



INDIA AND SOUTH ASIA: MARCH 2016 DOSSIER

The March 2016 Dossier highlights a range of domestic and foreign policy developments in India as well as in the wider region. These include analyses of the immanent dangers under the Modi-regime, the situation concerning the upcoming election in the Southern state of Kerala, the mid-March visit of external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj to Kathmandu for the SAARC ministerial meeting, the newly elected civilian executive in Myanmar and the difficult path that is to be tread in the country.

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Part I India - Domestic developments

Synopsis

Dr. Klaus Voll cites a critical voice about immanent dangers under the Modi-regime.

Voting in a series of state elections – altogether about 170 million voters in 160 *Lok Sabha* constituencies - has just begun and will end in May 2016. The results will be declared on the 19th of May.

After an earlier analysis about the critical North-Eastern state of Assam, this issue describes the situation in the Southern state of Kerala.

The May issue will focus on Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

'Dangers under the Modi-Regime'?

Pratap Bhanu Mehta, President of the *Center for Policy Research (CPR)*, spoke in an extensive TV-interview with Karan Thapar (*India Today*, 21. 3. 2016) about the neglect and implicit dangers, which are recognisable under the regime of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

According to Mehta, intellectuals are intimidated and academics would think twice, what they say in international conferences. He considers the „*Ultra-Nationalism*“ launched by the BJP as dangerous. The government is playing with fire with a view to the state elections in 2017 in Uttar Pradesh. The resulting undercurrents are not recognisable yet. Mehta: „*If India ceases to be a democracy, then it ceases to be a nation.*“

The government is in danger, not to trust its own citizens and is creating unnecessary social conflicts. Modi's reputation has been reduced. The government has lost its own agenda and '*narrative*' and has entered into a preliminary '*panic mode*'. Everything is considered as a '*conspiracy*'. The courageous Mehta spoke explicitly of '*political stupidity*' of the government.

Through this the government is helping the opposition to unite. But the Congress has no '*courage of conviction*'. To change this the Congress should express self-criticism.

The government is accepting vigilantism in politics and in public life. The government should stop intellectual intimidation. In Mehta's opinion, it is unclear how far the government is permitting this or even indulging in it. He misses a lack of action in this regard, possibly caused by the '*betrayal of its own promises.*'

According to Mehta, the government missed after 2014 the unique chance to constructively change with a development-oriented policy the basic conditions of the economy and society. Its social capital is shrinking, particularly since '*a feeling to be a victim*' by the ruling establishment is increasing. It is still time, that Modi could correct this, so Mehta.

Three cornered contest in Kerala?

The state election in Kerala will be conducted on the 16th of May 2016.

Till now, this southern most state is characterised by two relatively consistent formations opposing each other, which led in the past to a rotation of governments. Currently the Congress led *United Democratic Front* (UDF) is in government, whereas the Communist Party of India/Marxist (CPI/M) led *Left Democratic Front* (LDF) is in opposition.

Currently it looks like as if this rotation will continue at the forthcoming election.

But these conditions are beginning to change with the entry into the fray of the BJP as a serious player and the foundation of the *Bharat Dharma Jana Sena* (BDJS) on 4th December 2015. Are both these parties in alliance capable to influence and even change the traditional power equations? Irrespective of its rather good performance by the BJP in the recent local elections it will be difficult for the BJP, to rise from its current strength to a decisive political force, not to speak of even coming to power.

Strength of political forces

The CPI/M in 2011 with a 28.2% vote-share and 45 seats and the Congress with 26.7% and 38 seats are the leading forces in Kerala. Around the LDF and UDF are grouped different coalition parties in the relatively fragmented political spectrum.

In 2011, the UDF could win with 45.83% and 72 seats a narrow absolute majority in the 140 seats strong Parliament vis-a-vis the LDF with 44.94% and 68 seats.

Then the BJP put up candidates in 138 constituencies and did not win a single seat with 6.03%.

Religious and social patterns

About 54.7 % of the population in Kerala are Hindus, 26 % Muslims and 18.3 % Christians.

