



A Critical Assessment on Trend of Peace in South-Asia with Reference to India

Dr. Pawan

Assistant Professor of Geography, FGM Govt. College, Adampur

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ABSTRACT

The present paper aims to justify the trend of peacefulness in South Asian countries, with special reference to India. A critical review of the literature identifies that India is not only the country with the largest population in this geographical area but also its growing global influence and rapidly emerging economy attract scientists to discuss this burning issue. To examine the topic, data from the Global Peace Index reports from 2014 to 2024 were analyzed in the context of humanitarian implications. The analysis clearly shows that the peace status of various countries of South Asia has been fluctuating, there is a difference in the peace status across various political boundaries in which the tensions arising in their mutual relations over time have played a central role, although India has been continuously registering an increase in the global peace rank since 2014, except for the Corona period, surprisingly even in adverse circumstances, Bhutan is consistently occupying the highest rank in the peace report of South Asian countries. The study calls for a global debate that as South Asia is the Heartland of the future, the state of peace in this area will determine global peace.

Introduction: Although there is no unanimous definition of the word peace but scientists, organizations, philosophers, religions around the world agree on the fact that global peace is a contemporary issue as it is an integral part of human life and a sustainable path of development. He examined the contribution of the United Nations in achieving global peace. The analysis observed that despite various achievements,



the United Nations has failed to provide global peace and security, which is a framework for equal opportunities and sustainable development of nations. He also analysed contemporary global challenges in the context of peace, security and development (**Haruna A & Ibrahim A 2014**). Peace is defined as the ability to find solutions that take into account the interests of the various parties involved in any conflict. He examines the influences that shape peace and affect it over time (**Habibal O. 2019**). In recent decades, remote sensing technology has made a significant impact in monitoring various aspects of any area, even if it is a matter of peace. Because this modern technology plays a significant role in monitoring and reducing conflict areas in emergency situations. Remote sensing and GIS technology have made human access to inaccessible areas easier through continuous data collection and mapping. They investigated the capabilities of remote sensing technology and analysed its utility in global peace and considered remote sensing technology as a central tool in dealing with the challenges of international peace and security in the future (**Ram et al, 2021**). He analyses the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita as they advance knowledge in the area of global peace and security in the context of modernity, whose boundaries transcend historical constraints. The approach to this analysis adopts concepts such as Dharma, Karma and Yoga. He examines how the teachings of the Gita serve as tools for self-knowledge and self-control harmony, providing a sustainable path to peace for the entire world (**Bansal J. 2024**). They examined that peace and spirituality are the two dominant factors of human well-being. The findings were tested on the basis of Pearson correlation coefficient and independent sample test and the results of students on peace perception and spiritual intelligence are correlated. The result clearly shows that gender and educational level may not have any effect on spiritual intelligence (**Goswami K & Amar T, 2024**).

Thus, this study investigates peace trends in South Asia and identifies human factors in the fluctuations of peace trends, which is essential for accessing the three fundamental pillars of any nation: peace, security and development.

Objective:

- to comparatively investigate the trend of peace in South Asian countries.
- to explore the role of India in global peace through its harmony and scriptures.

Methodology: Secondary sources of data have been used for comparative investigation of the present study. The data of the Institute of Economic and Peace from 2014 to 2024 has been made the basis of analysis. The data has been displayed by cartography methods such as bar and line graphs. For India's contribution to global peace, its religious scriptures such as Bhagavad Gita, Ramayana, Vedas, Shlokas,



Puranas and literature have been used. Correlation and rank approach have also been used in comparative analysis of data.

