

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation: The Role of India in South Asia

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Abstract

South Asia is a diverse region of the Asian continent which represents very asymmetrical characteristics with regard to size, population and economy. Regional cooperative initiatives like SAARC stands unavoidable and significant in the region due to the lingering legacies of the regions colonial past, leaky troubled borders, ethnic and religious divergences and economic incongruence. SAARC was initiated with hopes which pave the way for a revitalizing dialogue on contentious security issues. But till date, progress has been glacial because the Indo-Pakistan security enigma has resisted solution. On the other hand, India's relations with the other countries of South Asia are less fraught, although not without friction. India, the region's dominant state shall repair relations with neighbourhood countries and become a net provider of public goods and work diligently. In South Asia, operational cooperation has to be supplemented with cautious enrichment of policy designed to enhance security-driven concerns. Thus, a double-edged process by which non-security cooperation goes hand in hand with a political dialogue on security matters is the only way to resuscitate the conked regional integration process.

Keywords: SAARC, South Asia, Regional Cooperation, India

Introduction

South Asia, the largest geographical entity in Indian Ocean embraces eight independent countries of the region namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. This entity lies south of Hindukush Mountains and Himalayas and enclosed by Indian Ocean on three sides and occupies a vivid and crucial strategic, commercial and natural position. Moreover, the region is one of the most thickly populated and poorest regions in the world. The political arena in the South Asian region is diverse with democracy, hereditary monarchy and military dictatorship (Snedden, 2016). In South Asia regional cooperation got salience with the pioneering initiative taken by late President Zia Ur Rahman of Bangladesh who was involved in propagating the cause of institutionalizing regional economic cooperation in South Asia. His inspiration was from the successful models of regional economic and political cooperation practiced by the European community among the developed nations and the association among the South East Asian developing countries. Factors like political, economic, security and potentiality of mutual economic benefits through regional cooperation also paves the way for establishing regional organisation in South Asia (Muzaffar *et al.*, 2017).

The smaller countries of the region like Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka quickly accepted the proposal. However India and Pakistan were initially sceptical due to the proposal's reference on the security matters in South Asia. On the one hand Indian policy makers were feared that the proposal for a regional organisation may create a chance for the small neighbours to regionalise

all bilateral issues and join together to gang up against India. On the other side Pakistan presumed that it might be an Indian strategy to manage other South Asian nations against Pakistan and guarantee a regional market for Indian products thereby consolidating as well as further strengthening India's economic supremacy in the region. Finally South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established in 1985 comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka and held first Summit in the same year in Dhaka where Charter of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation was signed (Miller and Bharath, 2016 and Bhattacharjee, 2018).

The rationale for the foundation of SAARC was to forge particularly economic cooperation among the member states. The postulation was that the common culture, civilization and heritage of all the seven post colonial states of South Asia naturally would bring an extent of unity and cooperation among them. It is envisaged that the cooperation will bring social and economic development in the region and would create an integrated market that could remove poverty, illiteracy and unemployment, the common problems (Muzaffar *et al.*, 2017). Sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence and non-interference in internal affairs are some of the key principles behind the creation of SAARC as defined in its charter. In addition, the SAARC Charter kept bilateral issues out of its purview while emphasized on multilateral cooperation. At the same time the member states were free to develop any other bilateral and multilateral cooperation thought to be beneficial for them. There is a great expectation that regional cooperation would endow with economic cooperation in spite of the political differences prevailed in their relations and the need to cooperate in various non-political fields were also adumbrated. But in reality, the bilateral disputes have in many cases stymied the prospects of multilateral cooperation through the forum of SAARC (Lahiri, 2007). Unlike many other regional organizations SAARC was not an outcome of the efforts of the leading countries of the region and no outsider was either directly or indirectly involved in its creation. In fact, it was the product of local endeavours and came into being through the concerted strives of smaller countries. A number of regional organizations were born in response to the efforts of the interested superpowers and survived under their patronage whereas SAARC is the product of steadily growing significance attached to the principle of regionalism. It took two years of continuous efforts to institutionalize the idea of South Asian regional organization. The realization of cooperative ventures rapidly gained momentum in South Asia in the face of complex disputes in the region.

