

Understanding Governance in South Asia

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Introduction

The major purpose of this chapter is to categorize and map patterns of governance in South Asia. The questions that are asked are there similarities in governance patterns in countries of this region? Does a particular pattern is more dominant and influence politics, policies, and inter-organizational relations.

The word governance is now fashionable but has a long history deriving from the Greek word *kubernân* meaning to pilot or steer or how to design rule making. Later it was used in Medieval Latin as *gubernare* with almost identical meaning (Kjær 2004, p. 3; Weiss 2000, p. 795). Until the 1960s, the notion of governance had a rather peripheral role in shaping the discourse in the social sciences. Yet from the 1990s, the term became a buzzword and over the years the meaning and understanding of governance has become pervasive, ubiquitous, and polymorphous with different meanings given by different organizations, scholars, and with different connotations in different contexts (Bevir 2011, p. 1; Chhotray and Stoker 2010, p. 3; Levi-Faur 2012, pp. 3–5; Rhodes 1997, p. 15). Currently, a universally accepted and agreed upon definition of ‘governance’ still remains elusive. There is no consensus or agreement as to what would be the nature and form of governance and public administration.

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In the academic literature a distinction is made between governing and governance where the former refers to the purposeful efforts by social and political actors to 'steer, control, or manage societies' while the latter denotes 'the patterns that emerge from governing activities' (i.e., as a more or less intended outcome of interaction among multiple actors). Further, the governance concept has a strong descriptive and analytical component and it tends to emphasize the interaction and influence of multiple authorities including non-governmental actors. Yet, various fields of political science approach the concept differently (Kjær 2004; Pierre and Peters 2000). For instance, in public administration governance has been linked to theories of policy networks (Rhodes 1997). In international relations governance refers to how nation states, international organizations, and transnational corporations interact under conditions of increasing globalization. In comparative politics theories of governance have addressed how the combined efforts of state and civil society institutions under various political regimes may promote economic and political development (Hyden et al. 2004).

Among policy makers, the more normative concept of 'good governance' has become very popular since it was introduced by the World Bank in 1989. A number of international agencies have joined the discourse on how to define the essential components of an ideal political system that sometimes metaphorically has been referred to as 'Denmark', where Denmark represents the ideal of a strong and stable democracy. Donors have also funded the development of various tools of assessing the state of governance in different countries, e.g., the Worldwide Governance Indicators of the World Bank, or the Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International. However, the good governance agenda has been criticized by scholars such as Farazmand (2004) and Grindle (2007). The former has claimed that the notion of 'good governance' does not include the global power structure and what is good and what is bad is unilaterally defined by the global power elites seeking to promote global capitalism. As an alternative, he has proposed to use the term 'sound governance' which will include the global elements of governance, yet be less biased in favor of capitalism and more open to indigenous solutions. Grindle, on the other hand, is concerned that the good governance agenda may become too comprehensive and complex. By introducing the concept of 'good enough governance' she wants to signal that 'all good things cannot be pursued at once' (p. 554). Rather it is important to focus on what may be working in the real-world context of a country.

Here we want to emphasize that according to our understanding of the concept: First, governance denotes exercise of authority and power. Second, governance involves interdependence among a host of actors for the sake of policy making at multiple levels, i.e., not only government organizations but also others such as non-governmental actors and private business companies. Third, for these diverse relationships to be properly governed at multiple levels require rule making, rule following, and rule enforcement. Finally, the meaning of governance is broader than government and emphasizes the role of network beyond the hierarchy and

market modes of governing. Networks operate at national, international, and transnational levels.

The transition from hierarchy-based top-down governing to market and now to network-based governance pose also serious challenge to governance. This requires trust and reciprocity among actors especially between state and society (cited in Kjær 2004, p. 4).

Understanding Governance in South Asia

As noted by many observers, the South Asian countries¹ including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, share a common history of colonial dominance (even though some, such as Nepal and Bhutan, have not been proper colonies) under the British Raj (Brass 2010, p. 1). Still they also present major variations in terms of geography, territorial and population size, religion, culture, and language (Haque 2003, p. 943). Even with regard to political governance, these countries show significant differences. India, since its independence has practiced democracy and is the most matured democracy in the region while Bangladesh and Pakistan have both experienced military and civilian rules. While democracy in the context of holding of elections has been stabilized in Bangladesh, democratic practices are weak in Pakistan. The Maldives witnessed first multi-party presidential election in 2008, and Nepal has now abolished monarchism and opted for federal democracy although the framing of the constitution for the “new” Nepal has been challenging. Though Sri Lanka demonstrated a stable political development and a peaceful transition to its independence from the British Raj, politics in recent years has been turbulent after the defeat of the Tamil separatist groups. New groups (e.g., the university teachers) with new demands are putting the elected government under constant pressure. Bhutan, despite ethnic unrests, has been the only South Asian country with a record of political stability but is also the only country in the region with a monarchical rule.

What has been the common trend in these South Asian countries is a quest for better and sound governance and this has been on the policy agenda of different governments. Different reforms, institutional changes and creation of new acts, policies, and new organizations have been tried to streamline public administration and governance mechanisms both at the central and local levels. In spite of many experiments and innovative efforts, governance has remained weak, unresponsive to citizen needs, centralized, rigid, non-transparent, and unaccountable. These have made wicked problems such as corruption, poor service quality and delivery,

¹ Afghanistan has recently joined the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and is considered a South Asian nation. In this book, South Asia refers to Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

energy crisis, sustainable development, unemployment, degrading food and human security, and safety nets more precarious.

