

BMC Research Journal

ISSN: 2795- 1731,

Peer-reviewed Multidisciplinary

Open Access Journal

Indexed in Journal



Birendra Bidhya Mandir Campus

Tikapur, Kailali, Nepal

Url: www.birendracampus.edu.np

Research Article

Human Security in South Asia: Lesson for Nepal

Naresh Bhakta Adhikari
PhD. Scholar

Published by: Research Management Cell, BMC, Tikapur, Kailali, Nepal

Publication: June 2025, Volume: 4, BMC Research Journal

Corresponding author: Naresh Bhakta Adhikari, adhikarinaresh4032@gmail.com

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-9995-6906>

Copy right@ The Author (s). The publisher may reuse the article(s) as per the prior permission of the concerned author(s).

DOI: 10.3126/bmcvj.v4i1.80086

Abstract

The concept of human security has evolved beyond traditional state-centric approaches to encompass the protection of individuals from a range of threats, including economic instability, environmental degradation, and political insecurity. South Asia, characterized by significant human security challenges such as poverty, armed insurgencies, environmental vulnerabilities, and governance deficits, presents a critical case for examining the complexities of human security. This study employs a qualitative research methodology, utilizing secondary data sources, to explore the status, challenges, and prospects of human security in South Asia, with a focus on deriving lessons for Nepal. The study highlights the interconnected nature of threats within the region by drawing on frameworks such as the UNDP's multidimensional concept of human security, Amartya Sen's Human Development Theory, and Barry Buzan's Regional Security Complex Theory. Common issues such as political instability, environmental insecurity, and forced migration exacerbate human insecurity, further complicated by traditional security concerns like border disputes and transnational terrorism. For Nepal, lessons emerge from addressing systemic inequalities, strengthening governance, and adopting people-centered development approaches. This analysis underscores the urgency of regional cooperation and integrated strategies to mitigate human insecurity and foster sustainable development in South Asia.

Keywords: South Asia, regional security, environmental security, political instability, sustainable development.

Introduction

Security is freedom from danger, fear, want, and deprivation. Throughout most of the past century, security thinking and policy have focused on the dangers of military aggression. However, in today's context, human security is promoted and threatened by various economic, cultural, political and environmental factors (Matthew & Fraser, 2002, p. 23). Experts of human security mention that human security has three dimensions. First, human security is about the security of individuals and the communities in which they live. Second, human security is about the interrelationship between freedom from fear and freedom from want and physical and material security. Third, human security implies an extension of rule-governed security instead of war-based security (Kaldor, 2011, p. 65).

If we talk about South Asia, the region is equally deeply engulfed in human security concerns. All three principal concerns of human security, namely, security of life and freedom from fear, freedom from want and search for quality of life and security of the environment, are present in South Asia. The state in South Asia is responsible for its failure in the area of human security. All states suffer from lapses in governance because of a lack of transparency, the spread of corruption and the absence of clearly defined responsibility toward people. The South Asian region has witnessed the rise of sectarian and undemocratic states in the past several decades (Chari & Gupta, 2003, p. 57).

Southern states are also generally weak and vulnerable to fulfilling developmental obligations towards people. Its demographic features, account for about 39.49% of Asia's population, over 24% of the world's population, and is home to a vast array of people. With its immense human security deficit, South Asia, compounded by inter-state tensions and the consequent diversion of human and financial resources from people's needs to states' preferences, urgently requires a change in mindset (Basrur and Joseph, 2007, p. 1).

The human security situation in South Asia is one of the worst in the world, characterized by a high degree of both want and fear. The persistence of threats to the safety and security of the individual and the people generated by violent intra-state conflicts, non-democratic rule, violation of democratic and human rights, misgovernance, corruption, crime, terrorism, gender violence, trafficking in women and children and the like are enormous, and remain a constant source of fear.