SAARC has started off as a grouping of seven South Asian nations has expanded to embrace Afghanistan as the eighth member in its summit held at Dhaka in 2005. The European Union, People's Republic of China, Japan, South Korea and USA are gained observer status in SAARC. By the membership of Afghanistan as a SAARC state, the entire region has now access to Central Asia, Myanmar as well as West Asia. The increased number of members in SAARC has not only added strength and vitality to it but also enabled it to get connected to the wider world and thereby play a more dynamic role in the global arena (Lahiri, 2007). Even though, the SAARC processes received periodic shocks that considerably slowed down the desired drive towards South Asian cooperation, the advent of SAARC intensified cooperation among the South Asian states. All the time the fundamental spirit of SAARC has been persistently showered with reaffirmations of cooperation by the heads of South Asian governments. Their aspiration for closer cooperation has facilitated all internal as well as external endeavours aimed at pulling South Asia out of a web of conflict into a cooperative network. In reality the most basic prerequisite for constructing interstate diplomatic and economic ties is that to resolve the ongoing disputes which have hitherto taken an extremely heavy toll (Cheema *et al.*, 2006). Apart from the obvious geographical unity, South Asia has the longest history of a coherent and united polity, economy and administration along with a unified civilizational

tradition as compared to other regional organizations that exist today. By taking this as a significant factor the SAARC Charter underlines the common ties of history and culture that bind member states together. Besides successive summit declarations, SAARC have emphasized the common values shared by the people of the region which are rooted in social, ethnic, cultural as well as historical elements. Yet, the trauma of partition, the intensification of assertive nationalism, the drift away from democratic freedoms and strategic as well as ideological rivalries between the member nations have become an obstacle in the way of the united history of the South Asian region (Narang, 2006).

In South Asia the formation of SAARC was a momentous development in the direction of regional cooperation. In the midst of their strong mutual differences as well as trust deficit, the South Asian nations agreed to sign an agreement encouraging regional cooperation (Singh, 2005). It is an organization rooted in the consciousness that in an ever more interdependent world, the objectives of peace, freedom, social justice and economic prosperity are best achieved in the region by fostering mutual understanding, good neighbourly relations and meaningful cooperation among the member states, which are bound by ties of history and culture (www.saarc-sec.org). SAARC has survived the heterogeneous levels of economic development and bilateral political conflicts among the countries and grown in its activities over these years. In the recent years it has entered into core areas of economic cooperation in connection with mutual trade expansion and joint industrial and non-industrial ventures serving regional market (Cheema, 1999a).

The new global challenges such as climate change, human rights, energy security, international terrorism, sustainable development etc opens new avenues for regional cooperation in South Asia. In the case of South Asia the adaptation and mitigation of climate change is unquestionably an extremely inspirational goal for regional cooperation. Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) highlights that the threat is real and its consequences can be disastrous for everybody which are already manifesting. So there are clear benefits from cooperation as well as collective action and the countries of the region cannot ignore this imperative (Gokarn, 2014). The crisis of clean energy and renewables are the areas to push energy cooperation since the region has vast untapped energy resources. Thus the region can get rid of common energy crisis that the SAARC nations are facing and cementing cooperation among the members. Furthermore SAARC nations are on the cusp of energy intensive economic growth (Mehta, 2014).