Result and Discussion:

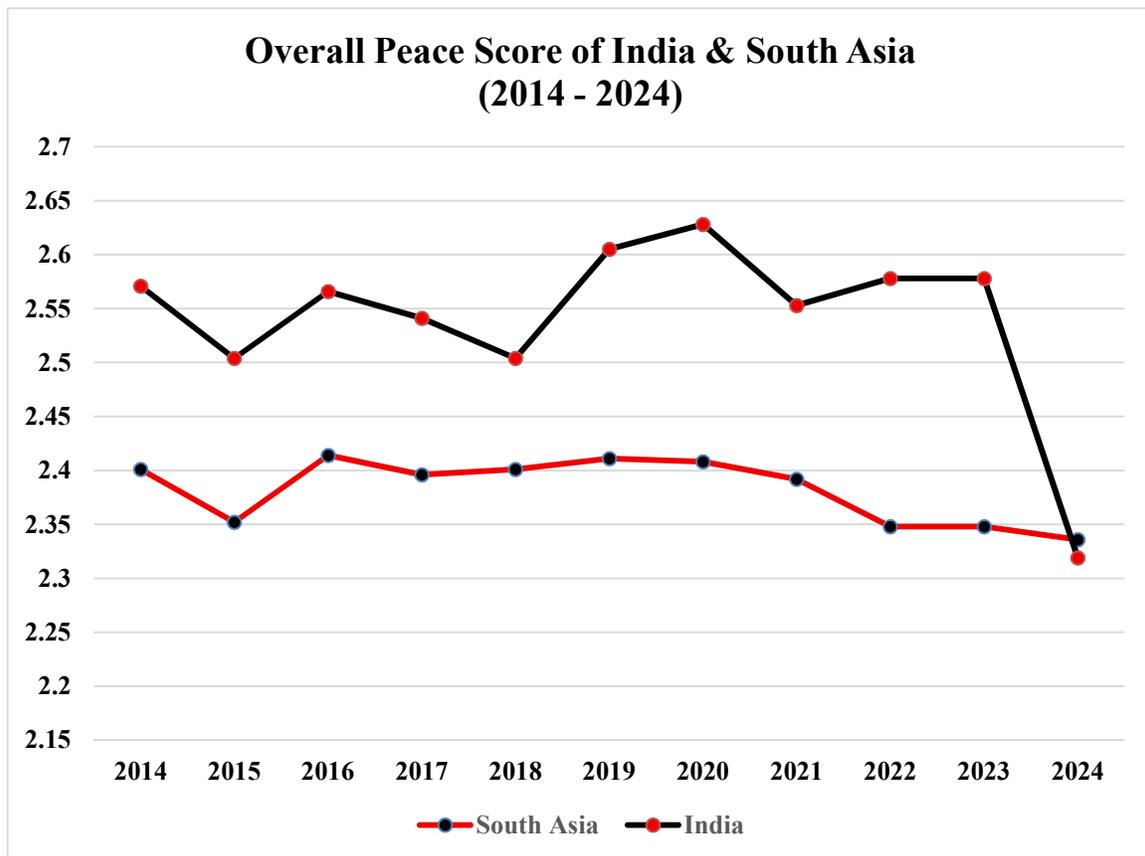
In 2014, the South Asia region had the lowest peace rankings compared to other regions, although a glance at the overall score shows that the region recorded the greatest improvement compared to other regions. Improvements in domestic peace resulted in an improvement in the overall score. The main reason for the improvement in Afghanistan's score was investigated as an increase in military expenditure. In the same context, improvements were noted in terrorism and the number of refugees and displaced persons in Sri Lanka and Bhutan.

According to the 2014 global peace statistics, Bhutan is the dominant country in South Asia in overall rank (16) and Nepal (76) is in second place. Bhutan is included in the very high category of global overall peace ranking but it is included in the medium category in level of development. India's peace situation in 2014 was not good as per the overall rank (143). In 2014, the average overall score of South Asia was 2.401, of which Bhutan's score was 1.422 and India's score was 2.571. A huge gap is clearly visible in the peace situation of Bhutan and India as per the statistics. In this year's peace situation, Afghanistan has the lowest position in overall rank (161). As per the 2014 statistics, the peace situation of India's three neighbouring countries Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh is much better than India. Internal and external conflicts of a pressing nature have constrained India's peace resolution. On one hand, the conflicts with various neighbouring countries of India are not the result of a few days but these conflicts have been going on for years, and their roots are constantly getting deeper. It seems clear from this scenario that these issues are likely to be resolved in the long run with strong policy making. On the other hand, resolving various movements arising at the domestic level will be a big administrative challenge.

