

SAARC and Indo-Pak Relations,

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Abstract

The South Asian region has always been highly important in the global politics because of its sensitive geographical location. The two major countries of this region, India and Pakistan came into being as a result of the division of Sub-Continent in the year of 1947. Both countries have remained incapable to have cordial relationship with each other due to various issues. This difference has badly affected SAARC by delaying its various summits. The uncertainties regarding regular SAARC meetings have clouded the prospect of regional cooperation. No doubt India and Pakistan are two traditional adversary states but both have also experienced such occasions when they became successful to hold peace talks and conclude various agreements to resolve different issues. But this situation has not been long lasting and suspensions in the peace process further enhanced mistrust on both sides. In this context this research paper analyses how the SAARC process has in fact given a stimulus to a better understanding between the member-countries; how Indo-Pak relations have influenced SAARC summits and how the latter has contributed to the normalising two countries' relations notwithstanding the fact that the bilateral disputes are out of the purview of the SAARC agenda. The methodology is qualitative in nature along with both primary and secondary has been used and examined. The primary source includes official documents, statements and the secondary source includes books, magazine, journals and newspapers etc.

Key Words: India, Pakistan, SAARC, Cooperation etc.

One of the aims for the creation South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was to support the regional states so that they may emerge as developed countries undermining their long history of enmities. The European Union in this context is such an example, which integrated the European nations and strengthened the economy of the member countries. Following this precedent, South Asian countries integrated themselves in the way of the European Union by retaining their individual identity and sovereignty under South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The South Asian region lies in the south of Himalayas and is surrounded by Hindukush Mountains and consists of seven countries. India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan and Nepal are located in Indian Sub-Continent while Sri Lanka and Maldives are part of Indian Ocean.¹

¹ Mussarat Jabeen, Muhammad Saleem Mazhar, Naheed S. Goraya; "SAARC and Indo-Pak Relationship", Journal of political Studies, Vol. 1, Issue 2, pp.127, 128

The idea to have regional organization was first perceived by President Zia-ur-Rahman of Bangladesh in 1980 to develop cooperation among the regional countries of South Asia. He perceived the regional cooperation in terms of a potential for peace keeping if it is executed in good faith by all the participants, which would not only offer economic progress but also diminish the political dividends.² Subsequently, the foreign secretaries of the seven states conducted a meeting at Colombo (Srilanka) in April 1981. This was followed up by a committee of all members to identify areas for cooperation. Five areas were chosen for regional cooperation. These areas were: agriculture, rural development, health, telecommunication and population. Later new areas of cooperation were added in the following years including transport, postal service, science and technology, arts, culture and support.³

The idea of common forum received immediate approval from the regional states. The countries like Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives found no reason to be hesitant about their participation in the proposed forum. However, the core countries—India and Pakistan were unwilling to join it despite recognizing the significance of cooperative measures.⁴ Both India and Pakistan had their own reservations regarding the aims and objectives of SAARC, both the countries, however, have been able to use the regional forum to further their economic and social links with other countries of South Asia. India was apprehensive of a Western hand when the concept of SAARC was propounded. It also had apprehension that the organization perhaps would provide a forum for ‘India bashing’ and ‘ganging up’ of its neighbours.⁵ Pakistan was thinking in terms of its own vision, expectation from SAARC has been limited. It is believed that there were two main motivating factors for Pakistan to join SAARC. First, Pakistan thought the forum could be used to strengthen its relations with other smaller countries, which are a part of the South Asian fraternity but with whom it does not share a geographical boundary. Second, Pakistan also thought that if the need arose, the forum could be used to repel the weight of India’s influence. At the same time, Pakistan was apprehensive of two factors: first, its initial reluctance to join SAARC was partly conditioned by its apprehensions about the organization being harnessed by India to further its hegemonic design and second, it did not want its efforts of forging closer ties with the West Asian countries to be hampered by joining SAARC.⁶