India and South Asian cooperation

South Asia is specifically identified with its unparalleled geographic factor that is three-quarters of the region consists of India, which covers almost 70 per cent of its regional area, three-fourths of the total population and around little more than two-thirds of its GNP. Almost all South Asian countries are neighbours of India but none of them are neighbours of each other, this is one of the reasons that make South Asia as an Indo-centric region. Simultaneously these factors coupled with the assertive and tyrannising Indian policy often generates fears as well as tensions among the SAARC members (Cheema, 1999b). Thus in all aspects India constitutes two fifths of South Asia as a result it has a crucial role in determining the future prospects of the region. India's economic growth, political stability and the willingness to share its technological development with neighbours will encourage and sustain the entire region (Chattopadhyay, 2008). India's vast size, population, resources and economic and military power as compared to those of its South Asian neighbours are the centrality of India's position in the region. These peculiarities retain almost all the South Asian neighbours apprehensive of India's allegedly hegemonic intentions in the region. So India's strive for collective self-reliance in South Asia and warning against allowing external powers foothold are interpreted as born out of such intentions. India always wishes all the South Asian nations to cooperate in the political field with the purpose of safeguarding the region's autonomy and

security *vis-a-vis* major external powers. But most of India's neighbours are constantly forge the support of external powers in order to counterbalance India to safeguard their own autonomy as well as security against the possible interference of India in their internal affairs. This makes India anxious about the intentions of its neighbours and vice versa. These apprehensions have created a situation which cannot be described as conducive to the growth of regional cooperation (Prasad, 1999).

The amalgamation of some of the foremost components of national power including vast geographical size, huge population, abundant natural-mineral resources, wide and reasonably well developed industrial base, an impressive reservoir of trained man power, size of the economy, capacity to produce nuclear weapons and a vibrant democracy have made India as a regional hegemon. The most obvious incident for the dominant position of India in the region is the disintegration of Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971. Such incidents have contributed towards divergent views about India's policies among its neighbours. For example, in India the strategic community tends to construe the military interventions in neighbouring countries into defensive terms. Yet, all the neighbouring countries particularly smaller and weaker neighbours have observed such interventions as the outward projection as well as demonstration of India's military power. Besides, India's military interventions in Bangladesh in 1971, Sri Lanka in 1987-90 and Maldives in 1988 have only boosted the insecurity as well as fear about Indian hegemony over its neighbours. India's pervasively dominant position in South Asia convincingly argues that India represents the core while all its neighbours form a periphery of South Asian expanse. In most cases regional organizations are built around dominant core states so being the dominant state in South Asia, India can perform as the core of organizations like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Harshe, 1999 and Jamil *et al.*, 2020).

Even after thirty years of survival SAARC continues to suffer from the hangover of the past along with its structural difficulties. The predominance of India constrained by the existence of Pakistan, which is firm enough to repudiate the perceived Indian hegemonic designs, is identified as the major structural problem of the SAARC system. In addition the impediments obstructing the progress include regional bilateral disputes, differing security perceptions, Charter problems and India's self-image. Actually the most significant hurdle on the thoroughfare to collective self-reliance is not the incumbent asymmetry and the overwhelming stature of India but how other members look at Indian intentions, attitudes and policies (Cheema, 1999b). In most of the time the overwhelming size and weight of India in the region creates misgivings among the smaller countries relating to economic, political and security aspects that works as a major impediment to the flourishing of cooperation in South Asia. India's persistent emphasize on bilateralism and lack of enthusiasm on multilateralism in the region has also a stumbling block in the path of regional cooperation. This is due to India's perception that the smaller countries of the region are ganging up against her. Thus the continuous mistrust among the countries in South Asia reinforces the asymmetric size-based negative perceptions only (Ahmad, 2002).

An assessment of the economic growth performance of the South Asian states depicts that economic development is extremely lower than its potential and still sharply below the growth rates in comparison with South East Asia. The disparities in the level of economic development over the last couple of years has created a feeling that economic cooperation in augmenting the expansion of intra regional trade in South Asia may not be as beneficial as that of the bilateral trade with developed countries. The lack of balanced interdependence amongst the countries of the region is another major obstacle for the growth of economic cooperation because there are huge inequalities in the economic development exists between the member states (Tripathi, 2008). The absence of sufficient advancement in the field of economic cooperation particularly in the areas of trade, industry and fi-

nance is added to the slow progress of SAARC. Mainly this is on the pretext that cooperation in these fields would benefit India on a large extent than the other countries of the region and their interests may suffer as a consequence of it. This assumption is quite natural owing to its geographical size, population, resources and economic development as equated with those of other South Asian nations. But it is possible to devise measures to safeguard the interests of India's smaller neighbours to overcome the adverse impacts of cooperation among these states. At the same time it is the fact that the smaller countries can gain enormously by getting an opening to a much larger market than the domestic commerce available in their own territories if the whole region of South Asia becomes accessible to them for free trade of their goods and services.

