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Beyond Regimes: The Prospects of Regionalisation in South Asia

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ABSTRACT

Aim of Study: Over the years, all South Asian countries have experienced repeated regime changes throughout the political spectrum. However, most South Asian countries, like most developing countries, currently have a hybrid regime. Gaps in the research highlight the necessity to investigate and establish the relationship between the hybridity ratio and its influence on South Asia's regionalisation possibilities. As a result, this article explores the influence of different regime types on regionalisation in South Asia and why, despite several regimes, regionalisation has remained an elusive goal for the area.

Methodology: The methodologies used in this study are descriptive and exploratory, emphasising assessing, comparing, and analysing the data's multiple dimensions and interpretations, both hidden and apparent.

Findings and conclusion: As a result, it may be inferred that the role of regimes in defining the possibilities of South Asian regionalisation is unclear and requires additional reflection. However, there is enough evidence to assume that altering the hybridity ratio (toward democratic inclinations) may assist South Asia in the pursuit of its goal of regionalisation.

Keywords: Democracy, Authoritarianism, Hybrid Regime, Regionalisation, South Asia.

Introduction

South Asia, located in the North Eastern Hemisphere and covering around 5.2 million km^2, is home to almost a quarter of the world's population, making it the most densely inhabited geographical region on the planet. South Asia is home to eight countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Each of these countries has seen various governments during the course of its history(Ananya Mukherjee Reed, 1997). Every regime was distinct in its qualities, as was its influence on the state's internal and exterior affairs. Each regime transition introduced its own set of methods, notably in politics and economics, which impacted the state's narrative and strategy toward regionalisation, i.e. the manifestation of a common identity and purpose. This shaping, over time and

across South Asian countries, eventually played a decisive role in determining the fate and prospects of regionalisation in South Asia.

The same is true now, as governments continue to influence South Asian regionalism's trajectory. There are three sorts of regimes in general: democracy, authoritarianism, and hybrid regimes. Most South Asian countries have gone through several regimes, like most other developing countries, and have ultimately landed on a hybrid system. A hybrid government has characteristics of both democracy and authoritarianism in that there are elections but also political repression. There are no fixed standards for a hybrid system, and people can freely migrate from one pole, democracy, to another, authoritarianism. A hybrid regime has a percentage of the features of one kind of regime and an abundance of the characteristics of another type of regime (Morlino, July 2009). As a result, all of South Asia's past and current hybrid regimes may be found anywhere along the spectrum.

However, it is essential to note that the closer a despotic government gets to democracy, the higher its possibilities for regionalisation in South Asia. A hybrid government with more democratic inclinations is more likely to regionalise than its authoritarian counterpart, so it is worthwhile to investigate how different hybridity ratios impact the chances of South Asian regionalisation. Thus, in an attempt to fill the gap in the literature, this study will investigate the various types of regimes and their impact on regionalisation in South Asia, as well as evaluate how these various regimes perform under the metrics established to assess the state of regionalisation in an area. It will also analyse why, despite numerous regimes, regionalisation has remained a far-fetched reality for South Asia. Finally, it will highlight the many strategies that may be used to encourage regionalisation in the region.

Problem Statement

South Asian states have witnessed multiple regime changes throughout the years. The transitions between and among democracies, authoritarianism, and hybrid regimes have been dramatic and frequent. Each change brings along its own unique set of consequences, both positive and negative, for the future of regionalisation in South Asia. Despite the multiple regime transitions and their occasionally positive aftermaths, regionalisation remains a far-fetched goal for the South Asian region. In the current day, the majority of South Asian states have a hybrid regime. However, the hybridity ratio, i.e. the degree to which the regime shares the characteristics of both authoritarianism and democracy, varies. A hybrid regime with more democratic traits creates a more conducive environment for regionalisation in its true essence. Assuming that the policymakers wandering the decision-making corridors are rational actors, broad initiatives to encourage regionalisation must have been made, as they promise reciprocal advantages. However, regionalisation in South Asia is still a long way off, and the situation is abysmal. Thus, there is a need to explore and establish the correlation between the standing of the hybridity ratio and its impact on the prospects of regionalisation in South Asia. Favourable changes in the hybridity ratio might herald the start of a new era for a more regionalised South Asia.

