

India Attitude toward SARC

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ABSTRACT

India, a country in South Asia is the seventh-largest country by area, the second-most populous country, and the most populous democracy in the world. Bounded by the Indian Ocean on the south, the Arabian Sea on the southwest, and the Bay of Bengal on the southeast, it shares land borders with Pakistan to the west; China, Nepal and Bhutan to the north; and Bangladesh and Myanmar to the east. In the Indian Ocean, India is in the vicinity of Sri Lanka and the Maldives; its Andaman and Nicobar Islands share a maritime border with Thailand and Indonesia.

1. Introduction

The Indian subcontinent was home to the Indus Valley Civilisation of the Bronze Age. In India's Iron Age, the oldest scriptures of Hinduism were composed, social stratification based on caste emerged, and Buddhism and Jainism arose. Political consolidations took place under the Maurya and Gupta Empires; the peninsular Middle Kingdoms influenced the cultures of Southeast Asia. In India's medieval era, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Islam arrived, and Sikhism emerged, adding to a diverse culture. North India fell to the Delhi Sultanate; south India was united under the Vijayanagara Empire. In the early modern era, the expansive Mughal Empire was followed by East India Company rule. India's modern age was marked by British Crown rule and a nationalist movement which, under Mahatma Gandhi, was noted for nonviolence and led to India's independence in 1947.

India is biggest member country of SAARC and it is the only country in this organisation which borders touch the borders of all the SAARC countries except those of Afghanistan and the Maldives. It is also important to note here that the three most populous countries of SAARC – India, Pakistan and Bangladesh – were parts of united India before 1947; and it is only because of the British policy of “divide and rule” that on the communal ground it was bifurcated into India and Pakistan. Pakistan again was bifurcated into Pakistan and Bangladesh in 1971 because the Bangla people felt that they were being exploited culturally, economically and politically. The people felt that religious basis cannot keep a people united if on other counts they are being discriminated against. The ancient heritage of all the three countries is the same, but the enmity created by injecting the venom of communalism not only caused the melancholy partition of India, but it perpetuated the enmity on communal line between India and Pakistan that has proved to be a serious bottleneck in the successful progression of the SAARC.

In 2018, the Indian economy was the world's fifth-largest and third-largest purchasing power parity with the GDP. After the market-based economic reforms in 1991, India became one of the fast-growing major economies. However, it is facing problems of poverty, corruption, malnutrition and inadequate public health services. Non-nuclear weapons are state and territorial power, the second largest military in the world, and the country is at fifth place in military spending. India is a federal republic under the parliamentary system and comprises

29 states and seven union territories. It is a plural, multilingual and multi-ethnic community and is also home to the diversity of wildlife in various protected domains.

2. Demography of India

In 2011, provisional Census Report registered 1,210,193,422 residents of India making it the second most populous country in the world. During 2001 to 2011, the country's population grew by 17.64%, while it increased @ 21.54% in the decade (1991-2001). According to the 2011 census, the human sex ratio is 9 1,000 per person. Medieval Age 27.6 was until 2016. Increased agricultural productivity caused by “Green Revolution” and increased medical advancements in the last 50 years have resulted in India's population growing rapidly. However, India is facing many public health-related challenges.

Life expectancy in India is 68 years, while so for women, the life expectancy is 69.6 years and the male is 67.3. There are almost 50 doctors per 100,000 Indians. In the recent history of India, there has been an important change from rural to urban areas. The number of Indians living in urban areas increased by 31.2% between 1991 and 2001, in 2001, more than 70% of the population still lives in rural areas. According to the 2011 census, the level of urbanization increased from 27.81% to 31.16% as per 2011 census. Since 1991, the rate of growth of the rural population has slowed down. According to the 2011 census, there are 53 million-plus urban agglomerations in India; among them Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Ahmedabad, in decreasing order by population. In 2011, the literacy rate was 74.04 percent: 65.46 percent of the women and 82.14 percent of the male. The literacy rate in 2011 was 74.04%: 65.46% among females and 82.14% among males. The rural-urban literacy gap, which was 21.2 percentage points in 2001, dropped to 16.1 percentage points in 2011. The improvement in literacy rate in rural area is two times that in urban areas. Kerala is the most literate state with 93.91% literacy; while Bihar the least with 63.82%.1