If we look at the global peace situation in 2015, the index score remained stable in 2015 as compared to 2014. If we look at the regions, the peace situation has improved in four of the nine regions whereas the peace index of five regions has declined. In 2015, South Asia's peace ranking rose by one place. Three South Asian countries improved their peace rankings, while the other countries' overall peace scores deteriorated. Internal strife in Afghanistan has dragged South Asia's peace rankings down. In neighbouring Pakistan, rising crime, insecurity from severe domestic conflict, and terrorist activity have resulted in its second-lowest ranking in South Asia. Although less so, India's peace score declined significantly due to movements arising from internal conflicts, but improvements in political stability



have slowed the rate of decline. According to the 2015 Peace Report, Bhutan tops the list in South Asia with an overall rank of 18 while Nepal and Bangladesh are at second and third positions respectively. India's peace ranking in 2015 was recorded at 143 as in 2014, while Afghanistan was ranked the lowest among South Asian countries with a rank of 160. On the other hand, South Asia's overall score was recorded at 2.352. Bhutan topped the list with a score of 1.416, while India's overall score was recorded at 2.504 with a change of 0.057 from 2014 to 2015. In the 2015 Militarisation score, India's score was 2.351 and Pakistan's score was 2.436. From 2008 to 2015, Pakistan's Militarisation score increased by 4 percent and India's by 1 percent. This trend of score change was recorded the highest in Afghanistan (28.25 percent).



Out of the nine geographic regions of the world, the South Asia region's peace position remained unchanged in the 2016 report. Political violence in Bangladesh and Nepal posed security challenges that were extremely worrying. Afghanistan's situation is unstable due to the steps taken to curb extremist violence. Pakistan is struggling with the crackdown on domestic terrorist activities. India's peace position is not satisfactory as issues such as international conflicts, including internal and border, and militarization have raised concerns, according to the 2016 report. Surprisingly, Sri Lanka's peace position



recorded a significant improvement, mainly due to the new reformist government as a result of parliamentary elections and improved relations with India. As in previous years, in the 2016 report too, Bhutan has topped the Peace Index in South Asia, while Nepal is at the second position. India's overall rank was recorded at 141 as against 143 last year. Afghanistan has consistently been ranked at the bottom in the Peace Index list of South Asian countries. In terms of overall score too, Bhutan has remained at the top in South Asia, while India's overall score (2.566) has recorded a decline of 0.006.

Compared to 2016, the 2017 data shows that the level of global peace increased by 0.28 percent. The decadal trends in peace show that the peace situation has declined by 2.14 percent since 2008, with 48 percent of GPI countries showing improvement while 52 percent of countries showing decline. As in previous years, Bhutan has topped the South Asia Peace Index list in 2017 as well. However, a moderate decline was also observed in Bhutan. Afghanistan and Pakistan are still the most troubled countries in South Asia, but India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan have been included in the list of improved countries in this year's Peace Index. This year, Nepal witnessed poor security conditions as a result of natural disaster and political instability. India jumped four places in the overall ranking by controlling domestic violent conflicts. However, the long-standing Kashmir dispute remains the main obstacle to improving the Indo-Pak peace ranking. Bhutan ranks first with an overall score of 1.474, India ranks fifth among South Asian countries with an overall score of 2.541, while the average score of South Asia is recorded at 2.396. Sri Lanka has made a remarkable improvement to overtake Nepal and secure the second place in South Asia. The main reasons for improvement in Sri Lanka's overall score were the improvement in parameters such as social security, fiscal benefits from economic growth, control over terrorism and domestic violent incidents as well as political stability. Sri Lanka is included in the list of top five countries in the world which have surprisingly improved in the indicators like improvement and deteriorations and social security domain. Sri Lanka achieved an overall rank of 80 with a change of -0.116. India recorded a change of -0.024, rising four places to occupy the overall rank of 137.

