



A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ADVENT AND EGRESS OF SAARC

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Abstract

The origin of SAARC could be traced by the proposal given by late President Zia-ur-Rehman of Bangladesh in 1980 which was followed by the circulation of Working Paper on south Asia regional cooperation in November 1980. In April 1981, the Colombo meeting of foreign secretaries of seven states of the region of south Asia, i.e. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka started the formal discussion for the establishment of a institutional mechanism for regional cooperation in south Asian region.

This evolution of a regional organization was indeed very late as compared to other regions of the globe. There have been several reasons of so, but the most important was India and Pakistan. The New Delhi meeting of foreign ministers in 1983 became a turning point in evolution of regional cooperation as south Asian regional cooperation (SARC) was launched. After few more meetings the SAARC took its form at Dhaka in 1985. The Dhaka Summit of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Heads of states adopted the charter of SAARC and marked it as beginning of regional cooperation in South Asia. The SAARC secretariat came into existence in 1987 with its headquarters in Kathmandu.

Most of the states within the region has developed a adversary kind of a relationship with India because of the bilateral problems they have with India and a psychological fear of turning India as sole hegemon of the region. As India is the largest of all the member states of the South Asia so, most of the bilateral issue revolves round India and other member states. India-Pakistan relations occupy the center stage of South Asian relations. The major bilateral problems are India's problems of Kashmir with Pakistan, river water dispute with Nepal, smuggling and river water sharing with Bangladesh. LTTE and Tamil insurgency with Sri Lanka. All these problems are pure bilateral. India played positive role in SAARC by cheering cooperation in South Asian states. India's has cordial relation with Maldives, Bhutan and other South Asian states regarding the economic cooperation.

The purpose of this study is to examine the state of SAARC after so much bilateral coercion among its members over the years and counts where SAARC played a serious role in economic and regional cooperation in region by loosen up the tension among states. Also the continuous terrorist attacks sponsored by Islamabad on Indian soil and subcontinent and the way it affect the region and the SAARC as an organization.

Introduction

The South Asian countries with experience and time comprehend the necessity of regional cooperation. They understood the importance of mutual cooperation and self reliance. They

learnt a lesson from the past experience from the greedy games of super powers during cold war like the afghan conflict. Though the concept of having an organization of cooperation in asia region isn't something out of the blue. It floated as a plan since 1920 when Gandhiji wrote of the growing solidarity of asian countries. In 1945 Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru said "*The small states of the world would have no future and they were sure to be reduced to the status of satellite states.*" Therefore he advocated creation of South Asian Federation of India, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Burma.ⁱ

The vision of south asian regional organization was propose by the then president of Bangladesh General Zia-ur-Rehman. The course of action which led to foundation of south asian association for regional cooperation began in 1980. South Asian region is comprised of seven states viz. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The region constitutes approximately 3.3 percent of the world land area, but accounts for 22.1 percent of its population. The countries of South Asia aren't only linked geographically, but also share a common history, religious traditions, and cultural values.ⁱⁱ Regional Cooperation amongst states is encouraged by common factors which may be geographic, ethnic, linguistic, religious, civilization, politico-historical or socio-economic. The greater the interaction, the better are the chances of success of collaborative endeavors. The South Asian region certainly has above mention commonalities with minor distinctions.

Regional cooperation has two important purposes which are political and economic. Politically, the idea of regional cooperation is to develop a sense of common interest necessary to successfully prevent external intrusion. It can create an ambiance of benevolence and trust among regional states making war unlikely mechanism in future conflicts. Moreover, stability inside a region allows member states to focus more energy and resources on governance and developmental tasks. On the economic front, regional cooperation in matters of administration and broaden markets could lead on to higher level of overall economic growth. A regional integrated arrangement provides better opportunities to collectively handle environmental degradation or conservation.ⁱⁱⁱ

There is mutual skepticism among the member states of SAARC. Chiefly it was questioned how far Indian hegemonism in South Asia affect the Regional Cooperation in South Asia. It is somewhat true and that the size and strength of India in relation to its neighbors gave room for this type of suspicions within the bilateral relations between India and its neighbors. The suspicions were rather psychological and by no means insurmountable. The talk about

Indophobia has its roots in the bilateral problems between India and its neighbors. India's ambitious foreign policy postures and its insistence of bilateralism in its dealing with its smaller neighbors are construed as dominant aspirations. But the very fact is that India is generally keen in preserving good neighborly relations with all its smaller neighbors. After all India has been more interested in economic relations with its smaller neighbors. The matter of India's big size is in actual an imaginary problem cultivated by Pakistan for palpable reasons and actively supported by the external powers, predominantly the USA and China. In the recent time both China and USA got the observer status in SAARC.