So the idea to get the South Asian region closer was moving towards its practical form and arrangement for holding the first meeting in Dhaka (December 1985) were being made when drastic changes took place in the domestic power structure of Bangladesh and a coup overthrew Zia-ur-Rehman while Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was also assassinated. However, the first summit held at Dhaka at fixed time on 8 December 1985 and leaders of all the seven countries joined a multilateral summit for

² Mussarat Jabeen, Muhammad Saleem Mazhar, Naheed S. Goraya, pp.127, 128

³ M. Siddiqi; “*India and SAARC nations*,” Delhi: Maxford Books, 2006, p.2

⁴ Mussarat Jabeen, Muhammad Saleem Mazhar, Naheed S. Goraya, p. 128

⁵ Pattanaik Smruti ; “Indo-Pak Relations and the SAARC Summits, Strategic Analysis,” Vol. 28, No. 3, Jul-Sep 2004 Institute for Defence Strategic Analyses, p. 42

⁶ Ibid; pp. 427, 42

discussion at regional level, for the first time. After four and half years of ground work, SAARC was established ultimately. To keep regional organisational on track and to accomplish its objectives of socio-economic development, it devised a charter where political issues were kept out of its realm. It is however believed that SAARC's failure not to take up bilateral political issues has been attributed as one of the major reasons for the failure of regional cooperation and Pakistani analysts have accused India of being the main culprit.⁷ The objectives defined in the Charter are:

- To promote the welfare of the people of South Asia and to improve their quality of life;
- To accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and to provide all individuals, the opportunity to live in dignity and to realize their full potential;
- To promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia;
- To contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems;
- To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields;
- To strengthen cooperation with other developing countries;
- To strengthen cooperation among themselves in international forums on matters of common interest and
- To cooperate with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes.⁸

The SAARC Charter prohibits the discussion of bilateral and contentious issues. Some Pakistani analysts feel that it is India's emphasis on bilateralism that has hampered SAARC.⁹ However, Indian point of view, shows that most of the problems it has with its neighbours are bilateral in nature and do not concern other member states. In that context, the argument put forward is that the role of a multilateral forum like SAARC is irrelevant and will hamper regional cooperation if it is to deal with complex bilateral issues.¹⁰ The highest authority of the association rests with the heads of state/government who meet annually at summit level. The Council of Ministers is second in ranking after the summit. It is responsible of formulating policies, reviewing progress, searching new areas of cooperation, establishing additional mechanism on different matters. The Council meets twice a year and may also meet in extraordinary session by mutual consent of the member states. Next is the Standing Committee comprising of foreign secretaries, which is entrusted with the task of overall monitoring and coordination of the program. The SAARC

⁷ Cheema, Pervaiz Iqbal, "SAARC in the 21st Century: Time to Reexamine". *IPRI Journal*, 2002, pp.40-41

⁸ www.saarc-sec.org.

⁹ Abdullah, Sadaf, " SAARC Intra-regional Trade: An Assessment, *Strategic Studies*." Spring- Summer 2000, (2&3) 236.

¹⁰ Pattanaik Smruti S, p. 428

Secretariat was formed at Kathmandu on 16, January, 1987 to coordinate and monitor the implementation of SAARC activities and as a channel of communication between SAARC and other international organizations.¹¹

An analysis of the socio-economic agenda within the purview of SAARC reveals that the organization has achieved limited success. Clearly, inclusion of political issues that are contentious is going to throw SAARC out of gear. Pakistan's position has been; "*Resolution of all territorial disputes could give fresh impetus to SAARC... If we want to move forward we must resolve and remove all territorial disputes to give a fresh impetus to this Organization.*"¹² President Pervez Musharraf in a speech delivered to the leaders of SAARC nations said: "There can be no peace so long as political issues and disputes continue to fester", adding that the bitter truth is: "SAARC will never achieve its full potential unless the disputes and tensions that draw us apart are resolved peacefully on the basis of justice and equity".¹³