Literature Review

A regime may be defined in two ways: first, as the group of people or institutions who control a country, and second, as the system that determines how a government gains and wields power. As a result, a regime may be described as the broad framework through which a state is governed. A regime also represents how a society is organised and administered in order to achieve maximum authority (Michie, 2014).

Regimes are broadly grouped into democracies, authoritarianism, and hybrid regimes (Bogaards, 2009). All of the rights, freedoms, and liberties enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) are safeguarded in a democratic system, and the right to free and fair elections for the election of the government is exercised in its entirety (Castoriadis, 1997). Suffrage reigns supreme, and a government is founded based on the popular vote.

In contrast, power is concentrated under the hands of the governing minority (which may be a single person or a small number of individuals) in an authoritarian government, which is not constitutionally accountable to the people (Teorell, 2007). This sort of system is distinguished by unquestioning deference to authority at the price of weakened rights and liberties.

However, there is a third regime type in the grey space between black and white. A hybrid regime is a blend of the two extreme sorts of regimes in that it adopts certain qualities from a democratic government and inherits a few from an authoritarian one (Leah Gilbert and Payam Mohseni, 2019). Hybrid regimes are the most adaptable, and their global dominance is here to stay for the foreseeable future. A hybrid regime can be found anywhere between the two extremes of the spectrum (Morlino, July 2009).

Throughout history, South Asia has been home to various regimes in various nations (Rahman B. U., 2012). All South Asian countries have had repeated regime changes throughout the political spectrum (Widmalm, 2021). However, most South Asian countries, like most developing countries, currently operate under a mixed framework (Ludden, 2006).A hybrid regime is the most frequent sort of regime presently; nevertheless, the nature of hybridity is another argument entirely. The hybridity ratio, or the mix of traits, varies between regimes and states. No two hybrid regimes can be entirely congruent, and no hybrid regime can remain constant throughout time(Hussain, 2020). The characteristics of a hybrid regime are fluid, and it is customary to witness frequent shifts and movements within the parameters, altering the chances of regionalisation in the region as a result (Slater, 2021).

When discussing regionalisation prospects, it is critical to offer some insight into the theoretical features of regionalisation. When it comes to regionalisation, there are several disputes and theoretical frameworks spanning from politics to economics. However, all conceptual frameworks have been heavily questioned, and not one is broadly accepted (Söderbaum, 2011). As a result, there is no credible and acceptable theoretical discussion on regionalisation in the literature. Some opponents have correctly pointed out that all semi-accepted ideas have drawn inspiration from or are based on European integration. The theoretical foundations are all ostensibly eurocentric and do not genuinely represent regionalisation as an autonomous process (Borzel, 2015).

Similarly, in other research, regionalisation is linked to either governance or globalisation, which changes the perspective and shifts the focus away from the underlying essence of regionalisation (Cooper, 2008).Although few researchers agree on the theoretical foundation for regionalisation, virtually all agree that there is a significant literature vacuum in Asian regionalism (Stubbs, 2012). Regionalisation theories will remain weak and open to substantial criticism if this gap is not addressed.

When it comes to South Asia, the literature gap on Asian regionalism is even worse. South Asia lacks regionalisation in both theories and practises: in theory, there is little literature on the region's regionalisation, while in practice, it remains one of the world's most divided areas. Some researchers feel that when British imperialists left the Indian subcontinent in the mid-twentieth century, they sowed the seeds for these profound divides (Ananya Mukherjee Reed, 1997). Others claim that the lack of unity or collaboration stems from the rivalry between states, notably the region's two primary actors, India and Pakistan, which are also frequently found on opposing sides of the global equation (Rahman S. H.).

South Asian regionalism may be lacking for various historical, political, economic, cultural, strategic, or security reasons (Pardesi, 2015).Thus far, South Asian attempts at regionalisation have neglected one or two of these critical components, which is why the current situation exists. India's expanding power, both economically and militarily, demonstrates that regionalisation in the area can never be a reality unless its benefits India, and what benefits India is usually not in the interests of its archrival, Pakistan. However, with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in South Asia, the possibilities for regionalisation may have increased slightly, as all regional actors are now unified for economic advantage (Wolf, 2017).

However, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation will play the most critical role in promoting regionalism (SAARC). Until now, SAARC has been a highly unsuccessful cooperative, and if

SAARC member states want to realise regionalisation, they must reactivate this dormant (Farooq Arshad and Lubna Ali, 2017). They will open a whole new economic Pandora's box with endless possibilities if they succeed (Maini, 2017). Promoting regionalism and economic cooperation is critical for an area to break free from its economic restraints (Mehta, 2020). However, given the history of inter-state rivalry and violence in South Asia, this is easier said than done (Chakma, 2020). With regionalisation being a long-term goal for South Asian governments, they may begin by focusing on the fundamentals, such as political harmony, economic interdependence, and shared identity. Once mastered, they can go on to more complex procedures to ensure collaboration (Paul, 2020).

As a result, it can be argued that substantial material is available on regimes and their varieties, the character of regimes in South Asia, regionalisation as a concept, and the predicament of regionalisation in South Asia. However, there is a literature gap in putting all three factors, namely regimes, regionalisation, and South Asia, combined in one piece of literature. There is little, if any, research that investigates the function of various regime types and the possibilities for regionalisation in South Asia. Thus, this research study will cover the above-mentioned literature gap.

Research Questions

This research paper would attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. How do the various sorts of regimes in South Asia influence the region's potential for regionalisation?

2. Why has regionalisation remained elusive for South Asia despite several regime transitions in the South Asian states over the years?

3. How might the prospects of South Asian regionalisation be improved under different regime types?

Hypothesis

Most South Asian countries have a hybrid regime; a favourable adjustment of the hybridity ratio will improve the prospects of regionalisation in the region.

In the above-mentioned hypothesis, there are two sorts of variables: independent and dependent. A favourable adjustment of the hybridity ratio is the independent variable, whereas the prospects of regionalisation in the region.

Research Methodology

Conceptual Framework

The Rational Choice Theory may be traced back to Adam Smith, the pioneer of modern economics, who provided this conceptual framework in his book "The Wealth of Nations" in 1776 (Smith, 1976). He determined that man is a rational actor who would act in line with what offers him the most profit or benefit. In the mid-twentieth century, sociologists George Homans, Peter Blau, and James Coleman championed rational choice theory in social interaction, expanding on Adam Smith's notion. According to these social theorists, social behaviour is motivated by a rational appraisal of a cost-reward exchange (Wiard, 2018). The rational choice theory explains why individuals connect or disengage in such relationships.

In the global arena, states behave similarly. As a result, when it comes to states, the Rational Choice Theory holds true in two ways: the state as a whole is a rational actor, and the decision maker on behalf of the state is a rational individual. As a consequence, every policy action taken by a state will be well-informed and measured, ultimately benefiting the state. Every state, or its rational policymaker, will identify the problem, specify the desired goals, weigh the ramifications of each option, and then choose the most reasonable decision that guarantees the most favourable results (William James Booth, 1993).

In the case of South Asian nations, or any states, the regimes have a rational actor (either a person or the state as a whole) who makes decisions based on specific strategic and economic aims. This notion states that there is a rational actor in every regime, regardless of type, and that this core actor formulates policy and strategy regarding, among other things, the choice between competition and cooperation (Glaser, 2010).If the rational actor has sufficient cause to assume that cooperation, rather than rivalry, with the states' regional actors, would yield fruit, the state will pursue a regionalisation plan. However, suppose the rational actor believes that competing with the state's regional actors will be more beneficial in the long run. In that case, the state will adopt a rigid competition policy with its regional actors, implying that the final formulation of the strategy will be based on the rational actor's understanding of the situation.

Furthermore, according to the Rational Choice Theory, it makes little difference whether the hybrid governments in South Asia lean towards democracy or authoritarianism. Thus, while assessing the chances for regionalisation in South Asia, it is critical to remember that, at the end of the day, it all comes down to the decisions made by a rational actor for and on behalf of the state. However, some proponents of the Rational Choice Theory, supported by their counterparts in liberal institutionalism, claim that by increasing cooperation between and across states, the possibilities of regionalisation may be enhanced (Quackenbush, 2004). As a result, we might say that regionalisation in South Asia is loosely related to democratic tendencies and an absence of it to authoritarian tendencies.