The figures of the 2018 report have shocked scientists and researchers around the world as there has been a decline of 0.27 percent in global peace this year compared to 2017. Due to the low level of improvement in the overall score, there was no change in the position of South Asia in the global ranking as this region still remains at the eighth position out of the total nine geographical areas of the world. The main reason for this is the continuously increasing unrest in two South Asian countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan. But there is no doubt that the overall improvement in Bhutan and Sri Lanka saved South Asia from falling to the ninth or the lowest position out of the total nine geographical areas of the world.

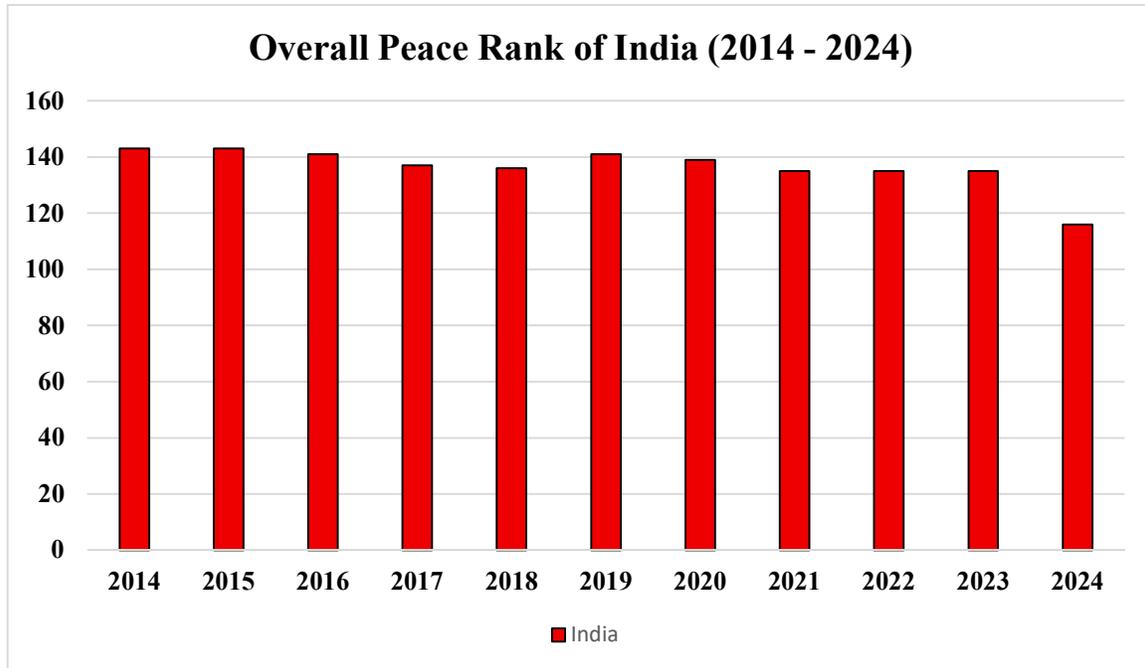


Border conflicts, confrontational relations between different countries of South Asia created disparities in these countries, although there has been improvement in parameters like security and militarization, despite this the picture of overall peace in the South Asia region is still unclear. India's role is dominant in the improvement of the overall peace score of Bhutan and Sri Lanka, but India, which holds the first position in the mandate in this area, recorded a slight improvement in the level of overall peace. In the context of decline in the level of overall peace, the situation of Bangladesh deteriorated, the conflict arising from Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, political instability and terrorism gave rise to default mechanisms. According to the 2018 report, the average overall score of South Asia was recorded as 2.401 and the score change was -0.002. Four countries of South Asia namely Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and India were included in the list of improvement in overall peace while Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan were included in the list of decline in overall peace. Bhutan has consistently been in the first place with an overall score of 1.545. India has also consistently been in the fifth place in South Asia according to the overall score (2.504). Bhutan is ranked first in South Asia according to the overall rank (19), while India's overall rank is 136 which was 137 last year, an improvement of one place was investigated.