Historically, the practice and concept of governance and public administration have strong basis in South Asia. From the time of Kautilya² to the reign of Mughal emperors³ and to the British Raj, public administration and governance have had different connotations leading to different organizations forms and functions, administrative structure, nature of authority, and political systems. The period before the advent of the British rule was the rule of kings. The colonization of most of South Asia by the British ushered a new dimension of governance. Prior to the British rule, the concept of public service based on depersonalization of the sovereign had no roots in India (Jamil 2007, p. 14). During the Mughal rule, *Mansabdars* (officials) were personal servants to the Mughal king. The *Mansabdars* were not part of the state organization, in fact, under the Mughals there was no concept of a modern state. It was a patrimonial rule and there was no sovereignty of law. It was during the British rule that the Indian Sub-Continent experienced the modern administrative system typified by depersonalization of public office, and loyalty to an office rather than to a person. The British rule in India was top-down, hierarchic and centralized, imposed on a system characterized by paternalism. Their system of governance rested on two principles: (a) maintenance of law and order, and rationalization of administration on the basis of rule of law, and (b) revenue administration to enhance a smooth collection of taxes (Heginbotham 1975).

In order to understand the system of governance in South Asia, one need to understand how it developed historically and what were the normative sources for its present state of affairs. What is most characteristic of South Asian governance is extreme centralization of the authority, personalized leadership, and patriarchy that have great implications for the system of governance from policy making to interpersonal relationships. Rationality as it is understood in the West, based on principles of neutrality, universalization, impartiality, and formalism has not taken deep root in the South Asian context. Instead, we observe strong loyalties toward family, caste and kinship, or toward people from the same region or political party.

² Also known as Chanakya was the chief minister to Chandragupta (321-296 B.C.), the founder of the Mauryan Empire in India. He was contemporary to Aristotle. He wrote *Arthashastra*, a treatise on good rule of the king. According to Modelski (1964, p. 549), “the literal meaning of *Arthashastra*” is Science of Polity; it has been rendered as the study of politics, wealth and practical expediency, of ways of acquiring and maintaining power.”

³ The Mughal Empire (1526–1757) which preceded the British Raj (1757–1947) in India was a patrimonial-bureaucratic empire in which the king was depicted as divinely aided patriarch where all political and administrative power revolved around the ruler who governed on the basis of traditional authority. It entailed obedience and loyalty to the king (as a person) and not to an impersonal office (Blake 1979, p. 94).

Table 1 Four types of governance

	Hierarchic stability oriented authority system	Polycentric change oriented authority system
Informal authority system	Paternalism	Alliances & networking
Formal authority system	Administrative state	Reinventing state

Source Developed by authors

The development of governance in most of South Asia⁴ may be analyzed along two dimensions. The first dimension refers to how governance systems may be divided into informal and formal authority systems, i.e., to what extent means (rules, technology, individual behavior) and ends (organizational goals) are systemized, routinized, and regularized. In other words, to what extent organizational tasks, duties, and responsibilities, and authority (power to sanction and discipline) are set according to some explicitly approved patterns. The second dimension focuses on to what extent authority is top-down and is concerned with maintaining stability of the existing power structure or whether authority is polycentric, more flexible, and shared as well as contested by other actors allowing for change and innovation. To what extent the changes resemble democratic practices or are these changes favor preferences of those who influence policy decisions? To what extent South Asian variant of governance may negate good or better governance to take deep root in the region? Does a particular pattern of governance so deeply rooted or over-institutionalized that it constantly impedes the rule of law?

The discussion draws on political events and reforms both historical and contemporary that have taken place in the region. It is more narrative rather than based on rigorous data that allow more in-depth analysis. Categorization or mapping of governance as illustrated below is based on the discussion of these events. As mentioned earlier, the focus is on finding similarities rather than categorizing South Asian countries along these dimensions (Table 1).

Paternalism

Paternalism refers to an authority pattern where obedience and loyalty is person or family based rather than linked to an impersonal office or position. This is what Weber called a traditional authority system. It protects and extends social privileges to certain persons belonging to certain family, caste, and group. Leadership is personalized and the authority pattern is hierarchic and top-down. In the family, it is the relationship between father and son, in the school, it is the relationship between the *Guru* and disciple and in an informal group organization it is the relationship

⁴ The administrative system created during British rule is still in operation in the Indian Subcontinent (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka). Other nations in South Asia such as Nepal and the Maldives almost follow the same administrative pattern.

between a leader and follower. This relationship is based on unreserved loyalty. This is what characterizes a high power distance society (Hofstede 1991).

In politics, family plays an important role in the selection of leaders, and families with high political standings exercise considerable power and authority in society. Such type of leadership trend often leads to dynastic rule as is evident in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and even in Nepal.

Paternalism in South Asia is founded on age-old values, deeply rooted and governs interpersonal relationships. It has a rural base and evolved for centuries to shape social, economic, and political lives in the region. Governance in such a system is informal and hierarchic and based on family, caste, and kinship lineage. Unconditional loyalty, obedience, and trust are important qualities to become included and loyal persons are usually rewarded and bestowed with favors sometimes undue. This hierarchic relationship is often characterized as patron–client relationship (Jamil 2007, p. 8). Stability or maintaining the status quo is preferred because change would disrupt the existing power structure and authority pattern, and thereby change interpersonal relationships. This would bring dire consequences to the existing system of governance.