The 112 years old organization *Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam* (SNDP) – founded by the social reformer Sree Narayana Guru - represents the community of the Ezhava, which – as a part of the OBC-category - constitutes about 24% of the Hindu population in Kerala with its 33 million inhabitants. Traditionally, the SNDP was close to the Congress, yet the Ezhavas voted in the past overwhelmingly for the CPI/M.

SNDP-General Secretary Vellapally Natesan – a 78 years old former contractor with Indian Railways and a hotel owner – decided in 2013 to join hands with the BJP.

The SNDP founded on the 4th of December 2015 its political arm *Bharat Dharma Jana Sena* (BDJS). The BDJS is the most important ally of the BJP in Kerala. This step could potentially complicate the traditional bipolar politics in Kerala.

Prominent topics in the pre-election campaigns

Corruption is the most prominent topic. The Congress under Chief Minister Oomen Chandy offers space for numerous attacks, particularly through the so-called 'Solar Scam'.

According to the *Economic Review* of the Central Government, unemployment in Kerala is three times higher than the national average, although the state is a major exporter of manpower to the Middle East and also world-wide.

But one should consider, that these data routinely presented by the central government are quite doubtful, since according to this India would fare better with 2.3% unemployment than Germany.

Alliances and prominent figures

United Democratic Front (UDF):

- INC, IUML, KC(M), RSP, JD (U) KC(J) and JSS, led by the Congress.
- The UDF-alliance has been hit hard by the so-called 'Bar bribery scam' and the 'Solar scam'.
- The UDF attempts to strengthen its relations to organisations of various communities, as for instance the upper-caste *Nair Service Society*, an umbrella organisation of the second-largest Hindu-community.
- As well Muslims with about 27% as also different Christian communities with altogether about 18% overwhelmingly support the UDF.

Congress-Chief Minister Oommen Chandy, 72 years, is since 46 years a member of the Kerala parliament and never lost an election. Chandy, a Syrian-Orthodox Christian, leads a coalition, in which the *Indian Union Muslim League* (IUML) and the *Kerala Congress* (Mani) – a predominantly christian party – are the next biggest partners.

Critics are alleging, that Kerala never faced such a corrupt regime like the one under Chandy. Especially the so-called „Solar-scandal“ - in which the previously convicted and attractive Sarita S. Nair – who according to her statements has been either raped or sexually „used“ by 13 politicians etc. – brought - because of alleged bribes by Nair to the Chief Minister and some of his immediate staff, whom he dismissed in the meantime – the government into extreme difficulties. This is another example of the „sexual and crony-capitalistic economy“ at state levels.

Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala, who leads a group within the Congress against the Chief Minister, and who hoped to be nominated as chief ministerial candidate, mentioned in a letter to the Congress *High Command* in Delhi, that corruption is blossoming and the image of Chandy destroyed.

The BJP, according to Chennithala, is after its recently good performance in village and city

council elections a political factor to be taken increasingly serious. A. K. Antony, a former defence minister and a close confidante of Sonia Gandhi, saw the reasons for the bad performance in these elections in the '*over-confidence and arrogance of the Congress.*'

Left Democratic Front (LDF):

- Alliance partners are: JD(S), NCP, Kerala Congress (Skaria Thomas), Indian Congress (Socialist). The Indian National League is not a member, there are only seat adjustments. CPI(M) and CPI support also some independent candidates.
- The political road-show ('Yatra') of the CPI (M) was led by Pinarayi Vijayan, member of the political bureau and one of the two candidates for the office of Chief Minister after the elections, if the LDF will win.
- The LDF used the recent budget session in order to highlight the various scandals and the corruption under the Chandy regime.
- The CPI(M) wooed for the support of various Hindu-groups by financing Hindu-festivals and penetration of its cadres into temple committees.

The CPI/M is led by the very popular V. S. Achuthanandan, 93 years old and an OBC from the Ezhava community. His biggest inner-party rival is Pinarayi Vijayan, a member of the political bureau of the CPI/M. Both are contenders for the office of Chief Minister.