SAARC's Achievement over the Years

In its twenty nine years of history, it is quite naive to believe that its accomplishments as a regional organization are history of failure. During these years SAARC's performance has been mixed and its political leaders have met regularly and pitch on informal discussions to deal with their mutual problems. These informal discussions produced some remarkable results in South Asia. The unceremonious talks between the Indian and Pakistani Prime Ministers at the second SAARC Summit at Bangalore in November 1986 led to the dispersion of tension between the two countries on the issue of India's military exercise, operation Brasstacks, on the Indo-Pakistan border, and the India-Sri Lanka talks at the 1987 SAARC Foreign Ministers' meeting, leading to their accord on the Tamil problem. As a result of an informal meeting and discussion between Prime Minister of India and Pakistan, Narsimha Rao and Nawaz Sharif respectively, at Davos (Switzerland) in 1992, the Pakistani government took action to thwart the move of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) to cross the ceasefire line in Kashmir later that year. The meeting was possible because of an earlier informal agreement between the two leaders at the sixth SAARC summit meeting at Colombo in December 1991.

In this way SAARC on many occasions has displayed its growing role. One of the important achievements that the SAARC has made during these years is that the Heads of State or Government at the Ninth SAARC Summit agreed, for the first time, that a process of informal political consultations would prove useful in promoting peace, stability, amity and accelerated socio-economic cooperation in the region. The leaders restated this goal during their Tenth and Eleventh Summits held in Colombo and Kathmandu respectively. As a result, the Agreement on SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) was signed in 1993. With the purpose of moving towards a South Asian Economic Union (SAEU), the Agreement

on South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) was signed during the Twelfth Summit in Islamabad in 2004. It aims at the liberalization of regional trade by getting rid of trade barriers and greater assistance. In this summit, the signing of social charter, Additional Protocol on Terrorism and South Asia Free Trade Area (SAFTA) agreement are the three most important achievements of SAARC.

Besides this, at the 12th SAARC Summit, the Foreign Ministers of SAARC signed Additional Protocol to the 1987 SAARC convention on Terrorism. The protocol was signed in the milieu of 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States. SAARC has become an eminent organization by signing the social charter, launching of SAFTA and acceptance of global obligations to suppress and eradicate terrorism. It is not only making progress in the areas of regional integration and social development but also showing enthusiasm to share the errands to fight the war against international terrorism.

In 14th summit SAARC expanded itself by formally adding Afghanistan as a member state, which could be seen as a step to bring stability region by an intergovernmental organization. All these schemes have encouraged other countries of the world to enhance the level of their dealings with SAARC members in areas like trade, investment, energy, infrastructure, education and security. This became the major foundation of the desire of some countries like United States, China, Japan and European Union to obtain observer status in SAARC.

Despite the slow advancement of regional cooperation in South Asia, the actual working of the SAARC since its creation has raised high hopes of peace in this region tormented by conflicts of all kinds. The present South Asian regional cooperation is far from the stage where EU and ASEAN have reached, yet it cannot be denied that a small beginning has been made in this direction, which would deliver harvest far reaching results in the future. The initiation of the SAARC represents unity in diversity.

SAARC's Failure over the Years

Institutionalized cooperation, in the form of the South Asian Association for Regional Integration (SAARC), formed in 1985, has failed to achieve expected results. The South Asian region remains one of the least integrated in the world. This can be accredited to the SAARC's failure to fully implement its main catalyst for improving intraregional trade, namely, the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) due to a variety of reasons.

First, the SAARC envisage progressive trade liberalization programme has not been enough to ensure the full implementation of the SAFTA, due to the continuation of Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs), while the SAARCs main focus has remained tariff decrease alone.

Second, low levels of regional connectivity, as well as the lack of border infrastructure to assist the smooth flow of goods and people, have hindered the creation of a regional supply chain.

Third, the failure of the SAFTA can also be explained by its narrow scope, in that it covers only intraregional trade in goods while excluding other important aspects of regional economic cooperation such as trade in services, and investment and financial cooperation between South Asian states.

