

Identities and borders in South Asia: A View from the Left

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Introduction

From the partition of British India to the civil war in Sri Lanka, the attempt to impose national borders in accordance with ethnic, linguistic or religious identities in South Asia has spawned civil wars and crimes against humanity, resulting in almost unimaginable suffering and bloodshed. This is all the more preposterous in a region where migration and the mixing of peoples and cultures have been occurring from time immemorial. The Left potentially has a conceptual and theoretical framework which would allow it to propose solutions to these conflicts, yet flawed interpretations of 'the right to self-determination' have led many on the Left to compound the problems instead. A different interpretation suggests that the key goals should be less violence and more democracy, and taking down barriers between peoples rather than erecting more and more of them.

The birth of India and Pakistan

It is surely a paradox that a non-violent movement in India for independence from the British Empire should have ended in such horrific violence and massive transfer of populations that the trauma of partition persists to this day. 'By the time the exodus was finally over, about eight to ten million people had crossed over from Punjab and Bengal - the largest peace-time mass migration in history - and about 500,000-1,000,000 had perished'. [1] The rape, mutilation and abduction of thousands of women and girls and the murder of many by their own families, either because they had already been 'dishonoured' or in order to avert such a fate, tells us something about the patriarchal attitudes that made partition doubly traumatic for women. And while it is easy to blame Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the Muslim League, and their 'two-nation theory' for the carnage, it is important to remember that V.D. Savarkar and the Hindu nationalists also believed that Hindus and Muslims were separate nations, and were equally responsible for the atrocities committed during partition.

Millions had no choice about leaving their homes, but millions more were bewildered by the necessity to choose between two countries, both of which had been their home. The bizarre nature of their predicament is captured graphically in Saadat Hasan Manto's brilliant satirical short story, *Toba Tek Singh*, in which the governments of India and Pakistan decide to exchange their lunatics.

'The Muslim lunatics in India were to be sent over to Pakistan and the Hindu and Sikh lunatics in Pakistani asylums were to be handed over to India.' One of them, Bishan Singh, is so obsessed with the question of whether his home town Toba Tek Singh is in India or Pakistan that everyone calls *him* 'Toba Tek Singh'. No one seems to know where his town is, so he refuses to participate in the exchange. In the end, he lets out a terrible scream and falls face-forward on the ground at the border. 'On one side, behind barbed wire, stood together the lunatics of India and on the other side, behind more barbed wire, stood the lunatics of Pakistan. In between, on a bit of earth which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh'.

Manto was not alone in his view of partition. 'Popular sentiment and perception, at least as reflected in Partition literature particularly in Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi, almost without exception registered the fact of Partition with despair or anger and profound unhappiness...The futility and tragedy of demarcating boundaries, and the impossibility of dividing homes and hearts are the theme of story after story, as is the terrible violence that accompanied forced migration. Nowhere in the thousands of pages of fiction and poetry do we find even a glimmer of endorsement for the price paid for freedom, or admission that this "*qurbani*" (sacrifice) was necessary for the birth of two nations. Rather, a requiem for lost humanity, for the love between two communities, for shared joys and sorrows, a shared past.' [2] The distinct and mutually exclusive identities that drove the politics of the two-nation ideologues found little resonance at a popular level. And yet the reality of separation and lack of contact, and the continuing cold war that periodically erupts into military conflict, have helped to create a divide that now consciously has to be bridged by those who seek to undo the damage.

The creation of Bangladesh

India remained at least constitutionally a secular republic, despite continuing efforts by Hindu nationalists to undermine its secular character, but Pakistan had to confront the contradiction between its citizens' aspirations for democracy and its formal status as an Islamic state. Something had to give, and that is exactly what happened in 1971. The people of East Pakistan, consisting overwhelmingly of Bengali speakers, were understandably unhappy with the imposition on them of Urdu as the sole national language. Police firing on language protestors in 1952 resulted in several deaths. In response to domination by West Pakistan, a Bengali nationalist movement took shape, and in 1966 put forward demands for a federation in which the East would have considerable autonomy. But far from meeting these demands, politicians and the army in West Pakistan frequently deposed elected leaders from the East. In 1970, when the Awami League led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman won a landslide victory in the national elections, thereby earning the right to form the government, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of the Pakistan People's Party refused to allow Rahman to become the prime minister of Pakistan. Negotiations between the two sides failed, and on 7 March 1971, Rahman declared that their struggle was now for independence.