3. Economy Reform of India

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Indian economy in 2017 was nominally worth US\$2.611 trillion; it is the sixth-largest economy by market exchange rates, and

is, at US\$9.459 trillion, the third-largest by purchasing power parity, or PPP. With its average annual GDP growth rate of 5.8% over the past two decades, 2 and reaching 6.1% during 2011–12, India is one of the world's fastest growing economy. Until 1991, Indian rulers have adopted protectionist policies. Right from the 1st Five year Plan India adopted Nehruvian policy of mixed economy whereby big industries were kept under public sector compelling private sector to take the backseat. Due to corruption and mismanagement in the politico-administrative setup, the economic growth rate around 3% till Rajiv Gandhi initiated some baby steps in liberalizing Indian economy; however, Rajiv Gandhi within a short span backtracked. In the whole period the growth rate was satirically called "Hindu rate of growth" (K.N. Raj). Comprehensive state intervention and regulation largely walled out the economy from outside the world. A serious balance of payment crisis crippled Indian economy in 1991. Thanks to P.V. Narasimha Rao and his Finance Dr. Minister Manmohan Singh who brought the economy on the right track by pursuing the "New Economic Policy of GLP". Since then, the Indian economy slowly turned to the free-market system, emphasizing both foreign trade and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). India is a member of the World Trade Organization since 1 January 1995.

The service sector contributed 55.6%, industrial sector 26.3% and agricultural sector 18.1%. In 2014, India's foreign exchange invoicing of \$ 70 billion in the world was the largest, 25 lakh Indians working in foreign countries contributed to the economy. Major agricultural products include rice, wheat, oilseeds, cotton, jute, tea, sugarcane and potatoes. Major industries include textiles, telecommunications, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, food processing, steel, transportation equipment, cement, mining, petroleum, machinery, and software. In 2006, the share of external trade in India's GDP was 24%, which was 6% in 1985. In 2008, India's global trade was 1.68%; in 2011, India was the 10th largest importer and nineteen exporters in the world.

Major exports include petroleum products, textiles, jewelry, software, engineering goods, chemicals, and leather products. Major imports include crude oil, machinery, gems, fertilizers, and chemicals. Between 2001 and 2011, the total export of petrochemical and engineering goods was up by 42% from 14%. China is the world's second largest calendar year in the calendar year 2013.

Real GDP growth or Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of India at constant (2011-12) prices in the year 2018-19 is estimated at 6.81 percent as compared to the growth rate of 7.17 percent in 2017-18. GVA growth rates of Agriculture & allied, Industry, and Services sector are 2.92%, 6.86%, and 7.53% respectively. India has registered highest growth of 8.74% in 'Construction' sector and lowest 1.34% in 'Mining & quarrying' sector. Overall GVA growth at constant prices is 6.63%. At current prices, GDP growth rates for year 2018-19 is 11.20%. GVA growth rates of Agriculture & allied, Industry, and Services sector are 3.96%, 12.24%, and 12.76%, respectively. Overall GVA growth at current prices is 11.09%. According to IMF World Economic Outlook (April-2019), GDP growth rate of India in 2019 is projected at 7.3%.

Despite economic growth during recent decades, India continues to face socio-economic challenges. In 2006, India contained the largest number of people living below the World Bank's international poverty line of US\$1.25 per day, the

proportion having decreased from 60% in 1981 to 42% in 2005; under its later revised poverty line, it was 21% in 2011. 30.7% of India's children under the age of five are underweight. According to a Food and Agriculture Organization report in 2015, 15% of the population is undernourished. The Mid-Day Meal Scheme attempts to lower these rates

The World Bank has forecast that India will continue to remain the fastest growing major economy in the world in 2018-19. In a report that was released on Tuesday (January 8) the World Bank said India's Gross domestic Product (GDP) will grow at 7.3 per cent during the ongoing financial year. In comparison, China is expected to register a much lower growth rate of 6.3 per cent in 2018-19. These predictions have been made in a report prepared by the World Bank titled: 'Global Economic Prospects: Darkening Skies'. The report says that most world economies stare at dark times in this financial year. However, it has projected a brighter picture for India and the South Asian region as a whole.