South Asia has enriched with high growth potentials though SAARC is failing to integrate in full swing due to numerous constraints which includes political compulsions, ideological factors, cross border terrorism, crimes, fundamentalist violent forces, demographic pressure and xenophobia. But in reality political pressures influence the prospects of South Asian security. It is well evident that there exists asymmetry between Indian and its South Asian neighbours in terms of demography, natural resources, economic development, technical capacities and military strength. Hence India has to take specific efforts to compensate the threat perceptions prevailing among its neighbours because India is considered as the logical consequence of this asymmetry. Second, nuclear weaponization of India and Pakistan has overwhelmingly influences the security milieu of the region, not in terms of the strategic response to the nuclear powers like USA, Russia and China but by driving South Asia into the brink of a nuclear war. And third is the demographic pressure on land in all the countries of the region due to the consequent migration that the individual governments' may not be able to contain thereby creates social tensions, economic instability, political insecurity and anarchy in South Asia as a whole.

India has a crucial role in shaping the future of South Asia even though it continues to behave as a status quo power and remain in dilemma over whether it should take the lead or not. There is no doubt that it's a regional power in economic, political, military and international terms. It's true that when the idea of regional cooperation was mooted by Bangladesh and other neighbours India was reluctant to play a key role towards South Asian regional cooperation. Still even after the initiation of the regional organization, India has been hesitant to enhance the momentum of cooperation with in the region (Baral, 2006). Anyway India should be proactive towards the radical transformations undergoing in the neighbouring countries otherwise it could be counterproductive in the long run because her own future is intrinsically linked to the events in its neighbourhood. At the same time nobody can vitiate her inherent obligation to lead the region especially those who responsible for India's destiny from immediate external influences. Therefore India needs to evolve an unequivocal and dedicated political perspective to push the region constructively towards a stable democratic and inclusive political order (Chattopadhyay, 2008).

The current Indian strategic scenario proves that SAARC came into the forefront of India's foreign policy lexicon and one of the major foreign policy priorities. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has ascribed high priority in establishing stronger relations with India's neighbours. While the gesture of inviting SAARC leaders to his swearing in ceremony might be considered symbolic. High-level visits to member states have also laid the groundwork for stronger and more substantive cooperation. The Indian proposal for a SAARC satellite and a Centre for Good Governance signal the government's intention to play a proactive role in providing a leadership and governance structure to a region characterized by fragmentation, marginalization and tension. India considers SAARC as an instrument to add additional strength to each member nation and advance collective action for shared prosperity in the region (Sidhu and Rohan, 2014a and Lavakare, 2015). In his address to the United Nations General Assembly Prime Minister emphasized the significance of regional cooperation.

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tion on the basis that a 'nation's destiny is linked to its neighbourhood' and assured to provide the 'highest priority on advancing friendship and cooperation with India's neighbours' (Sidhu and Rohan, 2014b).

