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Two-day International Conference  
on

# Reimagining South Asia: Geopolitical Inquests

15 & 16 March, 2024

Co-Sponsored by FEDERAL BANK

@Salesian College (Autonomous) Siliguri, West Bengal

*Organized by*

Department of Political Science, Salesian College (Autonomous) Siliguri



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## Concept Note

South Asia, or the southern sub-region of Asia, has had a deeply contested definitional legacy both ethnoculturally as well as in terms of political geography. As regards geopolitics, the composite region of South Asia—stretching from Afghanistan to western Myanmar, and eastern China in the north to the archipelagos of Maldives in the south—has been imagined in previous scholarship as being independent from the economically advanced Atlantic-Pacific maritime, the Eurasian continental Russian heartland, not least, the mixed continental-maritime East Asian geopolitical realms. The difficulties of structural rigour in differentiating South Asia from other rigidly conceptualized geopolitical regions is compounded by the overlapping Indian Ocean maritime realm that has historically contributed to the ethno-cultural diversity, and even protracted colonization of the former. Geographical openness to the south and geopolitical independence from the north have thereby enabled South Asia to remain an ever-malleable region with a discursive history and disparate climate: home to a myriad of ethnicities, cultures, religions, and other allied subjectivities that do not necessarily always coexist in peace.

As geopolitics concerns both the questions of influence and power over space and territory as well as the imagination of geography as the product of the clash of narratives for establishing control over spaces, it intertwines peace and conflict, as perhaps their singular causative element. Emanating at the popular level, narratives are both descriptive and generative, if reflected in a state's behaviour. Narratives are functional models of reality, serving as guides for action, and through the dynamic of action and reaction, these produce results that may bring gains for community and/or state and losses for another.

While physical geography remains constant, the interpretations and narratives thereof alter with situational, political changes which result in the evolution and mutation of narratives that highlight imagined geographical compositions by the imposition of particular identities on the regions under contention. South Asia, as one such geopolitical region, has been in a constant state of flux for centuries, being often at the receiving end of a plethora of contending discourses and ideologies, and the consequent formations of narratives of the 'self' and the 'other', not least, of inclusion and exclusion that underscore peace, conflict, and security. If South Asia is home to diverse 'imagined communities', and is in itself an 'imagined' geographical composition, re-imagining the geopolitical space is not only a legitimate, but also an urgent necessity in the light of the immanent, often insoluble paradoxes, issues, and insecurities facing the region today.

To wit, South Asia is a region populated with postcolonial states. The shared history of colonialism has left indelible marks of imperialist exploitation on the body-politic of South Asia, whereof since the late nineteenth century, South Asia was rife with anti-colonial mass movements that were not always peaceful. Since independence, the states of South Asia were clubbed by the West under the geopolitically convenient banner of the 'third world', whereby underlying notions of economic backwardness were slapped onto the region sans the identification of imperialism as the cause thereof. A series of reactions from the newly decolonized countries led by India later snowballed towards the division of the world into an economically/technologically developed yet reactionary 'global north', and a developing yet revolutionary 'global south'. South Asia, as the most geopolitically significant region of the global south, has forever grappled with the twin curses of burgeoning population and stilted development. South Asian states have therefore had to continually experiment with almost all variants of political economic pathways to development with mixed results, and are currently under the influence of geoeconomics and neoliberalism.

A hallmark of postcolonial third-worldism—exhibited by South Asian states in general, and India and Pakistan since partition in particular—is 'cartographic anxiety'. It denotes the geopolitical anxiousness surrounding questions of national identity and survival in a postcolonial society, impacting not only its political culture, but also producing cartographic metaphors of 'inside' and 'outside' along the borders for perpetuating both physical and epistemic violence that accompanies the endeavour of nation-building. For geopolitical analysts, particular comportments of nation-building and governance engendered from such anxieties and attendant insecurities have had far-reaching effects not only on the formulation and practice of foreign policy, but also, on strategic culture of South Asian states which variously opted for either neutrality (India, Nepal and Myanmar), Southeast Asian tilt (Sri Lanka), or geopolitical dependence on another regional/extra-regional state (Bhutan and Pakistan) for augmenting national and regional security against traditional threats—at the backdrop of the cold war-era geopolitical bipolarity.

Arguably, in the waning years of the cold war, the 'cartographic anxiety' of South Asian states has produced yet another set of paradoxes that remains under-recognized, not least, unresolved to this day. The exercise of state power and its attendant governmentality, falling within the domain of classical geopolitics have often elicited resentment, backlash, and rebellion in postcolonial South Asia. This has been to the extent of enunciating a clear break between the narratives of nation-building used by states—e.g. India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka—and those emanating from the grassroots. The dialectic of power and resistance in South Asia, whereby the discourses articulated by the ruling elite have rarely gone unchallenged by those in the receiving end of the resultant domination, exploitation

and/or subjection, has brought to the forefront various alternative narratives that frame history and define power in ways that are not predicated upon the wealth of nations, their military strengths, or the command of official languages, ideologies and cultural control.