The 2019 report shows that there was a very marginal improvement (0.09 percent) in the global peace level this year after five years. The 2019 report shows that this year there has been a very slight improvement (0.09 percent) in the global peace level after five years. This year Afghanistan has been investigated as the world's least peaceful country in the safety and security domain, while it has been found to be second in the world in the ongoing conflict domain. South Asia continues to rank 8th among global geographic areas, one place above its neighbour MENA, although MENA has a significant impact on the peacefulness of South Asian countries. South Asia continues to top the peacefulness rankings among countries, with Bhutan being among the top 15 peaceful countries in the world. The South Asia region has a relatively low level of violence compared to other geographic areas. The region is better than the global average in annual homicide rates, primarily due to political challenges dominating the region, rather than criminal ones. Afghanistan, Bhutan and Pakistan showed significant improvements in indicators such as refugees and annual homicide rates. There was no change in the impact of indicators such as terrorism in South Asia this year. Tensions between India and Pakistan remain high due to the continued increase in internal conflict and militarization. According to the 2019 report, Bhutan tops the overall peace score in South Asia with 1.506 points, while India is at number five with 2.605 points. This year, the average overall score of South Asia was recorded at 2.411. Surprisingly, the trend of improvement in the score change of Pakistan and Afghanistan was investigated. Bhutan is at the top in



South Asia with an overall rank of 15 and Sri Lanka is at the second position with a rank of 72, while India's overall rank in 2019 was 141. In this context, Afghanistan (rank 163) is the lowest ranked country among South Asian countries.



The 2020 data clearly shows that the world is no longer faced with traditional crises and conflicts as the COVID-19 pandemic has manifested in an uncertain and severe form, resulting in a 0.34 percent drop in the global peace score in 2020. This trend of decline in the peace level has been recorded for the ninth time in the last twelve years. According to the 2020 report, Afghanistan was ranked as the least peaceful country in the world in the Safety and Security domain, while it was ranked second globally in the Ongoing Conflict domain. Surprisingly, not only Afghanistan but also Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka, which were listed among the most peaceful countries in South Asia, witnessed a decline in peace level, resulting in deterioration of South Asia peace situation. Changes in indicators such as militarization and security emerged as the main factors for the decline in peace. On the other hand, according to the data of 2020, Bhutan was included in the list of twenty most peaceful countries in the world. India's position in terms of peace in South Asia is average. India is ranked 139th in the Global Peace Report due to the ongoing conflict between various political, geographical and cultural communities within the country. The amendment made in the country's constitution for citizenship of the Muslim community has created anger among the followers of Hindu ideology. Despite this, improvement in the peace rate of peace-loving country India has been investigated. Bangladesh was included in the list of peace reform countries in South Asia. Which made significant improvements in the areas of internal security and safety of the



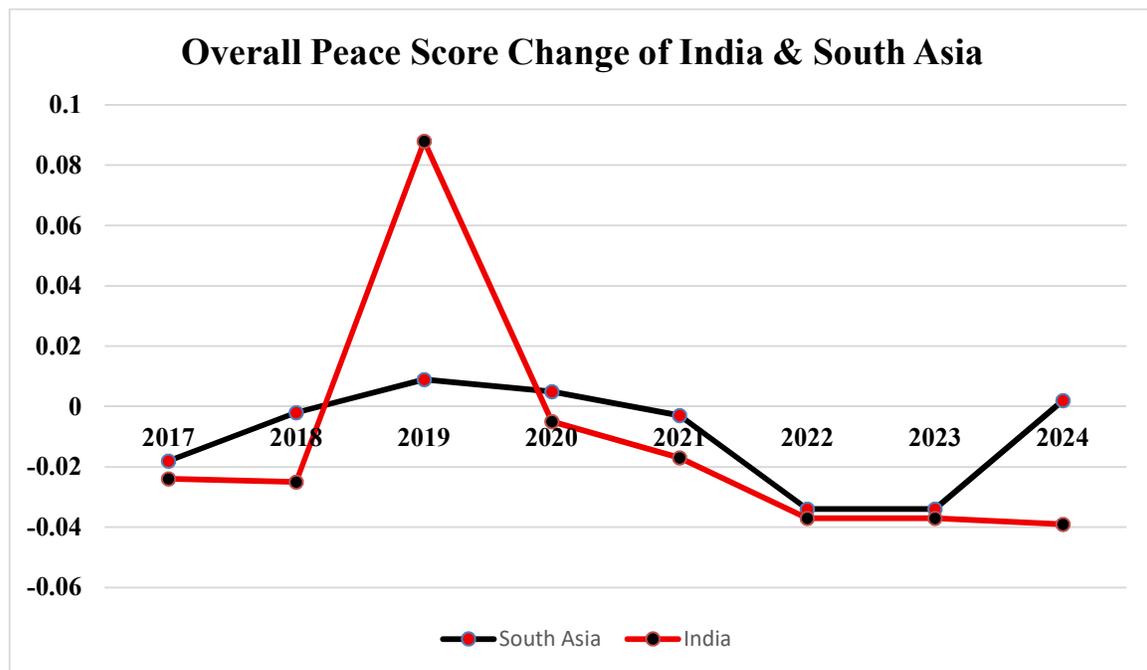
country. According to the 2020 Peace Report, the average overall score of South Asia was recorded as 2.408, in which India remained at the fifth position with a score of 2.628. Bangladesh, India and Pakistan showed positive improvement in the overall peace score, while South Asian country Bhutan, which occupies the 19th position in the global peace ranking, recorded a negative improvement in the overall peace score.