Indo-Pak factor in South Asian Cooperation

India and Pakistan are the two major drivers in the South Asian subcontinent. But the conflict between each other acts as the foremost barrier in the smooth functioning of the SAARC. In the Pakistani perspective, India is a dominant hegemonic player in South Asian system. On the other side India sees Pakistan as its major competitor. Actually India is likely to play the role of a regional security manager instead of domination. India is always favouring bilateral negotiation and prefers close economic as well as cultural relations with Pakistan though it wishes to maintain a regional power balance in its advantage. In the Indo-Pak relations, Pakistan attempts to internationalize their disputes for strengthening itself by obtaining strategic support from extra regional forces like US and China and also keep away from close economic as well as cultural relations with India (Lahiri, 2007). Two aspects of India's foreign policy founded on its national interests are frequently misconstrued by the SAARC member states particularly Pakistan. First, India is concerned about its autonomous status in the region that means the whole South Asian region should be free of external influences. Therefore, India is constantly against the outside interference in South Asian matters. Second, contrary to her neighbour's thinking, India is very much interested in the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of all the South Asian nations. In reverse India expects their respect towards India's unity and territorial integrity. As India is a decisive factor for the growth of SAARC, it needs to take reasonable and commendable policy initiatives with respect to SAARC activities and follow a compatible diplomacy to stir up confidence in her neighbours. Besides Pakistan's initiatives and dynamic role are indispensable for the strengthening of regionalism in South Asia. But Pakistan has expressed only a modest interest in the growth of SAARC while it has shown much eagerness and taken numerous projects for the development of the economic cooperation in the association. It is commendable that Pakistan has cordial relations with all the South Asian states though its connections with India are scattered.

Ever since independence, Pakistan's regional policy has mainly driven with dual intentions: first is the liberation of Kashmir to establish the legitimacy of two-nation theory and second is to attain a balance of power *vis-à-vis* India. For this, Pakistan has always looked for outside support to defy India's hegemony in South Asia. At the cold war epoch, Pakistan was a member of two United States-sponsored security organizations, namely the South East Asian Treaty Organization and the Central Treaty Organization, to ensure American support in case of any military confrontation with India. India and Pakistan fought two wars on Kashmir between 1950 and 1970 and India gained comparative victory over Pakistan in these two wars. Even though, Pakistan was largely triumphant in counterbalancing India's ambition of predominance in the region with economic and military assistance from the United States, China, Iran and Turkey. The creation of Bangladesh as an independent state with the intervention of India has changed the structural dynamics of power in South Asia because this decreased Pakistan's structural might and made the basis of the Two Nation Theory irrelevant to South Asian politics. Since 1971 Pakistan's dependency on Gulf States, China, and the United States has increased for military and economic support along with its vigorous pursuance of Kashmir liberation policy. The 1972 Simla Agreement provided an opening for both India and Pakistan to resolve their disputes on Kashmir even so Pakistan subsequently dishonoured the provisions of the accord by raising the Kashmir question in different international forums. Till this time Kashmir persists as the central bone of contention between India and Pakistan and this also limits

the Pakistan's involvement in the growth of regional cooperation in South Asia. The longstanding India-Pakistan rivalry right from the inception by being the immediate neighbours threatens the peace and security of South Asia (Haider, 2001) and their bilateral relations are still operating in the Hindu-Muslim communal framework. The deep rooted legacy of suspicion as well as mistrust ensuing from the partition of the sub-continent and the consequent communal conflict puts strains on the endeavours of cooperation (Lahiri, 2007). This communal syndrome has severely affected the functioning of SAARC and damaged the spirit of cooperation in South Asia (Singh, 2005).

The outbreak of militancy in Jammu and Kashmir in 1989-90 and 2001-2002, and the December 13th terrorist attack on India's Parliament house complex has strained interactions and inconsistency between the two countries has had a destabilizing blow upon the whole South Asian expanse (Kumar, 2006). In South Asia, India was the first country to explode a nuclear device that is in 1974 after that in 1998, both India and Pakistan conducted nuclear tests. When India carried out its second and third nuclear tests on 11th and 13th May 1998, Pakistan could challenge it by successfully carrying out its first and second nuclear tests on 28th and 30th of the same month of the same year. Even if India has the commitment of the 'no first use', both India and Pakistan have threatened each other that they would not hesitate to use nuclear bombs at the point it requires. They have succeeded in further enriching their nuclear capabilities and also disclosed their capacity to produce nuclear arms at need and deploying them swiftly. This arms building competition has unleashed a nuclear cold war and has augmented the possibility of nuclear conflict in the region because both the countries have the means and possibly the motives to engage in nuclear confrontation. In this manner the nuclear arms race pose a serious threat to the security of South Asian nations. Indian strategists argue that nuclear weapons are a political equalizer and the decisive bargaining chip which can be used to correct the imbalance of the international system. In contrast Pakistan believes that nuclear arsenal could supposedly offer some measure of nuclear intimidation against Indian military menaces (Haider, 2001 and Bajpai, 1999).