In the case of South Asia, political parties may said to be champions of paternalism. All the leading political parties that have been in power have a strong base in family leadership. For example, the Nehru-Gandhi family in India,⁵ Mujib and Zia families in Bangladesh, Bhutto family in Pakistan, Bandaranaike family in Sri Lanka, and the Koirala family in Nepal. Family members are groomed to become future leaders. In the case of nomination to run for national elections, family connections are important and family members within the kinship and friendship are offered nominations. Party leadership seldom changes, especially at the top. Most political parties have leaders for life and it is only in the case of death of a leader that a party leadership changes but then again another family member assumes the party leadership. Family dominance in politics is found in other countries too such as in the most democratic country the USA where for instance members of the Kennedy family held a strong position for several decades, and more recently there were the two Bush presidents. Yet, arguably the case of South Asia is different because political parties always had leaders from the same family and exceptions to this trend have hardly been observed.

It is usually claimed that family dominance of political parties is an efficient way to maintain integrity and loyalty to the party, if not then large parties would have split into smaller factions leading to more intense inter-party conflicts and hence state destabilization.

Paternalism has serious consequences for governance.

⁵ After gaining independence in 1947, the Congress party has dominated Indian national politics except for the brief Janata interlude from 1977 to 1980 (Kochanek 1987, p. 1278) and the period between at the end of the 1990s to 2004.

Implications

1. Accountability to be functional requires respect for formal rules. Since loyalty is based on personal obedience, accountability then also becomes person based rather than following an impersonal accountability mechanism. In a democracy, elected representatives are accountable to citizens but in paternalism, accountability is to the party leadership. In Bangladesh, for example, members of the parliament cannot go against the party they represent. If this happens then a member must relinquish his position. This is called “floor crossing” and no parliamentarian dares to cross the floor for fear of losing parliamentary seat. Therefore, unconditional loyalty to party leadership is also constitutionalized.
2. The distinction between private and official rules is often blurred in paternalism. Breaking and bypassing rules by leaders are quite frequent. Those who adjudicate rules use their positions for personal gains. Wood (2000, p. 222) refers to this as “the blurred moral boundaries between public and private behavior”. This results in lobbying even when a person is entitled to a statutory right. Corruption is often associated with lobbying. One consequence of paternalism is informal relations. According to Schick (1998, p. 128), “informality is a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it cuts through red tape, unresponsive bureaucracies, and bad policies; on the other hand, it opens the door to (and sometimes institutionalizes) corruption and inefficiency”. Citing Bangladesh as an example of patron-clientelism and informalities, Kochanek (2000, p. 547) argues that behind the façade of formal institutional trappings of a modern state such as the cabinet and the parliament are nothing but “hollow shells” imbued with informal relations mainly serving the interests of certain families.
3. Merit is often sacrificed in order to favor someone, thus giving rise to the problem of institutional legitimacy. Patron-clientelism flourishes leading to rent-seeking, nepotism, cronyism, arbitrariness, and secrecy (Wood 2000, p. 222). Political interferences in administration are common and since merit is not the major criteria for career enhancement, public officials resort to lobbying and showing political allegiance to further their professional career.

The Administrative State

The Administrative state refers to a state where most of the decisions are taken by state employees. In other words, it refers to a system where administrators reign (cited in Painter 2005, p. 336). The administrative state as referred here entails a well-established bureaucracy based on the Weberian notion of a legal rational authority system. This form of governance relies heavily on centralization, hierarchy, merit principles in recruitment, tenure of service, impersonality in officials’

behavior, autonomy, and a clear distinction between official and private life (Painter 2005, pp. 335–336).

In the Indian Sub-Continent, the British rule did not establish an effective form of political self-government. Instead the British created the Indian Civil Service (ICS) which was elitist, centralized, and staffed by generalists graduated from Oxford and Cambridge. The ICS was the premier instrument of colonial administration which also became the model for the British civil service, and subsequently influenced the structuring of civil services in the independent India and Pakistan, Sri Lanka and later in Bangladesh, Nepal and the Maldives. According to Painter (2005, p. 336)

The British ideal of the class of generalist administrators, whose members' classical education and civilized manners equipped them for rule and whose political discretion and judgment were more important than their expertise, embodied a more paternalistic and elitist set of ruling ideas than that spelled out by Waldo.

The British colonial administration was concerned with (a) formalization of rules and goals of organizations. In this regard, rulemaking, rule monitoring, and its enforcement were considered vital; (b) formalization of structure to make human action more rational and predictable; and (c) establishing political order across geographical regions in order to bring these under the common law framework. This would enhance standardization, universalization, and uniformity of government actions and delivery of public services.

It was a “strictly hierarchical administrative structure, with the line of command running unimpeded from the Viceroy and Governor-General in Delhi to the farthest village, but with certain well established traditions” (Jain 2001, p. 1301). Still the colonial legacy exists in the civil services of South Asia in spite of the fact that elitism has diminished over the years. The British tradition fitted well with the paternalism of the South Asian region. In Pakistan even after independence from colonial rule, “it continued to be an administrative state—excessive reliance on the bureaucracy for nation building and development” (Zafarullah and Haque 2001, p. 1384). The bureaucracy is now blamed for the cause of underdevelopment and many social ills by the private sectors, international development agencies, and members of civil society. This means that the legitimacy which it once enjoyed is on the wane. It is now highly politicized and its actions resemble nepotism, favor, and lack of response to societal demands.

The administrators, especially the generalists are the champions of the administrative state and want to revive the lost status and power of this cadre which was the hallmark of the British Empire. In replying to the question of how the British Empire was to be governed, the then Governor-General Wellesley in 1800 replied:

... not in the instruments by which kingdoms are overthrown, revolutions are accomplished, or wars conducted, but in a civil service capable of an exhaustible supply of useful knowledge, cultivated talents and disciplined morals.