Contrary to West Bengal, the cadre-basis of the CPI/M in Kerala is rather intact. It has to be seen, how far the seat adjustments between the CPI/M and the Congress in West Bengal will negatively affect the image of the CPI/M in Kerala, since the Congress is there its principal adversary.

The CPI/M went a long way in Kerala from propagating atheism to 'secular Yoga-classes and an interest in temple politics.

The district Kannur in Northern Kerala is a CPI/M-bastion – it means as much to the party as Nagpur with its headquarters to the RSS - and there are since the 1980's fierce battles between the CPI/M and the RSS. The RSS attempted with the help of a business lobby from Mangalore to push back the influence of Muslim traders there.

During the last three decades about 30 people died in these often very violent clashes – particularly during elections – in these „*killing fields of Kannur*“, sometimes literally hacked to death.

The Kannur district is mainly populated by Muslims and Ezhavas. From Kannur prominent communists are hailing, like the former Chief Minister E. K. Nayanar – who initiated a certain „*saffronisation*“ of the CPI/M – and three members of the political bureau.

National Democratic Alliance (NDA):

In the Assembly election in 2011 BJP gained 6.03 %, in the 2014 Lok Sabha-election it climbed to 10.3% (2009: 6.4%).

The *Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sangham Yogam* (SNDP) is an influential caste organization of the Ezhavas. SNDP-general secretary Vellappally Nateshan is supposedly a candidate for the office of Chief Minister in case of an improbable NDA-victory.

- The BJP and its partner SNDP Yogam have agreed to form an alliance between the BJP as a junior-partner and the SNDP with its political arm *Dharma Jana Sena* (DJS), also known as *Bharat Dharma Jana Sena* (BDJS).
- The DJS is supported besides the SNDP Yogam and a part of the Kerala *Pulaya Maha Sabha* (KPMS) by smaller caste and community fora.
- The community of the Ezhavas – an essential support basis for the LDF – is wooed by the BJP.
- Altogether, the BJP is wooing about 70 active Hindu organisations, in order to divide the LDF- and UDF-support basis.
- The BJP started its campaign - 'Vimochana Yatra' – in 140 constituencies under the leadership of party president Amit Shah and the planning and mobilisation by the RSS already since the 20th of January 2016. The BJP criticized as well the UDF and the LDF because of alleged corruption and 'appeasement of religious minorities'.
- The BJP-campaign promises an all-round development and justice for all.
- The BJP targets to win – together with the DJS - 72 of the 140 seats in Parliament, if not in 2016 then in 2021.
- The BJP gained impressively in the recent local elections to 1199 local bodies in November 2015. The BJP gained 933 seats in village councils (2010: 450), won 21 block-village councils and three district-councils. The party won 51 seats in city councils (2010: 9), amongst them 34 in the capital Thiruvananthapuram. In urban centres the BJP increased its seats from 79 to 236.
- In Palakkad, BJP became with 24 seats (2010: 15) the strongest party.

The BJP is led by the RSS-'Pracharak' Kummanam Rajasekharan, who heads a 15 persons strong election committee in order to nominate candidates. Rajasekharan – since more than 35 years in the RSS and known for his orthodox opinions – announced, that the campaign would be conducted in the spirit of „*Hindutva*“ with the slogan „*Clean Kerala*“ ('Samshudha Kerala'). The promotion of research and development and Ayurveda and the reopening of closed factories are amongst the electoral promises.

BJP-President Amit Shah emphasized, that the BJP is open for alliances with like-minded parties. There are allegedly even offers to the Kerala Congress (M) and its chairman K. M. Mani with regard to the low rubber-prices.

The Kerala Congress (M), founded in 1964, split in the meantime into the '*Janadhipathya Kerala Congress*', since Francis George – son of the party founder K. M. George – alleged, that K. M. Mani is conducting secret parleys with the BJP-leadership in Delhi with a view to a

possible coming to power.