Former Indian Prime Minister Dr. Man Mohan Singh stated at the 16th SAARC summit in 2010 that, “We have created institutions for regional economic cooperation but we have not empowered them adequately to enable them to be more proactive”. This statement is relevant in circumstances where South Asian nations recognize that regional integration is a geographic necessity, but the institutional arrangements fail to make integration possible, as they are impeded by a number of challenges which remain unaddressed. Presently, negotiations for establishing a South Asian Economic Union by 2030 were underway. However, the progressive trade liberalization programme under the auspices of the SAARC has performed poorly as South Asia remains one of the least integrated regions in the world.^{iv}

Summits	Scheduled/Expected Dates* and Venue	Actual Date and Venue
First	Dec. 1985, Dhaka	Dec. 7–8, 1985, Dhaka
Second	Nov. 16–17, 1986	Nov. 16–17, 1986, Bangalore
Third	1987, Thimphu	Nov. 2–4, 1987, Kathmandu
Fourth	1988, Colombo	Dec. 29–31, 1988, Islamabad
Fifth	1989, Colombo	Nov. 21–23, 1990, Malé
Sixth	Nov. 7–9, 1991, Colombo	Dec. 21, 1991, Colombo
Seventh	Dec. 1992, Dhaka	Apr. 10–11, 1993, Dhaka
Eighth	1994, New Delhi	May 2–4, 1995, New Delhi
Ninth	1996, Malé	May 12–14, 1997, Malé
Tenth	July 29–31, 1998, Colombo	July 29–31, 1998, Colombo
Eleventh	i) Nov. 1999, Kathmandu	Jan. 4–6, 2002, Kathmandu
	ii) 2000, Kathmandu	
	iii) 2001, Kathmandu	
Twelfth	Jan. 2003, Islamabad	Jan. 4 – 6, 2004, Islamabad
Thirteenth	a. Jan. 9–11, 2005, Dhaka	Nov. 12 – 13, 2005, Dhaka
	b. Feb. 6–7, 2005, Dhaka	
Fourteenth	April 3–4, 2007, New Delhi	April 3–4, 2007, New Delhi
Fifteenth	2008, Malé	August 2–3, 2008, Colombo
Sixteenth	Sept. 2009, Malé	April 28–29, 2010, Thimphu
Seventeenth	Nov. 10–11, 2011, Addu City	Nov. 10–11, 2011, Addu City

* Where exact dates/months were undecided, only years have been mentioned.

Lack of connectivity within the region also negatively affects intraregional trade. The creation of a smooth flowing regional supply chain would force investment in physical infrastructure for transport across borders. South Asia can be understood as comprising three sub-regions: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) in east; India, Maldives and Sri Lanka in south and India; Pakistan and Afghanistan in the west. The BBIN countries have recorded higher amounts of incorporation by undertaking measures for trade facilitation and improved connectivity. The Bangladesh-India Memorandum (2010) enables enhanced bilateral trade between the two countries, while also allowing Bangladesh access non-coastal states of Bhutan and Nepal through Indian Territory. Apart from these some constraining factors that can be identified within the SAARC's own framework are: its inability to tackle inter-state

conflicts that has often made it hostage to bilateral conflicts and therefore the nationalistic interests of member states. Also lack of trust among South Asian, SAARC was born with disabilities and restraint, which were self-imposed. It adopted a functional approach of cooperation in non-controversial areas like social and cultural fields, hoping that if successfully carried forward, opportunities for cooperation in more vital areas could open up. Moreover, SAARC follows the ideology that each decision has to be made unanimously and that no bilateral and controversial issue can be on the SAARC agenda. Which has its pros and cons as per perspective of states own interests.

A concern that has frequently come up at SAARC meeting is that the central position of larger states, particularly India, within the regional setup. The difference of size and power between India and all its neighbors, leads to concerns among the latter about India's dominance in the region and potential nosiness in their affairs. At different times this has been a major element in the policy view of states like Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka; and has led them to seek security assistance first and foremost from outside South Asia when they need it.^vSupportive policies of SAARC are influenced by the fear among number of states around India that interdependence will cause the wearing down of their political autonomies and therefore undermine their advantages for securing settlement of bilateral disputes with India.^{vi}

Types of conflict between member states of SAARC:

SAARC Members	Conflict
India-Pakistan	a. Deadlock on issues of Siachen glacier, Kargil and Sir Creek. b. Indus water sharing and infra projects issue c. Pakistan sponsored terrorism
Afghanistan-Pakistan	a. Durand line issue b. Afghanistani immigrants and cross border terrorism.
India-Bangladesh	a. Ganga water sharing issue b. Illegal bangladeshi immigrants
Nepal-Bhutan	Over repatriation of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal.

South Asia is that the least interconnected region within the world. This is often largely because of Pakistan's behavior. As an example, Pakistan refuses to let Indian trucks pass through it overland to Afghanistan, putting a constraint on regional transportation and interconnectivity. The lifelong conflict between India and Pakistan has also led to rising investments in arms and ammunitions to counter each other's military capability.