The elitism of this generalist cadre has been constantly under challenge by technocrats and other professionals and over the years through a number of reforms which emphasized unification of cadres their status has been reduced while at the same time the status of other cadres such as police, customs, taxation has been elevated much to the dissatisfaction of the generalist cadre. According to Wood (1980, p. 154), “that public servants, especially senior ones in India, bemoan the decline in their status and authority and look back fondly to the position of their predecessors”. In addition, the introduction and practice of democracy has put the politicians in control of state affairs and much interference in personnel policies such as recruitment, transfer, promotion and posting of bureaucrats. As a result the, bureaucracy in many of these countries are fragmented and the esprit de corps which characterized this service is reduced. These developments especially political interference and nexus between politicians and bureaucrats have serious implications for “good” governance.

Implications:

1. Unpredictable behavior—The bureaucratic behavior has become uncertain and unpredictable. The rule of law introduced by the British has not undergone reforms and as such is old and outdated. As a result, the exercise and application of laws and rules vary which undermine universality and impartiality. The South Asian region is highly hierarchic and paternalistic and as a result bureaucratic actions reflect patron-clientelism. There is an absence of professionalism as informal norms and values still guide their decision making in service delivery as well as their interpersonal relationships within the civil service and their relationships to society and politics.
2. Acceptance and legitimacy—The ICS and its lineage in India and Pakistan had high prestige and status in society. Entry to these services through highly competitive exams was considered a stamp of success and excellence. Over the years, this image has decreased substantially and does not attract the best talents in society. While the civil servants in Singapore and Hong Kong are highly paid and attract the best graduates this is not the case in South Asia. Nowadays, most civil servants are mediocre and incentive packages they get compared to their counterparts in East Asia as well as to the private sector in their own countries are meager. As a result, the myth of its talent, neutrality, and robustness is questioned. Also its acceptance and legitimacy of actions is challenged.
3. Political interference—In recent years, bureaucracy has become vulnerable to interference from politics. Bureaucracies are based on elaborate rules on the basis of which they act, provide services and relate to politics and society. These rules give them discretion; protect them from constant uncertainty as they encounter with changes of power, and new leaders sworn in as executives. New leaders usually have different agenda both formal and informal and policy preferences than their predecessors. These make bureaucracy vulnerable to political pressure and their posting, transfer, and promotion depend on their level of loyalty to the new leaders; and the process of erosion of the rule of law

starts. Some administrators join hands with the government in power and those who got favors earlier are usually discriminated and sidelined. The erosion of rule of law leads bureaucratic actions to be based on political preferences sacrificing universality, impartiality, and uniformity in the provision of services. Bureaucracy then becomes fragmented and esprit de corps weakened. A fragmented bureaucracy becomes less autonomous and more susceptible to political interference and attachments than a united one.

Alliances and Networking

In recent years, alliances and networking in South Asian politics are common in order to gain access to the power house. The policy arena is now a forum for many actors to strike a bargain with state machineries in times of policy making. With informalism still a major ingredient of governance mechanism in the South Asian region, we observe a number of alliances between and among political parties, between political parties and business concerns, and even between politics and civil society. The major reason of such alliances is to lend support and gain favor so it is a win-win situation for all parties. Of this, the alliances among political parties and politics-business nexus are crucial to win election and gain access to business favors. In the following, we discuss the recent trends in political alliances as well as politics-business nexus.

Alliances Between Political Parties

The wave of democracy in South Asia has made politics complex and allowed citizens to express their preferences along religion, ethnic, regional, and policy-based issues. In other words, inclusion in governance is the demand from different groups. This demand also draws different groups of people to different political parties catering to different needs of citizens. As such no single party has obtained absolute majority in recent elections in South Asia. Coalition governments based on alliances between political parties have become the norm and are a major instrument to win elections and form governments. This is a significant departure from earlier political scenario when a single party obtained the majority in elections. Therefore, alliances have now become important political compositions in the South Asian region to win elections. According to Burki (2010, pp. 84–85), political alliances in Pakistan paved the way for the civilian rule amidst frequent takeover of state power by the army. However, given the number of wicked problems unsolved, it seems that democracy in South Asia mainly revolves around winning elections because such a win legitimizes the winning alliance and gives a license to do whatever it may feel like doing and whatever policies it may deem

necessary. Since winning elections are the major ends of political parties, alliances are then a major strategy of political parties especially the larger ones.

In India, the Congress party which has dominated Indian politics and national elections after its independence until the late 1980s is now in alliance with 11 other parties to form the present government which won the last election held in 2009. The alliance is called the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) is led by the Indian National Congress which is the single largest political party in the Lok Sabha (the lower house of the parliament of India). Closely followed are two other alliances. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is a coalition of 13 political parties. It is led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The third largest alliance is the United National Progressive Alliance; also called the Third Front is a coalition of 10 political parties.

In the case of Bangladesh, two major alliances have ruled in different time periods since the restoration of democracy in 1991. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led Alliance of four parties won the elections in 1991 and 2001. The other alliance called the grand alliance of 14 parties is led by the Awami League (AL) is currently in power and won elections in 1996 and the last one held in 2008.

