In the April 2004 elections the TNA won 6.9% of the votes and secured 22 seats in the 225 members Parliament. Representation of minority rights in Sri Lanka is becoming a victim of majority assertion. The activities of the LTTE are responsible for the intransigent ethnic crisis of Sri Lanka, but the responsibility also lies with, the less emphasised, political competition between the UNP and SLFP. Both parties engage in anti-Tamil politics with the objective of winning the support of the Sinhala majority. According to certain analysis the demands of Tamil separatism are fuelled by the aggressiveness of Sinhala

nationalism. The nature of the unitary state in Sri Lanka reflects the uncompromising attitude of the Sinhala majority, which in no way justifies the violence perpetuated by the LTTE, but does help to put the on-going crisis into perspective.

The political process in Sri Lanka has come to challenge the most basic assumption of democratic governance: majority rule. *Sri Lanka's contribution to the fourth wave is the unfortunate realisation that institutionalisation and implementation of minority safeguards is dependent of the will of the majority in many third world countries.* Deprivation and alienation of the minority continues to occur in many political systems, receiving mere vocal condemnation and token sanctions, while such states continue to internationally qualify as 'democracies'.

The Fourth Wave

The fourth wave in essence implies that the democratic practices in the South Asian countries might be flawed according the western norms and also open to attack as 'undemocratic', but rather than tailoring the democratic practices to the western theories, the South Asian countries are doing well in tailoring them in accordance to national demands and sensitivities. For a realist it is obvious to realise that all is not well with the current trend of the fourth wave in South Asia. South Asia in no way seems to be emerging as an inspiring model of democratic governance for the other developing regions. Issues of minority rights, personalisation of politics, and existence of minimal democracy are some of the flaws discussed above. But the contribution of South Asia lies in asserting that the fourth wave will be dominated by the indigenisation of democracy and emergence of new standards to measure democratic success.

Given the overlapping of the processes of state-building, nation-building, economic modernisation and democratisation the South Asian states are evolving a self-suited democratic design, which is still in the experimental stages. There are cross-currents within the fourth wave as well. Bhutan's policy of culturally guided democracy stands in opposition to Sri Lanka's political system dictated by ethnic majorities; induction of the

Maoists in the political mainstream of Nepal raises questions about the future of the LTTE in Sri Lanka; primacy of the Islamic religion in guiding national lives could differently impact the polity and society in Afghanistan and Pakistan; the military is differently influencing the political process in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Maldives; the operations of democracy in India and Nepal have made the people of Bhutan apprehensive of embracing the new system. The fact that democratic developments in one regional state is neither inspiring nor concurrent to the democratic process in other raises the obvious question: how can South Asia collectively qualify as contributing to the initiation of the fourth wave of democracy? South Asia's very contribution to the fourth wave is the assertion of the possibilities of distinctiveness and innovativeness in democracy. Unlike the definite prescriptions of a successful democratic model, fourth wave emphasises on country-specific models of democracy. Rather than providing a model for replication, the fourth wave demonstrates the worth of developing national models of democracy through the example of South Asia.

The examples of Afghanistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, and Nepal have demonstrated the degree of democratic innovations in the region, while Pakistan, Maldives, and Sri Lanka confirm to the continuing search for innovation. The fourth wave holds that democracy is a political system inspired by the milieu serving the national specifics while acknowledging the broadly defined parameters of democratic practice. The fourth wave is in no way a defence of the autocratic regimes erected in the name of democracy.^{ix} It is rather an attempt to counter the excessive standardisation of democracy, which quells the attempts at constructing nationally suited variants of the democratic system. According to the South Asia inspired fourth wave, democracy is more about practice and less about prescription; it is more about aspiration and less about benchmarks; it is more about achieving tangible results and less about confirming to normative principles.

Endnotes

[i](#) The Third Wave of Democracy is discussed in Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave-Democratization in the late Twentieth Century*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1992

[ii](#) For the purpose of this study the South Asian Region is coterminous with the membership of SAARC, which includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Maldives, Pakistan, Sri Lanka

[iii](#) 'Driglam namzha' provides for a code of conduct for all Bhutanese people on matters such as how to eat, sit, speak, dress and bow down before authorities.

[iv](#) The issue of discrimination against the Bhutanese population of Nepali origin can be cited as an example of the cultural assertiveness of Bhutan. This discussion lies beyond the preview of the present discussion because the given contention is long-standing and not a direct outcome of the country's democratic transition.

[v](#) In July 2008 the Communist Party withdrew support from the UPA government over the issue of the Indo-U.S. Nuclear Deal. The UPA alliance was however able to garner the majority on the floor of the house.

[vi](#) Ireland could be the only exception to the case, but the international mediation played a vital role in the process. National reconciliation of separatist groups, to the extent of its leader now heading the interim national government, has occurred in Nepal only.

[vii](#) The NRO resulted from a political deal between President Musharraf and exiled leader of the Pakistan People's Party Benazir Bhutto allowing Musharraf to continue as the President while Bhutto assumed the role of Pakistan's Prime Minister.

[viii](#) *Dawn*, August 30, 2008, Islamabad

[ix](#) Recognition of the challenges faced by Pakistan, Maldives and Sri Lanka in the article bear evidence to the fact that the fourth wave does not appreciate authoritarian policies in the name of a home-made recipe for democracy.