3.1 Diversities in SAARC and Divergent/ Convergent interests of India and Pakistan; Probably, all SAARC countries have similar character in their low level of socio-cultural and economic conditions but they differ in size of their territory and in terms of population. SAARC countries covers 21 per cent of the world's population and 3-5 per cent of total area but it accounts for only 0.25 per cent of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). About half of the world's poor inhabit in this part of the world. The per capita Gross National Product (GNP) of all the members together is barely around US \$ 350 only.¹⁴ The intra-regional trade among SAARC countries is very low, at about 5.0 percent of their total trade. In fact, as a recent study points out South Asia is the least integrated region in the world. This study identifies cross-country conflict as one of the reason for this very low level of integration. The Human Development Institute of Pakistan (HDIP) reported in 1998; "South Asia has failed to minimize its income gap with the developed world in last three decades. For instance, South Asian countries average per capita GDP was 12 times lower than the average US level in 1990 – exactly the same as it was in 1965. East Asia moved much faster to close its income gap; the US income per capita was six times the East Asian average a generation ago but is only twice as high now". Economic structure of these countries is basically agrarian. Current international economic order has been operating against the basic interest of poor countries due to the growing protectionist measures among the rich countries. In open market, poor countries are facing tough competition due to the monopoly of rich countries in production.¹⁵

On some occasion, cooperative and collective steps were taken in determining the external relations. For example, in 1950s, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka promoted 'Colombo powers collectively and later the

¹¹ K. Bhushan, & G. Katyal et al, "*SAARC: challenges before new millennium,* " Delhi, A P H Publishing Corporation, 2002, pp. 5- 152

¹² SAARC Anti-Terror Pact to be expanded, News International. January 1, 2004.

¹³ Musharraf Wants SAARC to Take up Bilateral Issues. The News International, January 5, 2004

¹⁴ M. Siddiqi; "*India and SAARC nations,* " Delhi: Maxford Books, 2006, p. 115

¹⁵ Mussarat Jabeen, Muhammad Saleem Mazhar, Naheed S. Goraya, p. 130

Afro-Asian movements.¹⁶ All these states are members of Non-Alignment Movement as well. Despite these collective measures, they have not been able to settle their territorial disputes or conflict over sharing of river-water. They failed to evolve a common regional policy. In spite of these mutual activities, SAARC is not successful to overcome divergence of interests.

India is the largest country of the region and its position in SAARC is much greater and stronger than any of the other member in terms of area, population economic advancement, scientific and technological enrichment. Before the inauguration of the forum, regional states were looking away from each other. Sri Lanka increased its relations with South East Asia and Nepal was under the umbrella of China while Pakistan had inclinations towards China and Middle East. All of them were away from India due to bilateral tensions. India's hegemony was visible in its relation with other regional states, such as having Tamil issue with Sri Lanka, harsh trade treaty with Nepal (a land locked state), Ganges water issue with Bangladesh and above all the Kashmir dispute with Pakistan. These all remained source of tension with the biggest state of the region. However, today situation is changed as it has tried to make itself a stronger link between all the countries. But its position with Pakistan is still same due to the unresolved issues.¹⁷

Indo-Pak relations and the accompanied mistrust and suspicion between the two countries have greatly hampered the process of regional cooperation. The Sub-Continent has been considered as one of the greatest cradles of the ancient human civilization. It is the birth place of Buddhism and Hinduism as well as a great center of Islam. The region is often referred high-risk conflict zone due to the historic enmity of India and Pakistan. The religious and linguistic based majority and minority characters are major variables that have profound impact upon the intra region relations in the Sub-Continent.¹⁸ Indo- Pak differences give a picture of several dimensions ranging from territorial disputes to demarcation of land and maritime boundaries, disputed lands to waters-courses, illegal immigration to limited or large-scale wars and fears of hegemony towards the peripheral states. Sir Creek, Baglihar Dam, Siachen Glacier, and Wullar Barrage are threat perceptions between the two armed forces. All this historical orientation of differences converges on a single ground of Kashmir dispute. However, this problem is the core issue and any hope for peace and cooperation in South Asia lies in the resolution of this conflict. It influences Pakistan's policy towards India. In spite of India gave most favoured nation status to Pakistan in 1995; but Pakistan did not respond the same way until May, 2011, when Pakistan announced it is moving towards granting MFN status to India.¹⁹ Since 1947 both countries fought three wars in 1948, 1965, and 1971 (East Pakistan Debacle), apart from militaristic conflict of Kargil in 1999 when both were nuclear powers. The partiality, suspicion, and mistrust are dominant characteristics of their relations.²⁰