Shah wooed even christian religious leaders. The RSS-plan to form a christian organisation ('*Rashtriya Isai Manch*') was rejected by the Catholics - forming 70% of Christens in Kerala - and the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference, Cardinal Baselois Cleemis.

Indian Union Muslim League

The IUML looks back to a 68-old history. Although the original aim to build a pan-Indian party got lost, the IUML in Kerala represents one of the most well-to-do Muslim communities in the world. She understands itself as a progressive and secular representative of the community.

The IUML comprises 20 of the altogether 33 members of Muslim belief in Kerala's parliament and three MP's in the *Lok Sabha*.

Amongst its members the IUML is also confronted with radical Islamist tendencies by the Muslim fundamentalist *Popular Front of India* (PFI) and its political arm *Socialist Democratic Party of India* (SDPI) and the *Welfare Party*, which has its roots in the *Jamaat-e-Islam*. They form for the IUML a greater threat with their attraction to the youth than the RSS, according to experts.

As a result of the communal polarisation, which has its origins in the illegal demolition of the Babri-Mosque in 1992 by Hindu fundamentalist forces and has allegedly risen now to a new peak in Kerala, even the 12 to 13 bastions of the IUML, considered as secure, could be threatened by radical Muslim adversaries, who accuse the IUML of being ruled by an „*elite coterie*“, distanced from reality.

Christians and Muslims together can win 32 seats, 108 constituencies have a Hindu-majority, therefore the polarisation-strategy of the BJP could turn dangerous and force the IUML to essential and tactical adjustments, which would weaken it vis-a-vis its Islamic adversaries, according to experts.

Perspectives:

If these predictions would prove correct, the Congress will lose another state – possible together with Assam - and thereby would continue its journey towards national oblivion.

The communists and other „left and socialistic“ mini-parties fight for their political survival at the national level. A victory in Kerala would at least temporarily stop this trend. Yet the party has to bank on the 93 years old war-horse V. S. Achuthanandan, the only survivor of the CPI/M's founders.

The BJP wants to prove in Kerala – where the party could make in over three decades no inroads – that she is acceptable with its Hindutva-ideology at a pan-Indian level and that its polarisation-strategy – although with local and social compromises – is the overall successful tool to power.

Recent opinion polls

Opinion polls in India can often go wrong and the election campaign in Kerala has not yet started.

Yet the *C-Voter Institute* has been often correct in the past. Based on a survey in the fourth week in March, it predicts for the Congress led UDF with 41% 53 seats (2011: 46% and 72) and for the CPI/M led LDF with 44% 86 mandates (2011: 44% and 66) in a parliament of 140 members and thereby a clear absolute majority for the LDF. The BJP led NDA would reach with about 10% one seat (2011: 6%), others 5%.

Annexure:

KERALA: Parliament 2011 & 2016

Party	2011	2016		
Seats Won	Vote %	Seats Won	Vote %	
CPI(M)	45	28.2		
INC	38	26.7		
IUML	20	8.3		
CPI	13	8.7		
KC(M)	09	4.9		
JD(S)	04	1.5		
Other parties*	09	6.2		
Independents	02	2.4		
Total	140			

Source: Election Commission of India and www.keralaassembly.org

* **Other parties:** KC (J) 1 seat (0.91%); KC(B) 1 seat (0.72); NCP 2 seats (1.24); *Socialist Janata (Democratic)* i.e., SJ(D) 2 seats (1.65%); RSP(B) 1 seats (0.37%); and RSP 2 seats (1.31%).

Part II India - Foreign Policy Developments

The April Dossier will highlight the Indo-EU relations and the EU-India summit in Brussels end of March.

In this issue, Dr Joyce Lobo writes on the mid-March visit of external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj to Kathmandu for the SAARC ministerial meeting.