This could be seen as an expression of Bengali nationalism, which was undoubtedly one of the elements of the movement. But the struggle was also a response to persistent assaults on the democratic rights of East Pakistanis. Either way, it signified that the monolithic Islamic identity that Pakistan was supposed to embody simply could not hold a diverse population together. The atrocities perpetrated by the Pakistani army in its efforts to crush the independence movement have never been enumerated accurately, but it would be safe to say that the mass rape, mass murder and enforced displacement that took place in the ensuing war of independence were on a scale comparable to that of the partition atrocities. Racist attitudes against Bengalis and especially Bengali Hindus prevailed in the Pakistani army, and brigades of Urdu-speaking Biharis from East Pakistan participated in the carnage. On the other side, there were elements in the Bengali Mukti

Bahini (which was supported by India) who carried out a campaign of violence against Biharis in which thousands of civilians were killed. The Mukti Bahini also carried out lethal attacks on the predominantly Buddhist indigenous people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The birth of Bangladesh was as violent and blood-stained as the birth of India and Pakistan, and the same identity politics was to blame.

Dividing a country by drawing a line through it may look neat on a map, but things look very different on the ground, where the line may run through towns, villages and 'communities that have shared a historical relationship and mutual interdependence'. [3] Thus on the India-Bangladesh border, there is a surreal situation where there are 111 Indian enclaves inside Bangladesh and 51 Bangladeshi enclaves inside India. The problems of these border people have been compounded by the Indian government's project of fencing the border. India might have played midwife during the birth of Bangladesh, but Bangladeshis are still unwelcome in India, it appears, so since 1986 the state has been building a fence along the 4,095-kilometre-long border with Bangladesh to keep them out. However, in places the fence is up to one kilometre away from the actual border, leaving a large number of Indians in the no man's land outside it and cutting children off from their schools, peasants from their land, workers from their jobs, and patients from hospitals. [4] A moment's thought will make it clear how impossible it is for a state to provide its citizens even with utilities like electricity and water, much less health care, education, banks and the right to a livelihood, when they live outside the demarcated national border. And it is surely just as bewildering to people to find that places they had formerly frequented as part of their own land are suddenly turned into a foreign country where they are illegal aliens.

The Nellie massacre

Assamese nationalism combined with hostility to Bangladeshis, Muslims and Bengali-speakers produced the ghastly Nellie massacre of 1983, in which over 3,000 men, women and children in 14 villages were butchered in the space of a few hours on the 18th of February. Their alleged crime was that the adults had voted in the elections that had just taken place, after being exhorted to do so by the Congress government at the Centre. But the killing of large numbers of children - who obviously had not voted - made it clear that the other charge against them was the real one: that they were diluting the Assamese culture and identity. The All Assam Students' Union had formed the All Assam Gono Sangram Parishad with the aim of expelling alleged Bangladeshis. Digantar Sharma, who carried out an exhaustive investigation into the massacre for his book, *Nellie 1983: A Postmortem Report into the Most Barbaric Massacre of the Assam Movement* which was published in 2007, reports that an SOS sent by police officer Jahiruddin Ahmed on 15 February, saying that preparations were being made for a massacre and asking for reinforcements to help keep the peace, was ignored, suggesting complicity by the state. [5]

'The government gave the survivors of Nellie compensation for each death of as little as 5,000 rupees, contrasted for instance with Rs. 7 lakhs that have been paid to survivors of the Sikh carnage of a year later in 1984' (Mander 2008). [6] 688 criminal cases were filed in connection with the massacre, but all the cases were eventually dropped; therefore not a single person has even had to face trial for it. The report of the T.D.Tiwari Commission set up to enquire into the massacre was never made public. Could some of the victims have been from Bangladesh? It is possible. The rural poor from what is now Bangladesh had been coming to what is now Assam in search of a livelihood for hundreds of years and they might have been such migrants, or they might have been refugees who fled the war in 1971 and stayed. On the other hand, if they had been Bengalis from India, they would have had no way of proving their citizenship, and Hindu Bangladeshis who had fled during the war had not met the same problems in trying to get naturalised, nor were they targeted. But in the

final analysis, the identity of the victims is immaterial. The fact is that they were innocent, unarmed and helpless, and they were slaughtered in order to assert an Assamese national identity. Subsequently, Hindi-speaking Bihari migrant workers eking out a living on the edge of subsistence were also killed in pursuit of the same goal.