The restoration of peace in Nepal after decades of Maoist insurgency opened a window of opportunity for democratic governance and inclusion of different ethnic and religious castes hitherto excluded in a high caste dominated polity. As a result, election to the Constituent Assembly (CA) was held in 2008 with no single party obtaining an absolute majority to form the government. The main task of the CA was to reframe a new constitution for the “new” Nepal after the abolition of monarchism, establishment of a secular state (Nepal was the only Hindu state from 1962 to 2006), and the establishment of federalism (Brass 2010, p. 2). Although the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) got the maximum number of seats, two other political parties, the Nepalese Congress and Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) came in the second and third place in the number of seats won. The CA is dissolved now because it failed to write a new constitution even after extending its term by 2 years. The tug of war and horse trading between the major parties in terms of power sharing and distribution of executive posts did not produce functional alliances to form a government that could frame a new constitution. This has led the country reel under political uncertainty and the nature of governance in a new political scenario⁶.

The Sri Lankan case is somewhat similar to the Nepalese one. The country has now resolved its decades’ long civil war and is striving to restore peace and democracy. In this respect, the sixth presidential election was held in 2010 in which the alliance United People’s Freedom Alliance formed in 2004 won the majority and formed the government. Its main opposition was the New Democratic Front (Sri Lanka) which is an offshoot of Democratic United National Front in alliance with United National Front.

⁶ In March 2013, the chief justice in Nepal was sworn in as head of an interim government to hold new election after months of bickering among major political parties.

In Pakistan, politics has also witnessed political alignments. Four alliances namely Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI), People's Democratic Alliance (PDA), National Democratic Alliance (NDA), and Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) have dominated the political scene from 1990 to 1999. Political parties revolve around some individuals and do not have any well-defined ideology and programs. As a result, numerous parties both big and small are active in the political scenario and since winning electoral majority by a single party has become difficult lately, this has led to alliance formations (Hussain 2008).

The new political governance scenario in South Asia suggests that power is no more concentrated in a single party but shared between various alliance members, of course the major power held by the party spearheading the alliance. Political governance has now become competitive; elections are based on adult franchise with high voter turnout and power sharing alternating between different political formations (Brass 2010, p. 3). This new form of governance is a complicated equation in power sharing where negotiation and bargaining are regular features in alliance formation. This means alliances are fluid, ad hoc in nature, and often informal where leaders strike a deal with a major party for the sake of power sharing. If that fails to work, break up is quite common.

The alternative scenario is deep hatred between these alliances resembling vendetta leading to violent clashes. The take over of army in periods of violent clashes between alliances has taken place in both Bangladesh and Pakistan. As has been noted by Burki (2010, p. 85) in the case of Pakistan, "the civilian leadership when exercising power failed to institutionalize the base of their support. Had they done, the military would have found it more difficult to intervene". In Bangladesh, severe violence between the major political alliances in 2007 almost led the country on the verge of civil war and encouraged an army backed caretaker government to step in and declare a state of emergency (Jamil et al. 2011, p. xvii). Since post-election activities of the party in power and the opposition parties are mainly geared toward blame game denigrating the others, consolidations of democratic practices and establishing bonds with citizens is ignored. This has led to inter-party conflicts and paved the way for the army to step in on some occasions to takeover state power. This army takeover usually receives strong support of the citizens, since citizens find army rule more secured and disciplined compared to anarchy in inter-party conflicts.

Politics-Business Nexus

Along political alliances, we also observe alliance between business community and political parties. For instance, in the case of Bangladesh, business interests are increasingly becoming a part of politics. All the large business houses have close links to both the party in power and to the opposition since regime changes alternate between the two major alliances.

Recent data collected by Jahan and Amundsen (2012, p. 33) reveals that the political scenario in Bangladesh and the professional affiliations of parliament members have changed dramatically over the years. The biggest change is observed in the significant rise of businessmen in the parliament from 24 % in 1973 to 56 % in the last election held in 2008. There has also been an increase of retired high-level civil and military bureaucrats in joining the two main parties and contesting elections. What is also observed here is that the role of traditional political leaders coming from rural background and middle class families such as lawyers and teachers are now decreasing. The leadership of the two major parties—the BNP and the AL—and their alliances who have ruled Bangladesh alternately since 1991 was different in nature. While the AL leadership was “composed largely of lower middle class, village-born landowners, most of whom also held law degrees, most BNP members were drawn from the upper strata of the Bangladeshi middle class and rich farmers in the rural area” (Kochanek 2000, pp. 532–533). However, this scenario has changed significantly; in the 2001 election which the BNP and its four party alliances won, 58 % of the parliamentary members had business as their main profession. The situation is almost similar in the last election held in 2008. Moreover as Kochanek (1993, p. 234) notes about politics-business nexus that “Individual business families and firms have developed an elaborate system of personal connections at all levels of government based on *tadbir*, a process of cajoling and personal lobbying”.

In some of the South Asian nations such as Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan and to some extent in Nepal too, money and muscle play a central role during elections. Since elections are expensive affairs in South Asian politics, candidates raise fund either through intimidation or get voluntarily from business houses as part of getting favors in return if their favorite candidates win the election.

In India, during the rule of Indira Gandhi the ruling congress extracted huge financial contributions from business community through “permit-license-quota-Raj” (PLQR) and in return were allowed to amass huge wealth by these houses. During the reign of Rajiv Gandhi, the PLQR was replaced by commissions from awarding large contracts to business houses. With the Swedish Bofors scandal that tarnished his image as “Mr. Clean” also contributed to his election debacle in 1989. This ended the dynastic rule and one-party dominance and paved the way for alliance formation in Indian politics. However, politics-business nexus and underhand dealings continued even during coalition governments and reached to such a magnitude that a cabinet secretary commented that there is nothing they can do about it (Kochanek 2010, pp. 368–370).