On the other hand, human deprivation is caused by the consequences of underdevelopment, poverty, hunger, deprivation, inequality, illiteracy, disease and health hazards, overpopulation, environmental degradation, natural disasters, and overuse and misuse of

natural resources. South Asian regional scenario is more complicated because of the heterogeneity of groups involved in conflicts. Ideological, religious, sectarian, ethnic, and separatist groups are all active in the region, and what would be remedies for them is difficult here to assume. Some characteristics of conflict in South Asia are the largest number of armed groups, the longest duration of the conflict and the rising number of fatalities in terrorist-related violence.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the concept of human security in South Asia and its relevance to Nepal. A descriptive and analytical approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the issue, emphasizing contextual and interpretative insights. The views and data used in this article are secondary in nature. The secondary data was collected through related documents such as journals, articles, books, publications, and reports. This article primarily focuses on the status, prospects, and challenges of human security in South Asia based on its core components. More emphasis is placed on drawing out lessons for Nepal that will help to improve the country's human security situation.

Conceptual Framework

The study on "Human Security in South Asia: Lessons for Nepal" draws on the holistic concept of human security, as articulated in the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**'s 1994 *Human Development Report*. This report reframed security from a state-centric perspective to a people-centered approach, emphasizing "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want" (UNDP, 1994). Human security integrates multiple dimensions, making it an inclusive framework for addressing threats to individuals' well-being. This study adopts multidimensional framework to analyze South Asia's complex challenges and identify lessons for Nepal. The framework highlights how interconnected threats, such as economic instability and environmental degradation, affect regional human security.

Core Dimensions of Human Security:

1. **Economic Security:** Ensuring stable income and access to employment opportunities (Sen, 2002).
2. **Food Security:** Access to sufficient and nutritious food (FAO, 2022).

3. **Health Security:** Mitigating disease threats and ensuring functional healthcare systems (Mattiuzzi & Lippi, 2020).
4. **Environmental Security:** Addressing vulnerabilities linked to climate change, disasters, and resource depletion (Naidoo, 2022).
5. **Personal Security:** Preventing physical violence, human trafficking, and terrorism (Acharya, 2018).
6. **Community Security:** Safeguarding cultural identity and promoting social cohesion (Buzan & Waever, 2003).
7. **Political Security:** Upholding human rights, justice, and democratic participation (UNDP, 1994).

Theoretical Framework

Human Development Theory

Amartya Sen proposed this theory in *Development as Freedom* (2002). It emphasizes expanding human capabilities and freedoms as the cornerstone of development. It aligns with the principles of human security by prioritizing people's well-being over material wealth. This theory underscores the need to address structural inequities and promote access to education, healthcare, and livelihoods in Nepal's context.

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)

Developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, RSCT argues that regions such as South Asia operate as interconnected security systems due to shared geographic proximity and interdependence (Buzan & Waever, 2003). South Asia's regional security challenges, including border disputes, migration, and climate impacts, provide a crucial lens for understanding Nepal's vulnerabilities as a landlocked country reliant on neighboring states for trade and resources.

Critical Security Studies (CSS)

As articulated by **Ken Booth** in *Critical Security Studies and World Politics* (2005), CSS critiques the traditional focus on military threats and emphasizes the insecurities of marginalized populations. It calls for addressing systemic inequalities and ensuring human dignity is central to security policies. Nepal's challenges, such as social exclusion, poverty,

and political instability, align with CSS's focus on grassroots insecurities, making this approach particularly relevant.

Common Issues of Human Security in South Asia

The region has experienced various armed conflicts over the last six decades. While intra-state conflicts in the region have largely revolved around ethno-nationalistic movements within national boundaries, inter-state conflicts, and their causes have internal and external dimensions. Both external and internal dimensions have serious implications for the human security of the people of the region. For ease of analysis, common issues of human security in South Asia are mainly divided into political security, environmental security, physical security, health security, community security, personal security, and the issues of armed insurgency, poverty and conflict.

Traditional security challenges in South Asia

It is unfair if we do not discuss some core conventional security issues while discussing nontraditional security challenges of the region. In the region, both the India and Pakistan are nuclear states. The bone of contention of the region is border issues, particularly on the princely state Kashmir, that spread over the region at certain points of history as US former President Bill Clinton rightly commented, "the Indian subcontinent and the Line of Control on Kashmir" might be "the most dangerous place in the world today," which already resulted in four major war and crisis.