With this much of economic growth India wants to cooperate in the economic connectivity and prosperity of the SAARC countries. This was made obvious by P.M. Modi on the very first day when pulled off a diplomatic masterstroke by inviting leaders of all South Asian countries for his swearing-in ceremony in New Delhi. He attended the 18th SAARC summit in Kathmandu, signaling the pre-eminence of the 'neighbourhood first' template in his evolving foreign policy. India, the largest economy and the most populous country in the region, is an idealist as well as a realist in its ongoing efforts to revitalise the SAARC as the preeminent forum of regional cooperation and integration. Connectivity was the reigning theme of the Kathmandu summit and India's focus, too, was on weaving the region together in a web of rail, road and air links.

Moreover, Connectivity can't be just physical; in the end, it's forging connections of mind and heart that matters. India is, therefore, expected to unveil new initiatives and highlight the need for promoting and deepening people-to-people, educational and cultural linkages through the SAARC University and the Satellite. Harnessing cultural and spiritual energies of the region will complement the larger project of regional integration. South Asia is the cradle of four important religions of the world - Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism - and its multicultural mosaic should foster cultural integration of the region. Besides religion, one can see a literary alchemy binding the region. Nobel laureate sage-poet Rabindranath Tagore, Urdu poets like Mirza Ghalib and Iqbal are very popular in the region and are cited with equal fervour.

4. India's Attitude towards SAARC

Times without number, our dashing PM, Narendra Modi has been enchanting in international fora that if the 20th century was the century of Europe, the 21st century is going to be of Asia, and the Asian nations are expected to play pivotal role in International politics. When Narendra Modi utters this, he is just echoing the oft-quoted proverbial assertion that the mirror of global politics of the 21st century might be aptly applauded as an 'Asian Century' in which India must evolve as economic giant representing South Asia. India's fate of economic growth and development are intrinsically linked with the holistic development of South Asia as the phenomenon of globalization has been closely connecting the regional countries

in the single chain. The countries of South Asia represent a rich matrix and characteristics in terms of their physical and human endowment as well as their historically gained experiences.

However, India's stand on terrorism at global level is loud and clear that the dangerous paw of terrorism is a global menace and it is to be done away with at any cost with strong hands. It has declared its stand that no talk between India and Pakistan is possible unless Pakistan abjures its clandestine connivance with terrorist organisations operating in J&K. It was this aspect of Indo-Pak relations which also shapes the destiny of SAARC to a large extent. India and Pakistan traded volleys of barbs pointing fingers at each other which are the biggest impediment for the regional bloc. It was due to the terrorist attack that the SAARC Summit scheduled to be held in Islamabad from 15-19 November 2016 has been put in abeyance indefinitely following the rising diplomatic tensions after the Uri terrorist attack. India announced its boycott of the summit alleging Pak involvement in the attack followed by other member countries including Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Maldives over the issue of cross-border terrorism and hence the anniversary celebrations in Delhi in 2016 were a bit lukewarm.

The then Minister of State for External Affairs M.J. Akbar addressed the students and teachers of South Asian University (sponsored by SAARC); and remarked: "SAARC is going through teething problems. Hopefully the University has smoother run than SAARC." Akbar also noted the "complex history" along with "emotionalism" of the region may be cited as basic hurdle that made SAARC a non-starter since the beginning. The celebrations at the varsity did not see any representatives from Pakistan, which despite agreeing to set up of the institution is yet to chip in with its share of budgetary contribution towards the University. This is reflective of the greater malaise afflicting the regional block.

Most agree that at the heart of the failure of SAARC is the India-Pakistan hostility; their inability to put aside political differences and co-operate for the sake of the region. India, want to change this rhetoric, particularly to demonstrate its willingness to set aside bilateral issues with Pakistan and engage its neighbourhood, embraced a policy of 'Neighbourhood First.' When the new government came into power in 2014, they pursued this goal with high energy and dramatic gestures. In a move, totally unprecedented and high on optics, Modi invited all seven heads of the SAARC countries to his swearing-in ceremony. This was followed by several high-level visits to these countries, including Indian Foreign Secretary's 'SAARC Yatra' to discuss both the prospects for SAARC and bilateral issues.