External Affairs Minister at the SAARC meeting

The foreign minister of India Sushma Swaraj visited Nepal (March 15-17) to attend the *South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation* (SAARC) ministers meet. SAARC as a south Asian regional organisation aims to integrate the region with a common aim to attain unity, stability and prosperity. In order to bring in unity and prosperity member states have decided to integrate respective economies through SAFTA (Free Trade Agreement) and the South Asian Trade in Services Agreement.

The SAARC countries in total account for merely 2% of world trade and 1.7% of world FDI. While the intra-regional trade is less than 6% of the global trade and intra-regional FDI accounts for only 3% of total FDI inflows.

At the SAARC Council of Ministers meeting on March 17, Swaraj emphasised that socio-economic development within these countries remained low and called for new ideas and solutions to harness the economic complementarities for rapid growth. Here she pushed for 'connectivity' which has become one of the major drivers of India's foreign policy towards its neighbourhood. The agreements on rail and motor vehicles stand pending.

To strengthen SAARC, India has welcomed students from member states to pursue higher education. Also India has moved ahead in commencing on the initiatives that it promised in the last summit. There is a dedicated Satellite for SAARC states to support applications in health, education, disaster response, weather forecasting and communications, establishment of a supra-national laboratory to combat diseases, creation of a SAARC wide Knowledge Network to interlink students, academic and research communities, and organisation of the first SAARC Annual Disaster Management Exercise.

On the sidelines, she held informal talks with Pakistan's foreign policy chief Sartaj Aziz who extended the invitation for the SAARC summit to be held in Pakistan this year. As per the news reports, the talks also touched on other bilateral aspects including terror attacks. She also met Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli and her counterpart Kamal Thapa to discuss all issues of mutual interest and on the Constitutional amendment process and the Madhesi demands in particular.

Part III South Asia

Dr Joyce Lobo analyses the newly elected civilian executive in Myanmar and the difficult path to be tread.

The Change of Guard in Myanmar: mix of military with democracy

Htin Kyaw (pronounced Tin Chaw), aged 69, was sworn in as the new President of Myanmar. He takes over from the military backed President Thein Sein. A close confidante and friend of Aung San Suu Kyi, he has become the acceptable choice to her, the party the *National League for Democracy* (NLD) as well to the military establishment. What is striking is that he sets to become the first civilian Chief Executive of Myanmar to take office from April 1, after a gap of 54 years. He was elected by both the houses of the Parliament on March 15 with 360 votes out of 652 wherein he also won the support of 54 independent and ethnic party law makers. The two runners up, military nominee Myint Swe and ethnic minority Chin candidate Henry Van Thio, became the first and second Vice-Presidents respectively.

Loyalty matters:

Suu Kyi has waged a silent war against the military junta as the latter tightened its political hold in the late 1980s by accepting house arrest over leaving the country to join her family. The military during its rule rewrote the constitution in 2008 which bars citizens from becoming the head of the state if their close family members are of foreign origin or hold foreign passports. So far Suu Kyi has not been able to negotiate successfully with the military to amend this clause as her late husband and two sons are British. Instead she has made her intention clear to circumvent the constitutional bar by ruling “above” the President. And hence the choice fell over close friend and confidante Htin Kyaw.

Htin Kyaw enabled Suu Kyi who was released in November 2010 from house arrest to shape her party the NLD to its November 2015 victory. During this time he had faced four months of imprisonment in the notorious *Insein Prison* for helping Suu Kyi to travel outside Yangon in 2000. During Suu Kyi’s house arrest he acted as the link to the outside world. Prior to his election to the top office he had been a senior party member and the senior executive at the *Daw Khin Kyi* foundation, since 2012, which gives development aid and skills training. The most important quality in Htin Kyaw is his unquestionable loyalty to the party and to Suu Kyi. Suu Kyi after his nomination confirmed that the choice fell on Htin Kyaw for his ‘loyalty, discipline and education’. After his election victory he attributed his victory as Suu Kyi’s victory, a gesture that shows that he is willing to act as her surrogate. Equanimity and equitable values have been his hallmark personal traits. The well known historian from Myanmar Thant Myint-U has described him as well respected, nice and a man of unimpeachable integrity.