Dominant political parties are the champions in forming alliances with other parties sometimes diverse in terms of interests, ideologies, and the nature of citizen’s support they draw. The business community is also a champion of alliance building because forging alliance with politics gives them access to policy arenas and hence exerting influence in policies. The question is what are the implications of alliances of political parties and politics-business nexus?

Implications

1. Survival and winning elections

Alliances and coalitions are usually ad hoc in nature, may last until an election. However, some stability in alliance is also observed in the case of BNP led four party alliances in Bangladesh formed in 1999 prior to the 2001 election and still persisting. Stability depends on the age of the alliance. The older the alliance the greater is its permanence. Alliance is a win-win situation for both the leading party for winning elections and reducing opposition in policy matters. At the same time, it is also a strategy for smaller parties to survive in competitive politics and gain some access to power. Since the electoral process is based on “winner takes all” system that marginalizes the opposition, alliances are, therefore, important strategy in capturing state power and then denying the opposition of exercising any right even in the parliament as often is the case in Bangladesh (Hechler et al. 2011).

2. Patrimonialism and corruption

Given the patrimonial nature of politics in South Asia where leadership is personalized and authoritarian, power is exercised by a small group of people very close to the top leadership. While making major decisions, formal institutions are often neglected or bypassed and decisions are made on the advice of a handful of family members and personal advisors, and are devoid of openness. As a result, the style of governance suffers from transparency, accountability, and effectiveness (Kochanek 2000, p. 536).

This informal style of governance has increased politics-business nexus and business firms find it convenient to strike a deal with political leaders or be a part of politics to influence decisions in their favors. Some of the recent scams in Bangladesh concerning the collapse of the share market, excessive loan withdrawal from nationalized banks, and allegations by the World Bank of corruption by ruling party stalwarts in the biggest infrastructure project in the country, the so called bridge over the river Padma are examples of the politics-business nexus where public money has been usurped through a collusion of business interests and political leaders. Even the names of perpetrators involved in scams are highlighted in news media they are never apprehended by the government which testifies a close nexus between politics and some business interests.

This politics-business nexus has facilitated the economic progress wheel reel and a steady economic growth. Still from a democratic governance point of view, this is a disaster for social and formal institutional development as the gap between rich and poor is widening, welfare services are becoming ineffective, poverty is persisting, and formal institutions and rule of law are getting weaker. What has become institutionalized is corruption in which every transaction is up for grab these days.

3. Criminalization of politics

On 6th November 2012, the chairman of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) in Bangladesh mentioned that corruption takes place at two levels—at the upper level between political leaders and businessmen, at the lower level between political leaders and goon and hoodlums (The Daily Star 2012). The politics-business nexus is vital in day-to-day politics to prevail over policy decisions and especially during electoral competition where money and muscle power are important ingredients.

Although muscle power and incidence of violence were contained in elections under the neutral caretaker government in Bangladesh, the growing use of money persisted. This has resulted in growing involvement of the business community and the underworld in politics. Also the growths of factionalism, confrontational politics, and electoral competition have contributed to the increase of these incidents. These incidents have been reinforced with the decline of ideology-based politics in South Asia. Criminalization of politics has also opened the avenues for local hoodlums and thugs to contest in elections. In a report, it was revealed that in the 2004 election in India, almost 25 % of the members of parliament (Lok Sabha) had criminal cases against them (Kochanek 2010, p. 376).

Reinventing State

In the context of new liberalism, market orientation, and globalizations, South Asian countries are also adapting, though slowly, to these new modes of governance resulting in less government and more governance, i.e., less rowing and more steering as argued by Rhodes (1997). The aim has been to develop an effective, efficient, citizen friendly, and development-oriented governance system to improve welfare and quality of life of citizens (Jain 2001, p. 1300). It is inspired by the New Public Management and is increasingly embraced by the South Asian nations under the guidance and influence of international development agencies (Haque 2003, p. 942). The critical issue is how suitable are these modernization efforts to fine tune governance in line with Western trends in the context of South Asia. Schick (1998) is skeptical in introducing market principles and private managerialism in a system with weak rule of law and an absence of a robust market. This would invite more problem than solution and is likely to encourage misappropriation of public money and financial mismanagement.

This NPM trend may be said to get momentum in South Asia with the establishment of democracy in the region especially in the 1990s. It was also a time that developmental aid shifted its strategy of disbursement from allies to now assisting those countries who would opt for “good governance” measures (Turner and Hulme 1997). Good governance became a condition for aid disbursement. This led to a number of public administration reforms, privatization of state owned enterprises, deregulation to make public services easily and quickly available,

decentralization to transfer both functions and power to local government bodies, holding of elections on a regular basis, involvement of non-governmental sectors in policy formulation and implementation, contracting out and outsourcing of public services, etc.

The objectives were to streamline governments in line with global trends, which according to Haque (2003) feature elements of reinventing state with three major trends: (a) Less public sector but more private sector, (b) improving public sector management, (c) involvement of non-governmental sectors and civil society in governance.