When the SAARC Motor Vehicle Agreement fell through, India decided it would pursue sub-regionalism; i.e. a similar agreement with Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal (BBIN MVA); and the phrase 'SAARC minus one' started to gain popularity among analysts. When India pulled out of the summit scheduled to take place in Islamabad, the summit has been postponed indefinitely, leaving behind the feeling that SAARC has once again failed. When it comes to the prospects for SAARC, there is a sense of *dejavu*. It was further made explicit that even Modi's enthusiasm was decreasing about SAARC and it is intending to favour more about greater connectivity with its neighbours. He is reported to have said, "The bonds will grow. Through SAARC or outside it. Among us all or some of us

Several obituaries have been written for SAARC. While in the present climate, any sort of co-operation between India and Pakistan seems unrealistic, these two neighbours have experienced similar periods of acrimonious relations. Postponement of SAARC summits is not a new occurrence, having happened several times in the past. As dysfunctional as it appears, SAARC has survived, albeit sometimes as a farce.

Its critics refer to SAARC as being merely a talking shop. Nevertheless, regular talk should not be dismissed as inconsequential. SAARC offers, in principle, frequent opportunities for the leaders to meet. Bhutan's Prime Minister TsheringTobgay argued that "at the minimum it is a safe political stage for them to meet." When the Indian Foreign Secretary embarked on his SAARC Yatra, there was talk of it being a disguised 'Pak Yatra'. Is the Prime Minister, "trying to anchor his Pakistan policy within that of the outreach to all SAARC countries?" SAARC affords India and Pakistan the opportunity to discuss their bilateral issues in an incremental way, without it being the focus.

Many have argued that informal SAARC has been more significant and successful than formal SAARC, alluding to discussions that take place on the sidelines of its summits. The sidelines of SAARC have served the objective of privately attempting to resolve differences and thawing hostility. Owing to India's problems with Pakistan, the seven-country grouping BIMSTEC, is being considered as an alternative to SAARC. However, it faces several obstacles same as SAARC. At a recent conference in Dhaka, Syed Monowar Hussain (former Director of the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority) said, "When you talk about connectivity with India, the perception is that it is only for the benefit of India."^{7 1} The big struggle of this neighbourhood has been one of perception. There is a legacy of distrust amongst these neighbours, and predominantly against India. They see India as a domineering big brother and not as a developmental partner. India must address this "perception that it meddles and bullies."

With its role as a leading global power, India has shown its intension to maintain greater friendly relations with its neighbours. The Indian P.M. values friendly relations with India's neighbours. The South Asia Satellite, GSAT-9, which was successfully launched into space on May 5th by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) was initially meant to be a SAARC satellite. The programme was offered by India in 2014 to all SAARC members including Pakistan. When Pakistan dropped out, it had to be renamed the South Asia Satellite. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi ^{8 1} called this "a gift" to its South Asian neighbours to enable better coordination in a range of areas including banking, broadcasting, telemedicine, weather forecasting and disaster relief. Bhutan's Prime Minister TsheringTobgay dubbed the move historic, pointing out "this is the first time a country has launched a satellite for the free use of its neighbours."¹ Although a milestone for regional integration, many saw this as yet another totem for the failure of SAARC.

5. Conclusion

The desire and the thought for the formation of regional grouping for rebuilding and for reconciliation and to damp interstate conflict in Asia can be traced back to Japan's victory over Russia in 1905. It was measured as a wonderful survival of the Middle East. Japan raised the slogan of Asia for Asiatic.

However, this slogan was intended for to bring Asia under Japanese control. Since 1920 to 1930 Gandhi, CD Das, Mohammad Ali and other Congress leaders strained the need for collaboration between India and her neighbors. The theme, however, continued to be developed and redefined in coming decades. This was rightly voiced by Jawaharlal Nehru at the Asian Relation conference in New Delhi. The relations conference of 1947, the conference in Indonesia in Delhi in 1949 and Bandung conference in 1955 are prominent among them but no concrete results emerged.