Htin Kyaw was born on July 20, 1946 to the respected author and poet Min Thu Wun. This acts as an important factor, since lineage matters in Myanmar politics. As an addition, he is the son-in-law of the late U Lwin, one of the founders of the NLD. Htin Kyaw’s wife Su Su Lwin is a sitting parliamentarian. He and Suu Kyi have been childhood friends and school mates at

Yangon's *Methodist English High School*. He has an economics degree and did his computer science at the *University of London*. He started his career as a university teacher and held positions in the government in the late 1970s and 80s in the industry and foreign affairs ministries till his resignation in 1992.

Carrying on with the vestiges:

The fact that Htin Kyaw will rule as Suu Kyi's surrogate makes one remember the similar partnership of former Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh and Congress Party chief and *United Progressive Alliance* Chairperson Mrs. Sonia Gandhi. However what stands before Htin Kyaw unlike Dr. Singh is the state of affairs of his country.

First of all he and Suu Kyi have to share power with the military. When a State makes the transition from authoritarian to a democratic system, the vestiges of the earlier system and its nomenclature continue in the new set up. The military establishment has filled its apparatchiks at the national level and in the regions including in business establishments. Moreover, the 2008 constitution stipulates 25% of the seats in the parliament to the military. The military can veto any constitutional amendment that requires more than 75% of parliamentary votes; one nominee to the post of vice president goes to the military; and lastly military gets to retain the key portfolios related to security— defense, home affairs and border affairs.

Second, the country faces stagnant growth of the economy, widespread poverty interspersed with armed conflict with some of the ethnic groups.

Third, the civilian leadership has to continue with the number of investments that have flowed into the country including that with China which now stands troubled.

Most importantly Suu Kyi and Htin Kyaw need to accommodate their aspirations for the country with the intentions of the military.

Vice Presidents

First Vice President, Myint Swe: Myint Swe, aged 64, was elected as the first Vice President of Myanmar as he was the second runner up having won 213 votes of the lawmakers. Born on 24 June 1951, he graduated from the Defence Services Academy in 1971 and rose in ranks within the military establishment. He became the first ethnic *Mon* to be promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General in 2005 and then as Quartermaster General. After retirement he was nominated as chief-minister of the Yangon Region after the 2010 general elections. However, he became famous for his harsh treatment meted out to the activists during the pre-2010 general election period and also to the brutal crackdown of the Buddhist monks in 2007. Support to the authoritarian regime led him being blacklisted by the USA.

A close supporter of the retired dictator Than Shwe, his candidacy was backed by the army despite criticisms to his nomination. If Htin Kyaw fails in his presidency, it would be taken over by Myint Swe who is a hardline conservative. The later is connected to the business community and known to have indulged in shady commercial deals.

Second Vice President, Henry Van Thio: The second runner up with 79 votes is a little known ethnic minority Chin and a Christian lawmaker. Henry Van Thio, aged 58, has a degree and diploma in law. He had a military career as officer and then moved to the civil service working in the various industries of the state. Unlike the other candidates to the top executive post, Van Thio appears to be a mystery of sorts as much less is known about his life. However, he won the support of the ethnic parties due to his identity. The choice of NLD and Suu Kyi for Van Thio as vice presidential candidate may be to appease and give representation to the ethnic groups in the decision making process.

Part IV Book review

How to make peace with your neighbour

C. Raja Mohan

The Indian Express, March 26, 2016

BG Verghese's last book is a pragmatic reminder of the necessity of India-Pakistan reconciliation.

Book: State of Denial: Pakistan's Misguided and Dangerous Crusade

Author: BG Verghese

Publisher: Rupa

Pages: 230

Price: Rs 500

Few in our time have thought as clearly on Pakistan as George Verghese, a former editor of this newspaper and many others. If his reputation as an editor and commentator was formidable, less well known was his passion for finding ways to overcome the post-Partition challenges of the subcontinent.