1. Less public sector but more private sector

In order to overcome inefficiencies and sluggishness of the public sector, there was a need to reduce the government and transfer some of its activities and delivery of services to the private sector. The first trend was to denationalize or privatize state owned enterprises in the transport and communication, banking, electricity, telecommunication, and industrial production sectors. In Bangladesh, denationalization started in the 1980s and 1990s, in India and Pakistan in the 1990s, in Nepal, and in Sri Lanka in the 1990s. The major rationale behind such move was to develop the private sector to take over operations of these enterprises as well as to reduce public expenditure and subsidy. Second, allowing private sector initiatives to be increasingly involved in the development and running of higher education and health sectors. As a result, South Asian nations have recently witnessed establishment of higher educational institutions and hospitals some in collaboration with foreign universities and health consortiums. Sri Lanka is an exception to this trend which is yet to open its higher education to the private sector. In Bangladesh, the number of private universities has surpassed the number of public universities. However, public universities still educate the majority of graduates. Third, foreign direct investment is highly encouraged and some countries such as Bangladesh have established Board of Investment under the Prime Minister's office to encourage investments from multinational companies. The country has also established a number of export promotion zones allowing foreign companies to get established there. In addition expanded tax holidays, reduced import duties, transfer of profits, and 100 % foreign ownership of companies are introduced to encourage foreign investments.

However, what is interesting is that the trend of privatization has received priority from all types of regimes including the military ones as well as from the right and left oriented governments in Bangladesh; conservative and religious party backed governments in India and Pakistan, and even under the Maoist backed government in Nepal. According to Haque (2003, p. 945), "traditional ideological differences hardly prevented the ruling parties in these South Asian countries to adopt market-led policies to enhance performance".

Fewer public sectors do not mean less involvement of the state in development. To the contrary, development is state run in South Asia. According to Haque (2002, p. 1409), "In each of these South Asian cases, the role of the private sector remained subservient to the state-led governance irrespective of such regime variations."

This indicates that in the shadow of the state, private sector is thriving which of course is contributing to positive economic growth. Private initiatives are now also witnessed in sectors such as airlines, transport, and telecommunications which were solely the realm of public sector investment before. The question is whether positive economic growth is contributing to reduce the rich-poor gap?

2. Improving public sector management

As part of reinvention to make public sector in tune with market-based efficiency, ensure its accountability, and make it more responsive to citizen's needs South Asian governments carried out a number of administrative reforms. These reform initiatives of various reform committees⁷ recommended a number of measures such as retrenchment of the public sector leading to downsizing or rightsizing of the civil service, introducing e-governance in the management and delivery of services, citizen charter, deregulation, liberalization, and use of performance-based compensation (Jamil and Dhakal 2012; Jamil 2011; Rahman and Robinson 2006, p. 136). The retrenchment process downsized the public sector employment and also led to freezing of recruitment. In order to rationalize the public sector, the scheme of golden hand-shake was launched to encourage public sector employees to take early retirement.

Along with renewal of the public sector and the introduction of NPM inspired measures, there was a realization as an essential part of this process to decentralize some functions and power from central government to sub national governments (Vartola et al. 2010, p. 182). Decentralization has been a popular strategy in South Asia especially with the turnover of regimes experimenting with various structural forms and functional responsibilities at various tiers. In both Bangladesh and Nepal, there has been an array of decentralization measures with each regime favoring a particular form of decentralization at a particular tier of local government. However, decentralization efforts resulted in more deconcentration and minimal devolution, i.e., transferring of certain developmental functions to the local bodies, while the central government retained the major share of power to make crucial decisions. Decentralization of "real" power has, therefore, been mere rhetoric than reality. This has resulted in centralized and hierarchic central-local relations, dominance of central level bureaucrats in the management of local affairs, politicization of local policies along narrow party interests, poor local financial base, and absence of inter-organizational coordination mechanism, especially horizontal coordination to pool resources and expertise of different organizations operating at various levels (Sarker 2006, p. 1285). These have seriously curtailed

⁷ For example, Administrative Reforms Commission in India, the Public Administration Reform Commission in Bangladesh and the Administrative Reform Commission in Nepal. Also in other South Asian countries such as Bhutan, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan, similar reform efforts have been undertaken (Haque 2003, p. 944).

the capacity of local bodies as institutions of mobilizing local resources, expertise, autonomy to make its own decisions, and creating networks for local development.

3. Involvement of non-governmental sectors and civil society in governance.

In line with liberalization policy, non-governmental actors and civil society have become increasingly involved in governance in South Asia which now can boast of some renowned NGOs such as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and Grameen Bank (it started as an NGO but now a semi-government organization). Many of these NGOs play important roles in local and rural areas in the field of education, health and immunization, empowerment of women and the poor, awareness, democracy, and environment protection. They work with government, other international NGOs and donors and community-based organizations. They also act as watchdogs of government policies and point fingers to issues of malpractices in policy implementation, human rights violation, and high handedness of government authorities. However, they are also criticized for too much dependence on donor agencies instead of remaining more accountable and sensitive to their beneficiaries and to the national government. It is suggested that they should rely more on home grown ideas to enhance the quality and bottom-up governance. This would ensure fair distribution of public goods and foster social justice for the poor (Parnini 2006, p. 189).

Cooperation between NGOs and government under public–private partnership arrangement has encouraged network governance in the delivery of public services such as in agriculture (distribution of agricultural inputs, fertilizer, etc.), health (antenatal and post natal services and immunization), education, and management of government safety net programs for the poor. Public–private partnership represents an innovative strategy and a shift from its earlier bureaucratic model of service delivery (Haque 2003, p. 949).

The donors, NGOs and civil society, and some sections of the bureaucracy who have and want to remain non-partisan and neutral are the champions of reinventing the state along private management and market principles.

The question is to what extent NPM driven reforms have been institutionalized in the context of South Asia or have there been more talks than real actions in this context. Economic governance has got momentum in the process of reinventing state but democratic governance with rights-based rules such as women's equal status, abolition of caste discriminations, etc. (though constitutionalized), may still have a long way to go in South Asia. This is because many of these reforms with intentions of good or better governance are elite driven and “not solicited from below or conceived of by the broad masses of people” (Myrdal 1968, p. 1127). In the context of Europe, many movements to establish political (adult suffrage) and social rights (gender mainstreaming) were bottom-up driven movements by different social groups such as labor union, women activists, etc.