The concept of regional cooperation emerged late in South Asia and it was only during the seventies that various political and economic factors created congenial environment, After the cold war associations like SAARC achieved a great importance, particularly after the UN eagerly united them in peace-building efforts in several of the world's conflict zones. In the year 1977 the thought of the South Asian Cooperation was planned by the late President Zia-Ur-Rahman in the course of his good will visits to several South Asian countries. But there was some unwillingness on the part of both India and Pakistan. When the plan of regional cooperation was over, India has shown its eagerness due to the previous experience of the regional deal in Asia. India feared that sooner or later SAARC could get the same fate. India's foreign policy stops it from such type of political and security agreement that invites additional regional powers. Pakistan's approach towards multilateral cooperation in South Asia is marked by caution and circumspection. It has labored under the apprehension that the SAARC will provide India an opportunity for projecting itself and its policies. By virtue of its size, it is bound to overshadow others, and therefore Pakistan, reacting to the proposal put forward by Bangladesh, enthusiastically accepted the principle of cooperation on a step-by-step basis. Pakistan was also welcomed by others since they gave everyone a vote, a decisive say in what the SAARC could do and what it could not. Encouraged by the positive response from South Asian Capitals, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Bangladesh formulated a proposal for regional cooperation in South Asia and circulated the proposal among the countries of the region in November 1980. During 1980 and 1983, four meetings at the foreign secretary level Kathmandu, Islamabad, Colombo, Dhaka took place to set up the main doctrine of union and to recognize the areas for cooperation. A particular representative of Zia-Ur-Rahman visited the six capital cities of South Asia (Islamabad, New Delhi, Thimpu, Kathmandu, Colombo, Male) and individually delivered a copy of the similar

working paper with a letter from his President to the particular top-level statesmen. From August 1-3, 1983, the first South Asian foreign ministers' meeting was held in New Delhi, where the Integrated Programme of Action (IPA) was jointly agreed. Subsequent the New Delhi meetings, three more meetings of the foreign ministers were held at Male (July 10-11, 1984), Thimpu (May 13-14, 1985), and Dhaka (December 5, 1985) to decide the particulars and a date and venue for the first meeting of South Asian heads of state. At the Dhaka foreign ministers' meeting, a decision was taken to modify the name of the association from South Asian Regional Cooperation (SARC) to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The main aim behind the creation of SAARC is the endorsement of social interaction, economic growth, political, and, common vision for using region's capacities and capabilities to counter threats.

As a result of the long deliberations among the member countries of the region the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) came into existence on 8 December 1985 with its first summit meeting of the Heads of States in Dhaka. The basic aim of it is to accelerate the process of economic and social development in the member states through joint action in certain agreed areas of cooperation. It is a manifestation of the determination of the peoples of South Asia to cooperate regionally, to work together towards finding solutions to their common problems in a spirit of friendship, trust and understanding and to create an order based on mutual respect, equity and shared benefits. Like other regional bodies of the world the SAARC has also developed an institutional framework within which different level meetings take place at regular intervals, and within which a wide array of institutions, working groups, and so on, have been set up to discuss the feasibility and modalities of cooperation among the member countries.

However, SAARC has not been successful to the expectations of the set objectives of the organisation. The bottlenecks it is confronted with are such that put a question mark on the very survival of the organisation. Perturbed with the attitude of Pakistan, the next nuclear and big power of South Asia, Indian attitude indicates that it is inclined to consider alternative South Asian regional organisation instead of SAARC. After his election victory in 2019 Lok Sabha elections, PM Narendra Modi invited the heads of BIMSTEC countries, not those of the SAARC countries as he had done in 2014 after his electoral victory to grace the occasion of his oath-taking ceremony in New Delhi.

Reference

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2. The unweighted protection rate came down from 73 per cent in 1991/92 to 28 per cent in 1995/96. See W. Mahmud, W., 'Macroeconomic Management: From Stabilisation to Growth?' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 4 September, 2004, pp. 4023-32.
3. Most observers of Bangladesh are convinced that, but for a fractured democracy and corruption-ridden governance, Bangladesh's performance would have been better still.
4. According to one estimate, based on a CGE modelling exercise, in the absence of microcredit the GDP of Bangladesh would have been around 9-12 per cent lower than it was in 2012/13 and rural GDP would have been around 12-16 per cent lower, depending on the assumptions made. See S. Raihan, S.R. Osmani, and M.A.B. Khalily, "The Macro Impact of Microfinance in Bangladesh: A CGE Analysis" *Economic Modelling*, Vol.62, April, 2017, pp. 1-15.
5. In the process of undertaking the activities mentioned above, the NGO community has also made a significant contribution towards poverty reduction and human development.
6. Mohan IndraJha, Op. Cit., p. 3-4.
7. *Ibid.* p. 4.
8. "Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru's speech", Asian Relations Conference 1947. Retrieved on 9 January 2009; also see,

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