Other prominent security issues are border problems between Nepal and India, India and Bangladesh, water issues in the region, infiltration, migration, illegal activities, crime, refugee problems between Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as Nepal and Bhutan, etc. Even though, Misgovernance reportedly prevalent in South Asian states includes poor representation, lack of accountability, and lack of ethos of public service, poor standard of policing, above all injustice, and human rights violations that appear as threat to the human security of the region (Rahman, 2014, p. 2). These traditional security issues also help exaggerate the region's volatile human security situation.

Political Security

Ethno-nationalism and religious extremism continue to dominate the perceptions of a large number of people in South Asia. If one examines the reason why the forces of ethno-nationalism and religious extremism have gained ground, one important cause is the growth

of intolerance and chauvinism at various levels. Suppose the Jihadi culture is being promoted in Pakistan in the form of extremist religious groups, in India. In that case, one can see fanatic Hindu organizations, particularly the Shiv Sena, threatening various religious minorities. Unfortunately, South Asian governments have tried to deal with ethnic and religious issues by using purely administrative methods instead of handling things through a political process. (Basrur, 2001, p. 206). This inadequate political institution arrangement creates a volatile political situation in the region.

Environmental security

Environmental security has become an important dimension of comprehensive national security. Analysts believe that the scarcity of resources may give rise to a conflict for the remaining resources. The more crucial insecure segment in South Asia is climate change. Countries Bangladesh, Maldives, and some parts of Sri Lanka are in lower coastal areas vulnerable to climate change. Climatologists claim that these areas might go underwater in the coming decades because of the massive melting of ice in the two poles of the world due to the gradual waxing of the world temperature. Most of the region's governments are insensitive toward climate change issues. Regarding environmental security, the regional scenario is critical and vulnerable compared to other world regions.

Physical security

Forced migration, refugees, and IDPs, are another emerging security concern in the region. In the last 65 years, more than 35 million South Asians have moved across the border in search of security, running from threats of life, honor and property, or in search of protection from religious and other kinds of persecution, or to avoid strife and wars, or for work and food, or just by drives towards ethnic, racial, ideological or religious homogenization. The severe refugee crisis can be traced back to Bangladesh's Independence struggle when about 10 million refugees fled to Indian bordering states; Nepal has been home to hundreds of Tibetans and Bhutanese refugees since as early as 1959 and 1990, respectively, and during armed conflicts approximately 280,000 IDPs being homeless in Sri Lanka. However, with population growth, the crisis seeks immediate securitization approaches. Chronic poverty coupled with unemployment is in complete contradiction with economic security. Unemployment in the region has grown by 3 to 4 percent over the past decade and in some countries by 7 to 8 percent. Education, a measure of human capital and a

critical determinant of economic progress, has not crossed the figure of 50 percent of the population in many South Asian countries.

Armed Insurgency, Poverty and Conflict

South Asia has one of the largest numbers of non-state armed groups' in any region globally. Out of the 18 identified by the Military Balance of the International Institute of Strategic Studies, three are in Bangladesh, 8 in India, 5 in India/Pakistan, and one in Nepal and Sri Lanka in the past decade. Most of the armed groups are transnational in character, which often leads to accusations of cross-border terrorism. In the decade of following 9/11, South Asia has felt the repercussions of the terrorists' attacks on the World Trade Center perhaps more than any other region in the world (Rahman, 2014, p. 3).

Moreover, the region itself was struggling with internal terrorist attacks in India, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh, particularly activity of insurgence groups like LTTE in Sri Lanka, Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Jamatul Mujahidin in Bangladesh, Maoist' in Nepal, and Naxalbari in India, during the past decade. The issue has a substantial presence in various parts of South Asia and is an essential consideration when mapping regional security dynamics.

The region has the highest incidence of poverty in terms of absolute numbers and as a percentage of the population, compared to any other regional group of countries in the world. South Asia suffers from widespread poverty-, in some countries like Nepal, even, exceeding 40%, extremely poor health services, inadequate access to education, and poor infrastructure to cope with environmental challenges. The instances in South Asia of poor farmers committing suicide and families selling their daughters for prostitution due to poverty are galore. These are also food riots and hunger deaths. And such instances are not confined to any single country. A sizeable segment of these people is not free from fear either. They could become victims of slumlords, neighborhood dadas, smugglers, drug pushers, and criminal gangs. Dacoits, armed rebel groups, and terrorists attack them. Discrimination against women, exploitation of children, and unequal treatment of minorities are pervasive and seemingly beyond remedy.