The histories of resistance, often characterized as ‘geopolitics from below’, emanate from subaltern subjectivities within societies. These often result from blowbacks against state-centric geopolitics. Ever since globalisation and the ‘linguistic’, ‘spatial’, and ‘cultural’ turns in the social sciences such narratives have posed counterhegemonic challenges to the military, political, economic, and cultural hegemony of the state and its elites. Thereby, the sub-national anti-geopolitics of South Asia have endeavoured to articulate resistance to the coercive state apparatus—that creates both domestic and foreign policies—not least, withdrawing popular consent to be ruled ‘from above’. In South Asia, counterhegemonic narratives have engendered new social movements through the incentivization of specific identity and attendant intersubjectivity over universality along ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural lines, through the prioritization of the environment against rampant industrialization and exclusivist notions of development, not least, the politicization of the ends of human security—community and personal security ranging from access to food and health to gender, sexuality, and disability rights—as opposed to the narrowly defined ambits of national/regional security. The clash of narratives have also resulted in newer insecurities, whereby South Asian states have often been the victims of the worst forms of fundamentalism, extremism, and insurgencies, which in the wake of globalization have intensified internal dissent, forced migration and refugee crises, not least eliciting resolute counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency policies across the region.

Furthermore, states have become ever more assertive in South Asia with the resurgence of nationalism and right-wing political outfits in the region who deploy their own set of narratives that—albeit unrepresentative of an entire nation—often enjoy popular support from majoritarian communities. The geopolitical complexities of South Asia, thus adduced, beg a plethora of questions among which following may set the themes of the Conference: is it possible and/or even desirable to negate state-centric geopolitics, not least, wish away the state in South Asia? Is an intercourse and/or common ground possible between state-led geopolitics and counterhegemonic anti-geopolitics in South Asia? If indeed South Asia is to be reimagined, what may serve as the historical, philosophical, and empirical bases for such an endeavour? Attempts to answer to these questions, among others, can perhaps be found through debates along the following themes on which rigorously researched contributions are hereby solicited for presentation at the Two-day International Conference on ‘Reimagining South Asia: Geopolitical Inquests’-

## Sub-Themes

1. **Geopolitical approaches to South Asia: geography, politics, and colonial history.**
2. **International Relations of South Asia: from bilateralism to plurilateralism.**
3. **Traditional security issues: war, peace, nuclear proliferation, and strategic culture.**
4. **Goeconomics: resources, labour, regional trade and investment, economic sanctions.**
5. **Postcolonialism, identity politics, and anti-geopolitics: ethnic, linguistic, literary, and cultural reflections.**
6. **Borders, borderlands, and citizenship in South Asia.**
7. **Human security issues: violent extremism, cyber security, refugee and migration.**
8. **Environmentalism in South Asia: the politics of climate change and energy security.**
9. **Cross-cutting regional issues: food security, healthcare, gender, sexuality, disability rights and activism.**

## Chief Guest:

**Dr Ganga Thapa**, Professor, Department of Political Science, Tribhuvan University & President of the Center for Democracy and Conflict Analysis Nepal (CEDCAN).

## Keynote Speaker:

**Dr Samir Kumar Das**, Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Calcutta  
Former VC, NBU.

## Special Lecture:

**Dr Mahendra P Lama**, Professor, Centre for South Asian Studies, SIS, JNU & Former VC,  
Central University of Sikkim.

## Distinguished Speakers

**Dr Eklabya Sharma**, Padma Shri, Deputy Director General, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) & Former VC, TERI School of Advanced Studies, New Delhi.

**Dr Shantanu Chakrabarti**, Professor, Department of History, University of Calcutta & member of the Advisory Board of UNISCI, University of Madrid.

**Dr Shibashis Chatterjee**, Professor, Department of International Relations,  
Dean of FCoA, Jadavpur University.

**Dr Nandini Ghosh**, Assistant Professor, Institute of Development Studies Kolkata & Former member of drafting the Rights of Persons with Disabilities act 2016 in India.

**Dr Gorky Chakraborty**, Associate Professor, Institute of Development Studies Kolkata.

**Dr Nilanjana Deb**, Associate Professor, Department of English, Jadavpur University.

**Dr Bidhan Golay**, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Sikkim University.

## Valedictory:

**Dr Anindya Jyoti Majumdar**, Professor, Department of International Relations,  
& Former Dean of FCoA, Jadavpur University.

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## Important Points & Revised date

- Abstracts Submission: On or before 16 February 2024 (Revised date)
- Acceptance Notification: On or before 20 February 2024
- Full Paper Submission: On or before 16 March 2024
- Registration Closure: 5 March 2024

Abstracts and full paper should be sent to [scsc.conference@salesiancollege.net](mailto:scsc.conference@salesiancollege.net)

Selected Papers will be published in reputed Journal and Edited Volume.

## Registration Charges

Assistant Professor/Faculty: ₹ 2000/-

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