The period from 2020 to 2021 was marred by the global pandemic Corona, statistics show that in 2020-21, more than 5000 pandemic-related problems emerged, resulting in violent incidents. The lockdown measures, which were an attempt to deal with the Corona pandemic, led to violent riots in various countries, especially in Asian countries. During the Corona period, violent incidents were investigated in more than 150 countries, which were triggered by the Corona pandemic. Global peacefulness improved in three of the nine geographic areas, including South Asia, which, although marginal (0.1 percent), still ranks as the second-lowest peaceful region in the world. Improvements in militarization and security indicators were the main drivers of the increase in average peacefulness. Significantly, there is a great disparity in the peace scores of the countries in South Asia, with Bhutan being ranked the most peaceful in South Asia and 22nd most peaceful globally, while Afghanistan (ranked 163) is ranked the most troubled country in the world in this category. India is the most populous country in South Asia; the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic forced the Indian government to impose a lockdown. Data shows that the country's economy has registered a major decline, despite this India is ranked 135th in the Global Peace Index with an improvement of 0.7 percent according to the 2021 data. Pakistan's peace score improved by a staggering 1.9 percent, primarily due to improvements in indicators such as control of violent incidents, decline in murder rate and security.

It is not surprising that the level of global peace has declined in the year 2022 as well, because if we look comparatively, the peace level has improved only thrice in the last fourteen years, i.e. this is the eleventh decline. The data clearly shows that the rate of decline in the level of global peace is faster than the improvement. The 2022 report's analysis focuses on the Russia–Ukraine war, including a detailed assessment of the impact of increased military spending on economic decline, innovative technology and its widespread use in warfare, and food security and prices. A discussion of the 2022 data makes it clear that political stability has deteriorated globally. Compared to the 2008 data, the level of political stability indicator for global peace showed its worst performance. This was mainly due to the administrative response to the COVID-19 disaster. Despite the increase in violent perceptions due to political unrest and incidents of violence between Hindu and Muslim communities in the country, peace has improved by 1.4 percent last year, resulting in India being ranked 135th in the 2022 Global Peace Report. Surprisingly,



South Asia experienced the greatest improvement in peace among the nine global geographic regions, despite having the second-lowest global peace ranking. This improvement was examined in terms of indicators of militarization and ongoing conflict. Regional disparities in South Asia's peace status are clearly visible on the map, as Bhutan is among the top 20 countries in the global peace ranking, although its peace status declined by 0.2 percent, while Afghanistan has been the world's most troubled country for five consecutive years. However, Afghanistan has managed to reduce the perception of crime and the impact of terrorism. In Sri Lanka, violent protests against the government disrupted the country's peace situation, as clashes with security forces led to national unrest.