¹⁶ Report of the SAARC Ministerial Meeting on International Economic Issues. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamabad, March 1986, pp. 7-12

¹⁷ Op. cit; p. 131

¹⁸ Ibid; p. 132

¹⁹ The Financial Express, Mumbai/Kochi, February 18, 2004

²⁰ For details see D.C. Jha, Indo-Pakistan relations, Patna, 1972, chapter 4,

3.2 Efforts for normalization of Indo- Pak relations under SAARC Summits

Many initiatives have been taken from time to time to reduce the hostility by managing the differences through peaceful efforts. The SAARC is being considered the important forum in this direction as its agenda is to suggest that South Asian states should join together to form a tighter union. The fourth SAARC Summit held in Islamabad from 29-31 December 1988. The then Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi gave an optimistic assessment of trends and development in region calling them beginning of a “new dawn” in Pakistan. He even praised Pakistan’s Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto for “encouraging prospects of enduring friendship and goodwill between the two countries”. He mentioned Indian military actions in Maldives 1987 and Sri Lanka on Tamil issue in 1988 as examples of Indian friendly manifestation towards its neighboring countries.²¹ Thus SAARC Summit at Islamabad succeeded in making a breakthrough in view of softening stand of India and Pakistan on the disputed areas. The Indian on their part pacified Pakistan’s fears of economic domination and Rajiv Gandhi declared in Islamabad that “*India was fully conscious of its special responsibilities and that it would not seek to secure any unfair advantage at the expense of any other partner*”.²² Pakistan responded positively, the successive summits afterwards showed a trend of including core economic areas within SAARC. Following this practice, the regional actors can promote cooperation in less controversial areas including transfer of technology and bilateral trade. The 9th SAAR summit held at male (Maldives) again proved as a platform for the two countries to normalize their relation.²³ The 10 SAARC Summit was held at Colombo (Sri Lanka) in July 1998, in the aftermath of nuclear tests of India and Pakistan. Serious doubts were expressed on the smooth continuation of SAARC process in the wake of overt nuclearization of South Asian region. The informal bilateral meeting between the prime ministers of India and Pakistan on the sideline of SAARC summit acquired a great significance. However, the summit went ahead with its usual business.²⁴ The 11th Summit was scheduled to be held in Nepal in the second half of 1999 but was postponed in the aftermath of Kargil conflict (1999) and military coup in Pakistan, which brought military in power. India showed strong reservations against the participation of military leader in the SAARC summit and delayed the summit by not confirming its availability. Dhaka Summit in 1993 in the aftermath of the demolition of Babri Mosque in India and the events leading to the postponement of 11th SAARC Summit were to remind that the political and security considerations could not be ignored in the process of regional integration. However, the 11th Summit was held in January 2002 at Katmandu (Nepal) whereas 12th Summit took two years and was conducted at Islamabad from 4-6, January, 2004.²⁵ This summit again provided platform for India and Pakistan towards normalizing relation. This summit was important and productive despite the restriction in the SAARC Charter, which does not allow discussion or deal on bilateral disputes and regional conflicts

²¹ 192 M. Siddiqi; Op. cit; p.121.

²² 193 Summan Sharma, “*India and SAARC*”, Gyan Publishing House, 2001, pp.179, 180

²³ <http://www.ipripak.org/factsheet/ff42.shtml/>.

²⁴ The Nation, February 23, 1999.