After he stepped down as an active newspaper editor, Verghese spent much time at Delhi's Centre for Policy Research delving into issues that arose out of Partition — the question of sharing the waters of the Indus, the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, the problem of Kashmir and the unending conflict with Pakistan.

Long before “connectivity” became a buzzword in India's foreign policy, Verghese had a clear sense of the damage done by the economic vivisection of the subcontinent. For someone who grew up in undivided India, Verghese understood that the political partition of the subcontinent need not have been followed by an economic one. He refused to accept that the self-imposed restrictions on commercial and people-to-people contact between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are either sensible or permanent. Verghese advocated the restoration of the historic connections with Xinjiang, Tibet and Yunnan that were ruptured by the unresolved boundary dispute with China.

Reconnecting with Myanmar was also a major preoccupation for him. This volume by Verghese, who passed away in December 2014, is focused on Pakistan. As the title of the book suggests, Verghese had very strong views on Pakistan. I had the opportunity to interact with him closely at the Neemrana Track Two engagement with Pakistan at the turn of the 1990s, when tensions were running high over Kashmir.

At the first meeting of the Neemrana Dialogue in 1991, Verghese's peroration on Kashmir

sharply raised the tension in the room as he demolished Pakistan's case with a calm but devastating intellectual precision. Unlike some of his peers in the peace movement, Verghese did not believe in "making nice" at these interactions.

Recognising and remembering the truth about Pakistan, its creation and evolution, were absolutely critical for Verghese. He combined a very critical evaluation of Pakistan with a clear sense of India's imperatives for reconciliation and an enduring optimism about finding creative solutions.

The first part of the book is devoted to understanding the history of the Partition and its consequences for India-Pakistan relations. It races through the division, the controversies over Kalat, Bahawalpur, Junagadh, Hyderabad, the crisis over Kashmir and the 1965 and 1971 wars.

The second part of the book deals with some of the outstanding issues — Siachen, the nuclear rivalry and the intensifying disputes over the Indus waters. The third part of the book is a deconstruction of Pakistan and its ideology and conduct over the last seven decades. The book concludes with a discussion of the pathways to peace with Pakistan.

For Verghese, the problems of Kashmir, the Indus waters and nuclear weapons are consequences of an "endless stalemate" with Pakistan. The "real core issue", according to him, is "Pakistan's lack of identity or anchorage". Verghese insists that Pakistan is an ideological state that "continues to be chained to an ideology that is confused, illiberal and ill-suited to a modern state".

But unlike the uber-hawks, who dominate India's current public discourse on Pakistan, Verghese has no room for cynicism in his understanding of the western neighbour. India's challenge, Verghese asserts, is to assist in the positive transformation of Pakistan.

"Even incremental success could be transformative. If right efforts are made, the issues of Kashmir and waters could be resolved". The Indus, which Verghese terms as the "waters of unity", could be turned from a source of confrontation into a domain of genuine cooperation through the integrated development of its basin from the Karakorams to the Arabian Sea.

Unlike those in Delhi that see the China-Pakistan economic corridor as a threat, Verghese wants to open up Kashmir's disputed frontiers to enable road and rail connectivity between the two neighbours. On the Kashmir question, Verghese cites the possibilities for a political resolution opened by the back-channel negotiations between Gen. Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh during 2005-07.

In the end, Verghese offers us a powerful reminder: "The fugitive hope surrounding Partition was that India and Pakistan would separate to come together in time, as fraternal friends and partners in a larger South Asian Union. That time has come. Kashmir is not the 'core problem'. It can be shared. This will not undo Pakistan. Reconciliation could make it whole".

That India has the responsibility and power to overcome the tragedy of Partition is the central message from Verghese's final volume. In these times of frenzied anger and hatred

towards Pakistan, Delhi's political and policy establishments will do well to remember, shall we say, the "Verghese Proposition" on India's historic burden and the opportunities at hand to restore the strategic unity of the subcontinent.

(The writer is director, Carnegie India and consulting editor on foreign affairs for The Indian Express)