The 2023 report also shows a declining level in the Global Peace Index. The scenario is that this decline has been going on for nine consecutive years, with improvements only occurring twice since 2008. South Asia continues to have the second lowest global peace ranking. According to the 2023 report, the peace status of four countries in South Asia has improved, with militarization and security indicators playing a major role, although the peace ranking of three countries in the region has deteriorated. Despite the improvement in peace (2.73 percent), Afghanistan ranks lowest in the Global Peace Index. Bhutan, which ranks highest in the Global Peace Index outside Asia-Pacific, Europe and America, but the peace level declined last year as a result of political imbalance. According to the 2023 GPI, India has made a significant improvement in the Peace Index, ranking it 126th on the global peace list. The country experienced a major improvement (3.5 percent) in overall peace as a result of a decline in violent incidents and improved relations with neighbouring countries.



The 2024 report's shocking figures have attracted global attention as 97 countries of the world were investigated in the Peace Index decline category, which is the largest number of countries to have a decline in the Peace Index in a single year, which is the result of a decline in indicators such as ongoing conflict and militarization. As a result of significant improvement in safety and security indicators, 65 countries of the world registered an improvement in the Peace Index. Surprisingly, in the 2024 data, South Asia is now the third least peaceful region out of a total of nine, having been consistently ranked second. The 2024 Peace Index of South Asia shows a mixed pattern of improvement and decline as improvements were investigated in the ongoing conflict and security indicators while decline was recorded in the militarization domain. Bhutan has been consistently at the top of the Peace Index of South Asian countries since 2011. The result of militarization, security and radical changes by the ruling Taliban is that Afghanistan is ranked lowest in the Peace Index not only in South Asia but also globally. If we take a comparative view, it is clear that the biggest decline (2.5 percent) in the Peace Index of Nepal was investigated globally. India is the biggest superpower in South Asia. India has shown amazing results in improving overall peace. India's Peace Index has shown a massive jump as a result of an increase of 1.6 percent. The current Peace Index situation is the most peaceful ever as compared to the beginning of the Global Peace Index. As a result of improvement in serious problems like crime, terrorism, improved relations with neighbouring countries and reduction in border conflicts, India is currently ranked 116th in the Global Peace Index. However, Chinese activities on the border of the state of Arunachal Pradesh remain a matter of concern for India.

Central points of Indian scriptures for international peace:

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: This verse of Maha Upanishad clarifies that the boundaries created in the relations between different countries of the world should be removed and brotherhood should be established because "the whole world is one family".

Om Shanti: The value of Om Shanti is inherent in the ethics of Indians. At the global level, this value is a strong bridge for international peace solution because the global human can overcome the jealousy towards others by adopting this value in his life.

Bhagavad Gita: Bhagavad Gita's insights teach us the importance of self-control, sense of duty and selfless action as it inspires a balanced life and harmony at the individual and societal level.



Jainism Concept of Peace: The concept of Aparigraha and Anekantavada mentioned in Jainism encourages accepting differences arising at individual and community level and resolving them peacefully, which is essential for global peace.

Sikhism: 'Sarbat da Bhala' described in the Sikh religion's Guru Granth Sahib is a prayer for the welfare of all people, meaning this phrase describes the concept of universal peace.

Buddhism: The popular middle path principles of Buddhism such as "Four Noble Truths" and "Eightfold Path" contain the ideology of peace, tolerance and compassion which offers a way to resolve international conflicts.

Conclusion: The wonderful blend of diversity, conflict and possibilities are the important characteristics of the South Asian region, which gives it global recognition from other geo-cultural areas. The historical picture clearly depicts that this region has been in the grip of political instability, border disputes, religious and ethnic conflicts, due to which the trends of peace in this region have been dynamic, because despite the challenges of tension and conflict, the possibilities of immense cooperation and development have also been progressive. India is the representative country of this region, whose role has been central from time to time in the decisions of regional peace and through SAARC, BIMSTEC, and other multilateral forums, India is constantly striving for peace and stability in South Asia. India's foreign policy, influenced by the ideas described in Indian scriptures, is clearly reflected in principles like "Neighbour First" and "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam". The insights of Indian scriptures are not only the source of spiritual knowledge but they are also strong pillars of world peace, tolerance and brotherhood. Peace is possible not only in South Asia but also globally by adopting the insights from Indian scriptures and through open debate.

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