The case of Kashmir

The Kashmir conflict has continued since 1947, and escalated after the insurgency started in 1989. Estimates of the death toll vary considerably, with some estimates going as high as 80,000. The case for secession is probably strongest in Kashmir, because its territory has been divided and occupied by India and Pakistan, which have shown scant regard for the human and democratic rights of its inhabitants. In a situation where it is beset on either side by Indian and Pakistani nationalism, an independent Kashmir could, arguably, satisfy the demands for both unification and democracy. But a great deal depends on the vision of independence and how it is fought for. The population of Jammu and Kashmir, on both sides of the Line of Control established between the territories occupied by India and Pakistan, is quite diverse, and a solution of the problem must be able to satisfy the democratic rights of all its sections. There have been parties, for example the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front formed in 1977, which support the agenda of creating a secular, democratic, federal, independent state of Jammu and Kashmir. [7] Unfortunately this movement in general, and the JKLF in particular, are badly divided, with allegations that its leaders are flirting with or even controlled by the intelligence agencies of Pakistan and India. [8]

One of the most prominent leaders supposedly representing the 'Azadi' ('Freedom') movement in Indian-administered Kashmir is Syed Ali Shah Geelani, whose politics has all the elements of ethno-religious nationalism. In his book *Kashmir: Nava-e Hurriyat* ('Kashmir: Voice of Freedom') he 'claims that Muslims are a community/nation (*qaum*) wholly separate from the Hindus. He equates India with Hindus, overlooking the fact that India's Muslim population outnumbers that of Pakistan. He projects Muslims (as he does Hindus) as a monolithic, homogeneous community, defined by a singular interpretation of religion, and bereft of cultural, ethnic and other divisions. He depicts Muslims as radically different from Hindus, and as allegedly having nothing at all in common with them.' [9] This is an extreme Right-wing ideology, which, as Geelani himself recognises, shares the 'two-nation' theory with the Islamic nationalists of Pakistan and Hindu nationalists of India. And one might question whether Geelani can be seen as fighting for independence at all, given his strong preference for the accession of Kashmir to Pakistan, which is one of the states occupying Kashmir and oppressing Kashmiris.

His reactionary authoritarianism is underlined by the activities of another member of this tendency, Asiya Andrabi, and her organisation Dukhteran-e-Millat, who have thrown acid and paint in the faces of women to force them to wear the veil. This dress code was similarly enforced by another militant outfit, Lashkar-e-Jabbar, also using violence (Ramachandran 2002). [10] Andrabi warned separatist leader Abdul Ghani Lone of dire consequences because he asked foreign Islamist militants to stay out of Kashmir, and urged militants to take action against him. [11] When Lone was murdered by Pakistan-backed militants, [12] it is not surprising that his son Sajjad blamed Pakistan's ISI and Geelani was chased away from his house by the bereaved family. [13]]] Most separatist leaders were terrorised into silence by the threat of death if they dissented from the Islamist militants. Only very recently has this silence been broken, with open admissions that some separatist leaders who were earlier claimed to have been killed by the Indian state were actually murdered by militants. [14] The greatest irony is that these activists claiming to fight for a 'Kashmiri national identity' actually contradict Kashmir's indigenous liberal Sufi tradition, which is strongly influenced by Buddhist and Hindu mysticism, and does not require women to wear burqas.

More than one-third of the population of Indian-administered Kashmir consists of non-Muslim minorities. For them, a secular India, despite all its faults, is preferable to an Islamic Kashmir or accession to Pakistan. At a conference on Kashmir, I was astonished when a participant from Ladakh, a minority-ethnic and predominantly Buddhist region of Kashmir, started by saying emphatically, 'We don't want self-determination'. But as he continued, it became clear to me that what he meant was that most Ladakhis do not want Kashmir to secede from India, but would like more autonomy for Ladakh within Kashmir. Unlike the Hindu minority in Kashmir, Ladakhis cannot be accused of Hindu majoritarianism; their reluctance to belong to a separate Kashmir is clearly due to the perception that as a minority, they would suffer more in an Islamic state than in India. For them, as for women, imposition of an Islamic Kashmiri identity would constitute a negative development. Thus while the failure to resolve the conflict is primarily due to the obduracy of various Indian and Pakistani governments over the years, a contributory cause is also the lack of a unified vision on the part of the peoples of Jammu and Kashmir, with vocal sections advocating an Islamic state. And so the death toll keeps mounting.

The civil war in Sri Lanka

The recently-released UN report on the last stages of the civil war in Sri Lanka confirms the picture garnered from the testimony of survivors who escaped the carnage. Its allegations of serious war crimes committed by both the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, leading to tens of thousands of civilian deaths, conform with other human rights reports, including those by Sri Lankan human rights defenders. But the underlying causes of the conflict need to be unearthed and addressed if similar violence is to be prevented from erupting in the future.