Since 1998 a balance of nuclear deterrence was established between India and Pakistan as both of them have acquired nuclear weapons potentials. But the Indo-US nuclear deal and its ongoing reinforcement has added the chances of arms race and nuclear threat due to Pakistan's search for nuclear parity with India. In this scenario it is all the more necessary on the part of both nations to promote regional cooperation in South Asia (Lahiri, 2007 and Kumar, 2006). Confidence building Measures are the part and parcel of the South Asian system especially between India and Pakistan. This has always a catalytic impact on relaxing India-Pakistan relations. From the time onwards the hurried departure of the British and the partition of the Indian subcontinent, both India and Pakistan have signed various agreements intended to engender confidence and reduce tensions. The most notable Liaquat-Nehru Pact of 1951 (Cheema *et al.*, 2006) to the ongoing Sherif- Modi talks is aimed at reducing the depth of complex Indo-Pak relations because there is a need for harmonious India-Pakistan relations for the democratic prospects and regional cooperation in South Asia. Moreover the two countries with the virtue of their better economic and military might hold the power to navigate the affairs of South Asia.

Some of the dominant trends in indo-Pak relations have been identified as follows. First, Pakistan and India believes economic growth is essential for their national well-being, domestic cohesion and national security. The perceived primacy of economic growth enhances the chances of continued growth of trade between Pakistan and India. At the same time the pursuit of this goal may further raise the animosity between both countries. Second, the leadership in both countries seeks to avoid major crisis as well as border skirmishes for the purpose of economic growth and national security. Third is that Pakistani and Indian leaders are aimed at avoiding arms race and declared peaceful use of nuclear weapons and affirmed their intention to follow the requirements of minimum

credible deterrence. The fourth dominant trend is that their own internal security concerns are paramount for both countries than interfering in each other's internal affairs. Fifth is that the United States is interested in maintaining strong ties with both Pakistan and India. The recent U.S administrations have made a concerted effort to improve its ties with both countries. These dominant trends are conducive for the enhanced bilateral relationships in the South Asian subcontinent. (Krepon and Stolar, 2007). The long lasting historical burden of mistrust among the South Asian countries has not diminished even after all these years. In addition new tensions between countries are occurring from time to time also dampening the cooperative spirit in the region. However it is interesting to observe that the leaders of all SAARC countries are very much interested in attending SAARC summits. This reflects the prospect of SAARC as an apparatus for tumbling tension and recuperating cooperation in the region (Ahmad, 2002).

India's strained bilateral relations with its neighbours especially Pakistan may possibly hinder the accomplishment of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's readiness to embark on bold new ventures in SAARC. In the United Nations' speech he declared that a bilateral dialogue and cooperation with Islamabad is only feasible in a 'peaceful atmosphere, without the shadow of terrorism' and 'Pakistan must take its responsibility seriously to create an appropriate environment for it'. The SAARC experience reveals that bilateral skirmishes have repeatedly stood in the way of regional cooperation though the SAARC mandate excludes discussion on bilateral issues. The management of bilateral relations would greatly aid SAARC because since its formation the functioning of SAARC has been marred by acrimony between its members, and various SAARC summits have been affected by such conflicts. The continued bilateral strain has greatly hampered the prospects of enhanced cooperation through SAARC. Managing this relationship is central to the larger goals of SAARC; research suggests that an improvement in India-Pakistan ties could enable SAARC to emerge as one of the largest trading blocs, in manufacturing and services (Sidhu and Rohan, 2014b). By being a multilateral forum SAARC gives member states an invaluable opportunity to develop bilateral cooperation on many issues with regional as well as global implications (Gokarn and Anuradha, 2014).