²⁵ <http://www.ipripak.org/factsheet/ff55.shtml/>

with political orientation. In fact, this summit was conducted after tension and both countries held discussion on the sideline of the SAARC to improve the situation. An Indo-Pak joint press statement was released on 6, January, 2004, which revealed the normalization of relations through a composite dialogue on contentious issues including Kashmir.²⁶ A ceasefire along the line of control near Siachen Glacier was agreed on November 2003, following the annual meeting of SAARC. This provided an opportunity to composite dialogue between the two neighbors for mutual differences as this situation had seriously affected the activities and function of SAARC. Above all, the opening of five bus routes on LOC on 7, November, 2005 in the wake of devastating earthquake, which hit Pakistan on 8, October, 2005, was one of milestones in India Pakistan relations. Through these steps, people on both side of border got benefit in political, social and economic sphere but major challenges remained unaddressed. However, positive aspects of these crossing points are the provision of an opportunity to reunite the divided families and to facilitate those CBMs that the two governments have been putting in place to blunt the edge of hostility that has characterized their relations for than six decades.²⁷ After Islamabad, the 13th SAARC Summit was held in Dhaka in November 2005. The reactivation of the regular annual summits was a way to link India and Pakistan on composite dialogue because the sideline talks held during the 12th SAARC Summit were helpful to conduct negotiation on the bilateral issues. The 14th SAARC Summit was conducted in New Delhi on 3-4 April, 2007. It was another attempt to scale the mountain of difficulties between the two countries. This meeting was to impress upon the participants of the official SAARC Summit that South Asian countries will continue to lag behind in development until they realize the meaning of cooperation. It was first meeting for Afghanistan which got membership in the Dhaka Summit of 2005.²⁸

Conclusion

SAARC is the first major step of long journey towards the regional integration on the pattern of the European Union. Increasing regional cooperation among SAARC countries proved to be of immense socio-economic and political importance, which is the ultimate goal of the SAARC. This forum has increased a great scope in the economic activities among the regional countries owing to their common concerns regarding their similar problems. Although the regional cooperation has accelerated the economic development and strengthened the mutual trust yet much mistrust lies between India and Pakistan as none of them trusts the other. The ethnic and cultural minorities inhibiting in the two states have provided a prepared stage for sparking off the fanatical outburst and turmoil. SAARC has secured and addressed the controversial areas on sideline of its plate form by extending opportunity of interaction and contacts between the societies and people to people contacts between the two countries. It is also strengthening mutual understanding and goodwill. Thus several initiatives have been taken by the two states under the auspices of

²⁶ Jang, April 15, 2007

²⁷ M. Siddiqi, *op. cit.*, pp. 14- 101.

²⁸ K. Bhushan & G. Katyal; *Op. cit.*, p. 5- 152

SAARC for the economic growth, cultural development and collaboration in social, cultural technical and scientific fields. The enhanced cooperation has generated CBMs and led to the composite dialogue, which in turn has brought non-economic benefits for the two states and a steady and positive improvement in their bilateral relations.

The fundamental asymmetry at different levels has not been addressed yet. India and Pakistan have long time victims of their sceptical mindsets. Their stereotype images and perception has led them into the continuing enmity and are a hurdle in opting the peaceful means of conflict resolution. Basically, each one is plagued by an array of political and security crisis, regime instability and secessionist movement of an explosive potential. Each alleges to be a victim of the low intensity war and subversion of the other. To counter such tectonic challenges and resolving disputes in a befitting manner, is a difficult task but the resolution would ensure a lasting goodwill and harmony. The charter prevents to bring contentious issues in the SAARC. Despite this forum provided immense opportunities to both countries to reassess their foreign policies in order to address the security question. The forum is trying to construct mutual trust and understanding among the member states on economic areas, which would lead to the cooperation among them in political sphere too. The respective position of India and Pakistan on agenda pattern and frame work of the dialogues is needed to determine through negotiation. Moreover, two countries have respective position over the language of issues but cannot change the status of conflict except the mutual consent and will. Political dialogue is often conducted on the sideline of SAARC meetings and the SAARC is a useful channel for the protracted initiatives and remedial measures.

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