Violations of the human and democratic rights of Tamil-speaking communities started immediately after independence in 1948. Politicians adopting such policies were in some cases driven by their own Sinhala nationalism, in other cases by opportunistic stoking of Sinhala nationalism for electoral advantage. In either case, the message propagated was that Tamils were aliens in a Sinhala-Buddhist Sri Lanka, and should either leave or subject themselves to being treated as less than equal to their Sinhalese fellow-citizens. Legislation was passed depriving Hill-country Tamils of recent Indian origin of their citizenship and franchise and making Sinhala the only official language, thus discriminating against Tamil applicants for state employment. This was followed by discrimination against Tamil students and bouts of violence against Tamils that left displacement, destruction and death in their wake. This, apparently, was how Sinhala Buddhists established their national identity, an identity reinforced by the Republican Constitution of 1972, which confirmed the special status of the Sinhala language and Buddhism.

This left Tamils in Sri Lanka in a somewhat similar position to what Jinnah might have envisaged for the Muslims of India after independence. And the major Tamil parties responded in the same way as Jinnah: by declaring that Sinhalese and Tamils were two distinct nations, and that the Tamil nation would create a separate state. The Vaddukoddai Resolution adopted by the Tamil United Liberation Front in May 1976 stated, among other things, 'Whereas...[at independence] power over the entire country was transferred to the Sinhalese nation on the basis of a numerical majority, thereby reducing the Tamil nation to the position of subject people,...This convention resolves that restoration and reconstitution of the Free, Sovereign, Secular, Socialist State of TAMIL EELAM, based on the right of self determination inherent to every nation, has become inevitable in order to safeguard the very existence of the Tamil Nation in this Country.'

While there had certainly been Tamil kingdoms in Sri Lanka up to the 17th century, describing any of them as 'socialist' is surely an anachronism! In fact, the Tamil nationalists' claim to 'socialism' is

contradicted by their failure to incorporate the demands of Hill-country Tamil plantation workers, almost exclusively dalits, in their programme. Moreover, the two-nation theory mirrors and reinforces Sinhala nationalism, while flying in the face of historical, anthropological and contemporary evidence of the common origins of Sinhalese and Tamil people, cultural cross-fertilisation and intermarriage, all of which make it absurd to refer to them as two nations. Indeed, it is precisely because of this intermingling that such brutality is required to tear them apart. When I was interviewing Sri Lankan refugees and internally displaced people between 1988 and 1990, I came across three young Tamil women in an IDP camp in Colombo who had married Sinhalese men. While escaping from the onslaught of the almost exclusively Sinhalese armed forces in the East, their bus had been stopped by the LTTE, which had made them dismount, separated out all the Sinhalese, and killed them. The women were now terrified that their little bilingual children would give them away by speaking in Sinhala. In a Sinhalese camp a few miles away, I was told in hushed tones by a Sinhalese man who had been saved from the LTTE by his Tamil wife that she was there with him in the camp: but she was pretending to be Sinhalese!

If there is any doubt that Tamil nationalism could be as degraded as Sinhala nationalism, the LTTE's treatment of the Tamil-speaking Muslims of the North and East should lay that doubt to rest. In the East, Muslims were gunned down in mosques; in the North, they were expelled at gun-point, taking with them little more than the clothes they were wearing. While the army had made use of Muslim Home Guards to slaughter Tamils in the East, even this preposterous excuse could not be made for the expulsion of the Northern Muslims, many of whom testified that they had lived like brothers and sisters alongside their Tamil neighbours. Some of the older women were especially outraged because they said they had hidden LTTE cadres when soldiers of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force had come looking for them. Their only 'crime' was their insistence that being Muslim was an essential part of their identity.

There are many more examples and I could keep piling up the corpses, but I think I have provided enough evidence to rest my case. All nationalism contains the potential for violence against those who are seen as being outside the national identity and borders. But if the identity includes respect for human rights, equality and democracy, there is less danger of violence against those within national borders and greater potential for peace with those outside. If, on the contrary, the nation is narrowly defined in terms of ethnic, linguistic or religious identity, the potential for violence against those inside and outside national borders who are excluded by this definition is much greater. Rabindranath Tagore rightly observed that 'The nation has thriven long upon mutilated humanity.' [15] Elevating national identity above our universal human identity can only result in mutilating the latter. And as the stories of sadism and cruelty towards helpless innocents demonstrate, the degree of mutilation increases as the expression of nationalism becomes more virulent.