Research Design

Based on the requirements of the study, the research strategy outlined in the research design was that of a descriptive and exploratory research and thus, the type of literature review is narrative. As a result, this study is heavily focused on observations. Furthermore, the research time horizon used was a cross-sectional study since data pertaining to the research questions was collected at a given point in time. Furthermore, the chosen research approach was mono-method research, which indicates that only qualitative research was conducted. Finally, several research techniques and methods were used, which have been discussed as they are applied in the following sections.

Data Collection & Data Analysis

The research employs an analytical method to identify and comprehend the numerous parts of the topic under examination. Data for this work were gathered from various primary and secondary sources, including books, journals, magazines, research articles, newspapers, websites on the internet, official open-source materials, public legislation, and library records, among others.

The first part of the study is primarily archival, but the second part is more recent. The analysis presented is subjective, but it is firmly grounded in evidence. The study attempts to examine and thoroughly analyse all elements of the issue under consideration in an impartial manner. A holistic method is used to generate various interpretations from the retrieved data.

Furthermore, in addition to evaluating the data on the surface, this research attempts to read between the lines. Ulterior goals are revealed, as are alternative interpretations of the data. The study establishes the groundwork for future advancements in terms of how data in this field of study may always be understood based on the presentation and potential interpretation of data.

Organisation of the Study

The paper is divided into three sections to make it cohesive and understandable. The first section highlights the fundamental issue of the research, explains the research problem, reviews the literature while identifying the literature gap, formulates a hypothesis, and establishes the research questions, along with providing a summary of the research methods entailing the article. The second section discusses the three categories of regimes before specifying the type of regime predominant in each of the eight South Asian nations. Finally, the third section addresses the notion of regionalisation and proposes numerous measures that may be used to assess how much an area, in this case, South Asia, has been regionalised.

Furthermore, the hypothesis is put to the test and inferences to the theoretical framework are made throughout the study.

Analytical Discussion

This section of the research will go through five main aspects of South Asia regionalisation under various past and contemporary regimes. Doing so will enable us to assess the state of South Asian regionalisation. These factors include intra-regional trade, people-to-people contacts, type of border, labour migration, and cultural linkages (Iqbal, 2010).

Intra-Regional Trade

Although geography is on South Asia's side, intra-regional commerce remains modest due to long-standing rivalries, a lack of integration, and possibly even a lack of desire from all sides to ameliorate the condition of regionalism in the region. According to the most recent World Bank data, intra-regional commerce in South Asia amounts to less than 5% of overall trade in the area. To put things into perspective, this is only one-fifth of ASEAN's total and around one-fourth of the European Union's total. The 5% transaction has a total worth of $23 billion, which is about one-third of the anticipated value. The situation of intra-regional commerce in South Asia is bleak, as illustrated by the fact that it is 20% cheaper for India to trade with Brazil, a country halfway across the world than with Pakistan, a country just at a stone's throw.

South Asia's dismal status of intra-regional commerce is not a new phenomenon. In reality, the figure was even lower than 5% in 2007. South Asian governments in 2007 were diametrically opposed to what they are today. General Pervaiz Musharraf, who had been in power since a military takeover in 1999, was Pakistan's president. Nepal was a constitutional monarchy, Bhutan was an absolute monarchy, a dictator had ruled the Maldives for over three decades, and the US had invaded Afghanistan (which was not a member of SAARC at the time). As a result, bad intra-regional commerce is inherent in the South Asian area and has nothing to do with the sort of government.

However, adjusting the hybridity ratio may yield some favourable results. One thing is for sure: a state cannot realise its true economic potential or prosper to its limit in isolation. As a result, economic interdependence measures are required because the regional trade deficit costs $44 billion per year, which significantly impacts the economic conditions of all SAARC members. Financial assistance from the World Bank alone will not be able to pull South Asia out of its economic plight.

The lack of intra-regional commerce in South Asia is due to a lack of political will and vision, not a lack of possibilities. The options are limitless. If intra-regional commerce's potential for India and Pakistan is realised, it can generate more than $30 billion each year (Nizamani, 2022). Thus, regardless of the individual nations' regime, there is an urgent need to minimise superfluous tariffs and prohibitions and boost intra-regional commerce broadly across the area. Regime types have been shown to have little influence on the possibilities of regionalisation in South Asia; therefore, alternative pathways should be explored when looking for ways to boost intra-regional trade.