Four Faces of Governance in South Asia

As argued, South Asian governance reflects four types of governance mechanisms. These traditions have serious implications for how the state is organized in terms of institutional structure and behavior, interpersonal relations, policy making and implementation, and relationships between the state, private sector, civil society, and citizens. To understand the pathology as well as development potential of South Asian states, we need to understand these traditions of governance more deeply and how these are incorporated in the nation building process and the structuring of the state. There are tensions among these competing patterns of governance.

While paternalism and administrative state emphasize centralization of authority and hierarchy, the alliance, and reinventing state governance mechanisms emphasize networks and polycentric power centers. On the other hand, while the administrative and reinventing state governance mechanisms are focused on establishing formal rules of governance. The paternal and alliance traditions are more concerned with informal networks and relations limited within family and nexus between politics and business.

Which mechanism is dominant and influences the system of governance in South Asia? Paternalism has a long tradition and is deeply rooted. This is complimented by the hierarchic nature of administrative state established during the colonial rule. Since both emphasize top-down centralized control system, this matches well with the South Asian cultural tradition. While paternalism is emphasized by political parties and their leaders that give them control over governance mechanism, the administrative state is preferred by the appointed officials, especially the generalists because these give them much leeway over policy-making process and shield them from political interference.

On the other hand, alliances and reinventing state are new patterns of governance. Alliances became important when winning elections became the most important instrument to gain access to complete hegemony over policy decisions and blocking the opposite alliances from this. While alliances are necessary and help to consolidate power and win elections, this is a popular strategy to be used by the major political parties. This strategy ensures win-win situation for all those involved in the alliance.

Reinventing state is also becoming a popular strategy of governance because of globalization of economy and neo-liberal market trends. Economic growth and sustained economic development can only take place when the national economy, administration, and policies are geared to the global economy. This is a preferred instrument of the donor and international agencies because foreign assistance cannot be utilized better without reengineering the existing state. This is also preferred by civil society, especially non-governmental organizations because that would give them access to policy-making arenas and be part of the public-private partnership process.

These four types of governance mechanisms have different demands for the type of institutional and authority pattern, accountability and loyalty, and interfaces between politics and bureaucracy, and between politics and citizens. There are different champions of these four types governance. Paternalism is favored by traditional big political parties. Administrative state is favored by generalist bureaucrats. Alliances are preferred by political parties, sometimes in alliance with economic interests. And finally, reinventing state is guided by international organizations and advocated by NGOs and civil society organizations.

However, paternalism as a deeply rooted social order is cross-cutting affecting and influencing all forms of governance. One reason is that rule-based governance has remained weak and is marginally institutionalized despite many legislations and acts. This is because this has been handed over to people by elites in collaboration with international actors without required solicitation, respect, support, and legitimacy from below (Myrdal 1968, p. 1118)

Conclusion

The South Asian context in terms of its political and societal culture poses serious challenges to governance in terms of inclusion of citizens and responding appropriately to them. The main challenge is how to include different hitherto neglected groups in decision making. India is struggling with religion and caste tensions, both Nepal and Sri Lanka are post-conflict states and struggling to make a balance in including different ethnic and caste groups in their governance system. Pakistan is torn between Islamic fundamentalists, on the one hand, and both the government and the military supported by the West are struggling to contain the rise of religious fundamentalism and Balochistan⁸ separatist movement in the west, on the other. Bangladesh is the only country in South Asia with less ethnic and religious tension but the country is divided along political lines, especially between the two major alliances. These challenges are not well addressed in the system of governance. It is still characterized by short sightedness, with weak vision for long-term planning and redistribution of its resources. The gap between the rich and the poor is widening. Poverty is highly visible alongside affluence which indicates that the system of governance is slow to respond to this disparity.

Given the present governance scenario in South Asia, a quick fix is not likely to come readily. The region if it intends to embark on a “developmental state” tracks needs strong political commitment to rise above narrow family and partisan interests. At the same time, rule of law or the revival of Weberianism such as introducing merit, performance-based management, and clear distinction between

⁸ Balochistan a province in the Western part bordering Iran and Afghanistan is the poorest region in Pakistan. The demand for more autonomy has now developed into a separatist movement and an ongoing conflict between the Baloch nationalists and the government of Pakistan.

family and official life is essential to check patron-clientelism, and undue bestowing of favor. Democratic practices become futile if rules of the game at the state, societal, and individual levels are not properly spelled out, practiced, and obeyed. Democracy should combine both autonomy and independence of actions but within the boundary of what is acceptable, appropriate, and legitimate. Some South Asian countries have introduced right to information act to ensure transparency and accountability of governments' acts and decisions. However, without a functional democracy, right to information may remain a mere rhetoric reflecting symbolic politics.

Better or sound governance is desirable in the South Asian region but the question is on whose premise and on which ideas? Does the present system of governance mostly benefit those who have more from before? Do existing policies respond adequately to what citizens expect and desire? Do citizens trust those who are at the helm of public affairs? As a concept, better or sound governance is appealing but does it have normative connotations serving better the corporate, political, and administrative elites, and promote specific donor preferences? The four types of governance have both strengths and weaknesses. However, if properly managed these may prove to be powerful and useful tools to address political and socio-economic challenges in South Asia; for example, paternalism may turn out to be strong tool to make decisions quickly and mobilize people in the shortest possible time.

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