Nationalism and the Left

One would have thought that Marxists could not possibly be prone to nationalism of any sort, given their commitment to internationalism encapsulated in the slogan, 'Workers of the world unite!' But unfortunately, there has been more confusion than clarity in their writings on this subject. A famous debate on the issue between Vladimir Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg erupted in the first decade of the twentieth century. Luxemburg approved of point 7 in the programme of the Social Democratic Labour Party of Russia, which granted full legal equality to all citizens without distinction of sex, religion, race or nationality, and point 8, which granted the various ethnic groups the right to schools conducted in their own languages at state expense and the right to use their languages at assemblies and in all state and public functions. But she opposed point 9, which granted all

nationalities the right of self-determination, *including secession*. She insisted that the attitude of socialists to nationality questions should depend on the concrete circumstances of each case, which would also change with time. She pointed out that all ancient states were extremely mixed with respect to nationalities, and quoted Karl Kautsky to the effect that the great Buddhist, Christian and Muslim cultures were not national but international; therefore stating that all “nationalities” had the right to form their own states was impractical.

Furthermore, Luxemburg wrote: “In a class society, ‘the nation’ as a homogeneous socio-political entity does not exist. Rather, there exist within each nation, classes with antagonistic interests and ‘rights’...There can be no talk of a collective and uniform will, of the self-determination of the ‘nation’ in a society formed in such a manner”. In cases where the interests of the proletariat were directly opposed to those of the “nation” (for example, Jewish workers versus Zionist nationalists), the formula could result in imposing on workers the will of the ruling class. [16] However, she conceded that socialists were duty-bound to oppose all forms of oppression, including that of one nation by another.

Lenin responded by alleging, ‘Carried away by the struggle against nationalism in Poland, Rosa Luxemburg has forgotten the nationalism of the Great Russians, although it is this nationalism that is the most formidable at the present time. It is a nationalism that is more feudal than bourgeois, and is the principal obstacle to democracy and to the proletarian struggle.’ [17] But he conceded that “the important thing for the proletariat is to ensure the development of its class. For the bourgeoisie it is important to hamper this development by pushing the aims of its ‘own’ nation before those of the proletariat.’ [18]

What was common to Lenin’s and Luxemburg’s positions was their opposition to nationalism and oppression, but they both tried to apply the same formula to two fundamentally different situations. When it began, the debate related almost entirely to the national question in Europe, that is, the right of “nationalities” like the Poles, Ukrainians and Jews to have their own state. But it was soon expanded to encompass the colonies. Lenin’s more mature formulation of 1916 linked the right of self-determination to the struggle for democracy and against colonialism and national oppression. [19]

The ‘national question’ can therefore be resolved into two distinct questions. One concerns the right of colonies to freedom from the imperialist or dominant powers occupying them, and the other concerns the right of minorities to secede from existing states and form separate states. These two questions were almost inextricably linked in the case of imperial Russia, which, unlike other European empires, had annexed territories adjacent to it. But in most cases, there is a clear distinction between anti-imperialist struggles and secessionist ones.

The problem was compounded by Stalin’s definition of a nation in his 1913 essay on ‘The National Question’. According to this definition, which Lenin implicitly accepted, “*A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.*” [20] A closer look reveals this definition to be dangerously narrow. On one side, the requirement of a common language and culture encourages racist or fascist attempts to create a homogeneous national community through assimilation, ethnic cleansing, or even genocide of minorities. On the other, it encourages conflict and civil war in the form of separatist struggles waged by those minorities. This definition also blurs the distinction between a territorial unit like India, with all its ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity, and particular ethnic, linguistic or religious groups like the Tamils or the Jews.

The confusion caused by Lenin’s argument for self-determination combined with Stalin’s definition

of a nation has dogged socialists in South Asia. For example, the Communist Party of India rejected the reactionary 'two-nation' ideology, but got fatally confused by the 'right to self-determination'. In the resolution passed by its Central Committee in September 1942, it declared that:

'Every section of the Indian people which has a contiguous territory as its homeland, common historical tradition, common language, culture, psychological makeup and common economic life would be recognized as a distinct nationality with the right to exist as an autonomous state within the free Indian union or federation and will have the right to secede from it if it may so desire...Thus, free India would be a federation or union of autonomous states of the various nationalities such as the Pathans, Western Punjabis (dominantly Muslims), Sikhs, Sindhis, Hindustanis, Rajasthanis, Gujaratis, Bengalis, Assamese, Biharis, Oriyas, Andhras, Tamils, Karnatakis, Maharashtrians, Malayalees, etc...