People-to-People Contacts

With South Asia home to over a quarter of the world's population, it is reasonable to infer that the South Asian people constitute a potentially potent force. People-to-people interaction at all levels is always helpful and recommended, whether for peacebuilding, improving regional cohesion, increasing tourism, or developing bilateral connections. People-to-people interaction between academia and researchers can start dialogues on numerous fronts. As a result, it is critical to have different pathways that enable and promote individuals to engage in meaningful interactions with others outside the region's borders.

Unfortunately, because the SAARC countries do not get along, people-to-people communication has been limited in the South Asian area. People-to-people relationships have a very tiny chance of flourishing if the states do not get along, which is why they do not. A lack of trust between and among nations is at the

core of a lack of people-to-people interaction, which is accompanied by every relevant security concern. People-to-people communication is further complicated by deeply ingrained concepts and ideals of spewing hatred toward one's geographical neighbours.

Regionalisation can only be realised in its genuine nature with people-to-people contact, which has been sadly lacking in South Asia over the last decades. Contact was problematic in the year 2000 due to solid border controls (Chadha, 2000). Similarly, it was proved in 2012 that lax oversight and excessive paperwork inhibited fruitful person-to-person encounters (Rahman F.-u. , 2012). The same is true now, when the SAARC nations' political environments, notably in Pakistan and India, have made cross-border relations impossible. As a result, regime types, like intra-trade interactions, have a minor influence on people-to-people relationships in South Asia (Ashraf, 2022). People-to-people relationships have remained fundamentally unchanged under democratic, authoritarian, and hybrid governments.

People-to-people communication largely depends on the security environment within and among South Asian governments. People-to-people relationships typically drop when political tensions or security are high. Changing the hybridity ratio, on the other hand, might lead to good changes in people-to-people relations and, eventually, regionalisation in South Asia. People-to-people connections, for example, may rise if a more democratic and inclusive policy or narrative around such encounters is created and implemented. Measures that encourage cross-border communication in its purest form should be adopted and implemented because meaningful connections are built via contact and engagement. Instead of waiting for a regime transition to increase regionalisation chances, it is advised to begin with the people - once the people link and integrate, regionalisation of South Asia would be unavoidable.

Type of Border

Borders are virtually always turbulent and a cause of concern in South Asian countries, needing significant efforts to safeguard them. Nonetheless, they open the door to problems in some ways, necessitating proactive security measures. The Durand Line, a 2430-kilometre-long boundary between Pakistan and its western neighbour, Afghanistan, is one of several contested frontiers in South Asia. The boundary was established in 1893 due to an agreement between Afghanistan and the British Empire. It has been tension between the two nations since Pakistan's independence in 1947. The Durand Line was particularly destructive to regionalisation at the time since the incumbent Taliban government in Afghanistan, while not yet recognised internationally, is an authoritative regime. Pakistan has encountered several security issues recently and has purportedly blamed Afghanistan for permitting cross-border terrorism (Putz, 2023).The extent of this charge is unknown; nonetheless, it is apparent that it has had a detrimental influence on the region's chances for regionalisation, suggesting that authoritarianism has the ability to harm the prospects of a regionalised South Asia.

Similarly, the Line of Control (LoC) that runs along Pakistan's 2912-kilometre border with India has been a significant cause of trouble in the region. Both international relations professionals and amateurs agree that the Kashmir problem has been at the heart of the Indo-Pakistan rivalry. Since 1947, the disputed area of Kashmir has been a source of friction between Pakistan and India, catalysing four wars. India tries to demonstrate its dominance by marginalising Muslims in IOK. Bilateral relations reached a new low in August 2019, when India abolished Kashmir's special status, prompting Pakistan to downgrade diplomatic ties and expel the Indian envoy. With active conflicts like these, regionalisation in South Asia can only remain a distant objective.