South Asia: A Futuristic Perspective

SAARC, the '*umbrella initiative*' for South Asia is buffeted by herculean forces of change, especially globalisation. Globalisation has both positive (more Foreign Direct Investment, hike in trade volumes etc) and negative implications (burgeoning inequalities, lead role for non-state actors etc) among south Asian countries. Currently, the region has a panoramic role in world order, as the centre of gravity is visibly shifting to India and China. The global economic recession comparatively unharmed the region but the situation is fragile and tenuous in many countries. The economic development has sufficiently reduced absolute poverty in the region but relative poverty is growing alarmingly, as the economic development is restricted to elite pockets. Majority of the socio-economic parameters in the region are worse than those of the sub-Saharan Africa region and the countries in the region rank poorly in the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI) too. Acute regional fluctuations within South Asia and within the countries in HDI parameters are also recorded which leads to commendable regional inequalities and tensions in the region with unprecedented perturbations.

It should be noted that the Indo-Pak rivalry is the major factor that has impeded regional cooperation and made the region unstable. The Afghanistan issues and the presence of Al Qaeda and Taliban in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region also exert profound scourges and terrors to regional and international peace and stability. The enfeebling internal troubles among the South Asian countries

has resulted in enlisting in the top ten of the 'Failed State Index' developed by the Foreign Policy Institute and several others rank quite high too. Moreover, the non-state actors with cross border nexus make the situation more assailable. Gupta (2011) has identified various vital drivers that will influence the South Asian region in near future such as demography, internal stability, economic growth, climate change, water, food, education, non-state actors, attitude towards India and external powers. These drivers are interconnected and embedded in a tight nexus crafted and geared to grow and nurture the entire ambit of the future for South Asia ranging from united dream or regional nightmare.

Conclusion

The constitution of regional organizations has been greatly successful in bringing historically hostile countries in concert. Today regional cooperation has become a critical element of development process. The concept of regional cooperation slowly gained exuberance in South Asia and during the 1970s that various political and economic factors created simpatico environment for it. SAARC has survived and grown in its activities over the years despite heterogeneous levels of economic development as well as bilateral political conflicts among member states. The most vital and serious problem that divide South Asia is the Indo-Pak conflict which is exacerbated by the nuclear tests and created new areas of tension and dissonance. It is crucial that the South Asian states have a regional outlook with regard to security matters to overcome the recurrent setbacks caused by continued political differences among the member states. Even though it is unimaginable to delegate some of the political power to SAARC but it would be the best way to develop such a regional outlook. In a region like South Asia the security comes only through mutual sharing by the way SAARC has an enormous potential to contribute to the progress of greater regional cooperation as well as collaboration. Thus the need of the hour is to conjoin a pragmatic move towards the idea of regional cooperation. It is well cited that with the creation of SAARC, South Asia has emerged as a regional entity in the international political arena. Above all the coherence and resonance in the region will boost the individual potency of SAARC member states as well as that of the South Asian region as a whole in the global power structure.

In recent years there has a shift in India's big brotherly attitude to sharing of its fruits of development like economic growth and technological advancement with other SAARC members. However the member states are reluctant to accept the shift in India's outlook and policies due to the aeonian Indo-Pak conflicts and it's strive for emerging power status at the international scenario. The tense political relations among some SAARC nations adversely affect the economy of the entire region which includes the mobility of resources as well as people within the domain. In reality India seeks SAARC as a forum to resolve global challenges such as climate change, energy security, terrorism, human rights etc at the regional level. In fact SAARC is getting more relevance in the 21st century by the worldwide as well as regional efforts in mitigating climate change, energy cooperation, expansion of renewable energy sources, avert terrorism and so on. In short, India stands at the nub of all potential opportunities and must be at the cutting edge by taking the guidance to reap the great benefits from regional cooperation. All this consequently will contribute to India's twin goals of stability in the neighbourhood and thereby national development of the country.

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