Continuous Pakistani sponsored terrorism on Indian soil could tumble the future of SAARC. The creation of 1987 *regional convention on suppression of terrorism* includes a definition of terrorist act called for a greater regional cooperation in south asia, this was updated in 2002 Additional protocol (inspired by UN Security Council Resolution 1373) in aftermath of 9/11 and parliamentary attacks. This protocol addresses the issue of terror financing. This declaration was adopted by SAARC leaders in august 2008 and the irony is that nearly a month after it India faced dreadful act of terrorism in Mumbai. SAARC even created the Terrorist Offences Monitoring Desk (STOMD) in Colombo, Sri Lanka, which is made up of experts from throughout the region working to “collate, analyze and disseminate information about the terrorist(incidents), tactics, strategies and methods.”^{vii} Though its accomplishments are hard to assess but it has the aptitude to act as a early warning system and to assist dialogue between member states, but fails to act out the policies as it lacks the ability to do so.

If we analyze Pakistan’s past and unstable present, it affects the entire south asian region’s growth. For example, the 11th SAARC summit in Kathmandu was postponed after India protested against the participation of the military government in Pakistan and there adventurism in Kargil’s bloody conflict which distressed SAARC role in south asian equation of cooperation. In present scenario, Pakistan relations with Bangladesh have plummeted over the trials of the criminals of 1971 war in Bangladesh began in 2011. Pakistan objected to the trial and later execution of the war criminals which Bangladesh sees as intrusion in its internal affairs. The future of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is in a midpoint mostly because of one member state. Considering the present level of the relationship among the member countries, especially, with Pakistan, the future of SAARC appears to be limited.

Conclusion

The trouble with SAARC is that its member-states have in many instances involved in creating trouble in their neighborhood. Some of the bilateral problems have greater consequence for interstate cooperation. These bilateral suspicions also fallover to other issues of regional cooperation. The region, which has the possibility to emerge as a major transport hub and can provide access to both Central and South East Asia, is caught up in narrow nationalistic agenda. It is important to mention that some of the agenda concerning regional cooperation have occurred from certain domestic desires and do not necessarily bring genuine

regional gains. Moreover, the states have adopted a wait-and-watch policy on certain issues like trade and development of communication linkages. The states need to believe in geographical status quo and allow greater travel and transport linkages so that economic cooperation becomes feasible.

SAARC has made progress in fulfilling some of its commitments under its social charter. As an organization it also brings the leaders of all the South Asian countries together to work for a common regional future. SAARC needs to aim at uniting the region economically, preserving the commonality of the socio-cultural ethos and at the same time allowing the countries to retain their independent political identity. The challenge would be to overcome the bilateral political differences in order to make the region a coherent whole where the geographical boundaries do not act as a barrier to economic integration. This will be possible if the states discard the concept of absolute sovereignty and look at South Asia as a region in broader terms than merger of eight different countries. Greater success in trade, investments, travel, and communications would in turn create the political community and conditions for bilateral dispute resolution.

When SAARC was formed it was period of cold war concentration, bitterness and mutual suspicion that is why some of SAARC members were hesitant to frame and practice this forum. However they realized its regional and interstate significance they generally became eagerly interested to the platform. SAARC itself wanted the support of member countries so that it might have operate well but more than that these South Asian states needed much SAARC forum's encouragement so that they come together. It is a stage on which these states discuss their basic and mutually problems. Many things can be settled town, mediated among them it and threshed out. According to the practicality of time it has to be ready to accept some challenges also but not on the cost of its regional unity and sanctity. If there are formations of many other groups as – SCO, ASEAN, APEC (Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation), IORC (Indian Ocean Rim Cooperation) etc.; SAARC may also become strong and smart enough to build up an 'Asian Order'.

ⁱ J.S. Bright (ed) *Before and after independence (collection of Nehru's speeches 1922-50)*, New Delhi, 1950, p. 279

ⁱⁱ P.K. Mishra, *op.cit.*, p. 200.

ⁱⁱⁱ Bharti Chibber, *Regional Security and Regional Cooperation, A comparative study of ASEAN and SAARC*, New Century Publications, New Delhi, India, 2004, p. 1.

^{iv} *Next Steps to South Asian Economic Union: A Study on Regional Economic Integration (Phase II)*". SAARC Secretariat Report (June, 2003). <http://www.sasec.asia/uploads/publications/next-steps-to-saeu.pdf>

^v A. Bailes, *Regionalism in South Asian Diplomacy*

^{vi} Smruti Pattanaik, S. 'Making sense of regional cooperation: SAARC at twenty', *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 30, No. 1., 2006, Institute for Defence Studies Analysis, New Delhi

^{vii} SAARC, *Declaration: Partnership for Growth for Our People, made at the Fifteenth SAARC Summit, Colombo, August 2-3, 2008*, available at www.saarc-sec.org/data/summit15/summit15declaration.htm .