Furthermore, India and Nepal share a 1770 km boundary that comprises both Himalayan areas and the Indo-Gangetic Plain. There are two territorial disputes between India and Nepal, over the Kalapani area in northwestern Nepal near the India-Nepal-China trijunction and Susta in southern Nepal. This border war, like other conflicts, harms South Asia's possibilities for regionalisation. In addition, India and Bangladesh share a 4096-kilometre boundary known as the International Boundary (IB). In 2001, there were occasional conflicts along this border between the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and the Border

Guards Bangladesh (BGB), signalling that this border, too, has the potential to produce turmoil in the region. In addition, the maritime boundary between India and Sri Lanka remains tense.

All of these border skirmishes or clashes have existed independent of regime type. However, it has been noted that the intensity of these incidents is much reduced when the regimes on both sides of the border lean more towards the democratic pole. When political tensions between SAARC countries subside, an open international border like the one between India and Bhutan may become a consideration. As a result, it is possible to conclude that border geopolitics may benefit from active initiatives to strengthen democratic ideals on both sides of the boundary.

Labour Migration

Labour migration is significant in South Asia since the area has the most migrants, estimated at roughly 13.9 million workers from the eight SAARC nations in the Gulf countries and Malaysia(Wickramasekara, 2011). In this sense, labour migration may be divided into two categories: labour movement from South Asia to the rest of the globe and labour migration within the area. The second category is crucial in terms of regionalization, and the two primary instances are labour migration from Afghanistan to Pakistan and labour migration from Bangladesh to India.

Labour migration in South Asia is a double-edged sword in the sense that it is helpful and encouraged from the perspective of Afghanistan or Bangladesh since Afghan labour has found a market and Bangladesh has discovered a constant supply of remittances (Nicola Piper, 2022). However, from the perspective of Pakistan or India, it is not especially advantageous because the majority of labour movement occurs through unlawful routes. Even if it does not, it still varies with market forces, demand and supply related to the workforce. As a result, because labour migration is a double-edged sword, it is impossible to predict whether it would enhance or damage South Asian labour migration prospects.

However, labour migration may prove to be one of the most potent weapons of regionalization since it increases people-to-people interaction and goodwill across nations while making the host country's labour market more competitive. Regime changes have not been observed to influence labour migration significantly. So, regime types do not affect the chances of regionalization in terms of the scope of labour mobility.

Cultural Linkages

South Asian countries have extensive cultural links to one another. They share a history, experiences, customs, social conventions, religion, language, cuisines, attire, a mutual love of cricket, and ethnicities. Despite a large and diverse population, some cultural bond connects one South Asian to another. These cultural ties are strong and have existed both before and after South Asia was divided into various countries. Cultural ties have always been a constant regardless of colonial control, independence, or the numerous changes in governments.

However, it can be extrapolated that this regime might make it easier or more difficult for cultural links to exist, establish, and thrive (Jalal, 2017). There is a significant possibility that initiatives to strengthen cultural ties will be done if there is a democratic regime or a hybrid system that shares many elements of a democracy. At the very least, no attempts will be made to undermine cultural ties. In contrast, when political repression is prevalent in an authoritarian government, there is always the chance that the regime may design some policy that will impede cultural ties. With little or no cultural ties, regionalisation is unlikely to occur in the South Asian region. Thus, cultural ties may be increased by favourably altering the hybridity ratio, improving South Asia's potential for regionalisation.

Conclusion

South Asia is a complex territory to regionalise due to its unique history, large population, and insurmountable diversity. In and of itself, the area is complicated, demanding a visionary and holistic approach if regionalisation is to be actively pursued as a goal. To begin, SAARC must be revitalised and

equipped for future challenges. All SAARC countries must work together to achieve a common goal: a regionalised and prosperous South Asia. It is going to be an uphill task and will not garner results overnight. A lack of devotion on the part of any of the members will do irreparable damage to the cause and, as a result, tarnish the region's prospects for regionalisation.

The significance of regimes in determining the possibilities of South Asia's regionalisation is not evident and needs further investigation. Once disclosed, it leads to the conclusion that regionalisation thrives considerably better in a government that is as democratic as possible in its functioning. However, the idea of regionalisation flourishing just as much, if not more, in an authoritarian government cannot be ruled out. Given that the majority of SAARC members have a hybrid regime, it was worthwhile to investigate how a favourable modification of the hybrid ratio increases the region's prospects for regionalisation. Even little modifications might go a long way toward regionalising an area as fragmented as South Asia if managed with utmost competency and finesse.

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