Health, Community and Personal Security

Health security in South Asia has a dismal record, and many lives are lost as people lack access to health centers. For example, according to the World Health Organization, 25 percent of people in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, India, cannot access health care because of location problems. In Nepal, 15 percent of life's equivalent healthy years are lost due to disease, again

often because of the lack of access to healthcare in rural and mountainous areas. In Pakistan, inadequate funding and poverty in provinces like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan are significant concerns. And war-ravaged Afghanistan has one of the worst infant and maternal mortality rates in the world, while 70 percent of the total population lives in health vulnerability (Mufti, 2017, p. 1).

The situation is worse in Bangladesh, where people are more vulnerable to health security issues because of rapid population growth, pervasive poverty, poor environmental conditions, and climate change. With a current annual growth rate of 1.39%, the population is expected to increase to 172 million by 2020 and stabilize at 210 million by the year 2060, if replacement-level fertility is achieved, which has not yet been the case.

Community and personal security in the region is also under threat, due to the growth of fundamentalist forces and terrorist organizations as well as ethnic conflicts. In the region, domestic violence features an extreme array of perpetrators and victims. Low-caste Dalits, despite reductions in caste prejudice, continue to be terrorized, the New Delhi-based Institute for Conflict Management registered 27,000 “caste-crimes” against Dalits in 2017. The rise in regional radicalization and the growing influence of left extremism, such as the Naxalite or Maoist movement, are only symptoms of emerging disaffection with the government not only in India but also affect the whole region (Tariq, 2017, p. 3).

Lesson for Nepal: Key Issues on Human Security

In the changing security environment at global and regional level, Nepal has also been experiencing significant deviations from its traditional state-centric threat perception into a new and nontraditional threat perception. More people lose their lives every day in Nepal due to malnutrition, poverty, disease, road accidents and natural calamities than any other factor. The successive regimes’ failure to provide good governance and inability to maintain law and order made the country more vulnerable. It provided ground for the extremist forces to expand their influence and enhance their agendas. These governmental failures precipitated other challenges, such as internally displaced people, refugees, migration, and environmental crises.

The escalation of conflicts and deteriorating security environment have increasingly posed multiple challenges to the security of the Nepali state. The resurgence of identity-based movements particularly the violent activities carried out by some of the groups in Terai and also in the eastern-hills, have posed a serious threat to the security environment of those regions. Likewise, the prevalent poverty situation, increasing unemployment, gender, caste and other forms of social discrimination, regional disparity, and resource gaps have also generated various

forms of conflict. Furthermore, the 10 years of Maoist insurgency have weakened the state's efficiency and delivery systems.

We cannot ignore the risk of communal violence between Pahadis and Madhesi in Terai. The line between the struggle against the state and against Pahadis has been blurred among the Madhesi parties and armed groups. Likewise, the formation of Pahadi groups like Chure Bhawar has further polarized the situation causing the security environment in the Terai to further deteriorate. As identity-based politics became a significant feature of Nepali politics, various ethnic groups became more assertive and started engaging in violent activities (Bhattarai et al., 2010, p. 46). The issue of migration and security is interlinked, and an increasing number of migratory movements, both internal and external, has a great implication for the security environment of Nepal. On the one hand, it has to control the ongoing internal migration, which has not only disturbed the country's demographic structure but, in the long run, may create serious problems.

Food and water insecurity was one of the structural causes of the conflict in Nepal. Water scarcity and food insecurity in Nepal are politicized and marginalized in policy and practice; these two issues are a perennial source of socio-political tension and conflict in Nepal. Likewise, land distribution is also a significant challenge, concerning Nepal's food and water security and internal stability. Nepal should take these issues seriously and formulate immediate plans to address them. By analyzing the federal experience of South Asian states, there are, challenges to implementing federalism in Nepal, as well as risks of failure. The economic aspects of federalism have largely been ignored. Conflicts among the tiers of government look inevitable unless changes are adopted. In this context, civil society and the business community must inform decentralization, ensuring that the process strengthens-rather than undermines-the country's fragile democracy-, and boosts economic freedom through improved governance, efficiency, and accountability (Anderson, 2017, p. 2).