Such a declaration of rights in as much as it concedes to every nationality as defined above, and therefore, to nationalities having Muslim faith, the right of autonomous state existence and of secession, can form the basis for unity between the National Congress and the League. For this would give to the Muslims wherever they are in an overwhelming majority in a contiguous territory which is their homeland, the right to form their autonomous states and even to separate if they so desire. In the case of the Bengali Muslims of the Eastern and Northern districts of Bengal where they form an overwhelming majority, they may form themselves into an autonomous region in the state of Bengal or may form a separate state. Such a declaration therefore concedes the just essence of the Pakistan demand and has nothing in common with the separatist theory of dividing India into two nations on the basis of religion.' [21]

Thus the CPI praised the 'just essence of the Pakistan demand' instead of opposing with all its strength the formation of a nation on the basis of religion. Similarly, some of the socialists in Sri Lanka who had put up a principled opposition to Sinhala nationalism ended up providing critical support to the reactionary Tamil nationalism of the LTTE.

Resolving this confusion would involve abandoning Stalin's definition of a nation. The goal of establishing a mono-ethnic, mono-lingual and mono-cultural nation presupposes the notion that the mixing of peoples and cultures results in weakness, even pollution, whereas history shows, on the contrary, that it has been a source of enrichment. It would also clarify the issue to admit that while Lenin's emphasis on national self-determination is appropriate when colonies (or countries like East Timor that have been occupied by a more powerful neighbour) are struggling for liberation, Luxemburg's emphasis on minority rights is more appropriate when oppressed minorities are struggling for justice within an already-constituted nation. Finally, it would be worth reiterating that Marxists are committed to internationalism and the effort to build solidarity between workers across all existing differences, including differences of nationality.

Conclusion

Nation-states are likely to be with us for some time to come, but we can do much to minimise the damage done by national borders, especially in South Asia. The first step would be to abandon all mono-ethnic, mono-linguistic and mono-cultural definitions of nations, instead making them as inclusive as they can be within the limits of the nation-state model. The second step would be to try to establish respect for equality, human rights and democracy within all existing nations. One can think of this as implementing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but also as realising the vision put forward over 2500 years ago by the Buddha in the *Vasettha Sutta*:

Behold the grasses and the trees;

They do possess the mark of birth

And species each from other distinct.

Then behold the beetles, moths and ants...

And four-footed creatures, big and small;

The reptiles, snakes and long-backed animals,

The fishes and creatures of the water,

And birds that cross the sky on wings.

Consider them, they possess the mark of birth

And species each from other distinct.

As in these kinds of creatures there is

The distinction based on birth,

So there is not, among human beings

The distinction based on birth...

A distinct mark in human bodies there is none,

It is just convention that speaks of difference in human beings...

Habitual views of ignorant beings

Lying deeply hidden from ancient times.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that impervious borders make no sense in a region where people have been migrating across what are now national borders for millennia, and peoples and cultures have always mixed and enriched one another.

Kanak Mani Dixit, founder-editor of *Himal Southasian* magazine, has been a vocal advocate of a Southasian identity and regional integration. And there has been a movement - variously called People's SAARC, South Asian People's Summit, and, most recently, the South Asian People's Assembly - committed to creating a South Asian People's Union free of all forms of discrimination, exclusion and domination within and between countries. It would be opposed to militarism, and there would be freedom of movement within the region. [22] Such a development would help to end the bloodshed resulting from various nationalist conflicts in the region, create a context in which the Kashmir dispute could be resolved, and facilitate cross-border people-to-people contacts between family members, friends and colleagues currently separated by these borders. Peace in South Asia depends on taking down barriers between its peoples rather than erecting more and more of them.

Rohini Hensman

P.S.

* <http://groundviews.org/2011/06/08/identities-and-borders-in-south-asia-a-view-from-the-left/>

Footnotes

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[19] V.I. Lenin, The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination', 1916,
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/jan/x01.htm>

[20] J.V.Stalin, Marxism and the National Question, 1913,
<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1913/03a.htm#s1>

[21] A transcript of this resolution can be found at
<http://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=46661742857&topic=12204>

[22] See 'Special Report on Assembly Toward Union of South Asia,' Union Power, April 2010,
<http://ntui.org.in/union-power/april-2010>