Nepal is becoming a new route for the narcotic drugs trade which already threatens social and cultural problems in Nepal. Likewise, the Climate Change Risk Atlas 2020 ranked Nepal as the fourth most vulnerable country out of 170 countries worldwide to climate change. This statistic indicates that Nepali people are insecure due to global climate change. So, while formulating human security policies, Nepal should consider the nation's and its people's environmental security.

Human security in Nepal is largely centered on its fragile physical setup. Nepal's geology and geomorphology are favorable for several natural challenges ranging from earthquakes to

various types of mass wasting and floods. Each year floods, landslides, soil erosion, forest fires, epidemics and various other natural and human-made disasters cause heavy casualties and destruction of physical property in Nepal, thereby wreaking severe human insecurity across the country's geography. This geological setup should consider the government's plan and policies.

Conclusion

After the implementation of the federal system in Nepal, Various ethnic and marginalized groups have become more assertive and violent to some extent which seriously threatens the human security aspects of the country. Even though, Nepal can take important lessons from the region's countries, South Asian states are generally multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, diverse, and developing nations. Regional security and stability are also indirectly linked with the country's national security. Various core issues of human security need to be further researched. There has not been a proper study on how federalism helps for the improvement of the human security situation in Nepal. There is also a need for a comparison of human security status, especially before or after implementing a federal system, which helps to understand the core challenges of human security in Nepal. Likewise, the present scenario does not clearly identify the prospects, status, and various dimensions of human security. The restructuring of government agencies based on federal division is also an important issues in today's context. So, there is a need for urgent research and analysis on the core issues of human security with respect to Nepalese perspectives.

References

- Acharya, A. (2018). *Constructing global order: Agency and change in world politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Anderson, J. (2017). *Will a Federal Form of Government Succeed in South Asia's Newest Democracy?*
- Basrur, R. M., Joseph, M., & Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (New Delhi, India) (Eds.). (2007). *Reintroducing the human security debate in South Asia*. Samskṛiti in association with Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies.
- Bhattarai, R., Wagle, G. S., & Nepal Institute for Policy Studies (Eds.). (2010). *Emerging security challenges of Nepal*. Nepal Institute for Policy Studies.
- Booth, K. (2005). *Critical security studies and world politics*. Lynne Rienner Publishers London.
- Buzan, B., & Waever, O. (2003). *Regions and powers: The structure of international security* (Vol.226). Cambridge University Press.
- Chari, P. R., & Gupta, S. (Eds.). (2003). *Human security in South Asia: Energy, gender, migration, and globalisation*. Social Science Press : Distributed by D.K. Publishers and Distributors.
- FAO (Ed.). (2022). *Repurposing food and agricultural policies to make healthy diets more affordable*. FAO.
- Kaldor, M. (2011). Human security. *Society and Economy*, 33(3), 441–448.
<https://doi.org/10.1556/SocEc.33.2011.3.1>
- Matthew, R. A., & Fraser, L. (2002). *Global Environmental Change and Human Security: Conceptual and Theoretical Issues*. University of California.
- Mattiuzzi, C., & Lippi, G. (2020). Cancer statistics: A comparison between World Health Organization (WHO) and Global Burden of Disease (GBD). *European Journal of Public Health*, 30(5), 1026–1027. <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckz216>

- Mufti, I. (2017). Peace and Security in South Asia: Challenges and Solutions. *South Asian University*.
- Naidoo, S. (2022). Commentary on the contribution of Working Group III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. *South African Journal of Science*, 118(9/10). <https://doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2022/14690>
- Rahman, M. (2014). Security challenges in South Asia: Traditional versus Non-Traditional security. *South Asian University*.
- Sen, A. (2002). Development as freedom: the spaces of Amartya Sen. *Progress in Development Studies*, 2(3), 183-217.
- Tariq, H. (2017). Human security challenges in India. *South Asian Journal*.
<http://southasiajournal.net/human-security-challenges-in-india>.
- UNDP. (1994). Human Development Report 1994: New Dimensions of Human Security. O. U. Press.