

## **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation: Challenges and Prospects**

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### **Abstract:**

The main theme behind the efforts for Regional Integration of South Asia under the banner of SAARC was to extend mutual cooperation, eradicate poverty, economic interdependence, social exchange, Preferential Trading Arrangements (PTA's) and Free Trade Arrangements (FTA's). Though these goals are achieved in theory but in practice nothing promising is done. Since its formation till date, the organization has been failing to achieve the promised goals of regional integration. This study presents a theoretical analysis of the performance of the organization and finds out that the organization needs more and more attention on practice than theory. The research effort mainly focused on the challenges faced by the organization and its future prospects.

**Keywords:** SAFTA, SAPTA, SAARC, adjustment, economics, expansion, security, stability

### **INTRODUCTION**

SAARC is a regional organization having eight member countries. It came into existence in 1985 after tiresome efforts by the late Zia Ur Rehman of Bangladesh. The organization was aimed at bringing socio-political and economic development in the region but it is failing in achieving the promised goals. It is seen unorganized in a sense that the member countries do not rightly follow the codes that rules its business. There are many constrains in the working of SAARC, for example, political insincerity, structural inability, economic diversification, hegemonic phobia and fear phobia, etc.

The summit meetings are very inconsistent. After spending almost thirty years, SAARC is still thought to be immature like a child. At the opening of every SAARC Summit, great zeal and enthusiasm is recorded, high rhetoric is made for progress, poverty alleviation, economic unification, combating terrorism, friendly coexistence, non-interference in each other's affairs, sovereign equality, mutual respect, embracing SAPTA and SAFTA, and show of regional coherence at international forums; yet in practice none of these promises are completely fulfilled and the picture is upside down. So the theory seems complete but the practice is not all correct.

South Asian region has distinct qualities of significance and study. It is often called the 'nuclear flash point' because the major actors of South Asian politics; India and Pakistan are nuclear powers. All other countries of the region are facing numerous domestic and regional problems. In the last thirty years of its formation the organization has not brought good luck for the region. Afghanistan is

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recently awarded the membership in the South Asian Organization and is gravely facing insurgency, political and economic instability and other multiple problems.

In the present day globalized political and economic structure, Regional Organizations are eminent actors in regional and international politics. The success of a state in today's world is not so much measured in terms of capacity for defending borders or establishing unique national institutions, but in terms of ability to adapt to regional and global trends. It is significant to note that the other contemporary organizations have achieved greater progress than SAARC. Then, why SAARC is not so sensitive to global and regional trends? This question need to be answered. India the most rapidly growing political and economic power of South Asia is hesitant and insincere towards other regional actors. She does not want to lose her hegemony. The regional philosophy requires the equal basis for the unifying units; it does not mean the loss of sovereignty but the sovereign equality.

Another vitality of India lies in the fact that she borders almost all the regional countries. Definitely, she has a disproportionate responsibility for the success or failure of SAARC. Apart from the occasional leadership, the elite and bureaucratic circles in India have a view point of aloneness. They consider the regionalism doctrine as a challenge to Indian domination in the region.

The civil society of the South Asian states is keen to collectivism. The analytical research circles advise regional integration in complete sense for the peaceful resolution of disputes, prosperity and security of the region. In the changing globalized world, the state is losing its strength, as economy is not in the grip of state. Terrorism and sectarianism, ethnic disparity and cultural identity are gravely encircling the entire South Asian region. The elite and bureaucratic circles are keen to nationalistic trends while the civil society and private sector are focusing on common benefits. The main stake holders in South Asian integration process are Government, Civil Society and Private sector.

The main problem of SAARC is the weak conflict management mechanism (Idrees & Naazer, 2017). No milestone achievement is made towards the resolution of bilateral disputes generally among the South Asian nations, and particularly between India and Pakistan; specially the Kashmir dispute. There is irregularity in conducting of summit meetings due to differences among India and Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan.

The time and tide does not always remain the same, there is a considerable improvement in the SAARC's physics. Similarities are breezing all around the SAARC region. Multi-party democracy is prevailing throughout. Pakistan is boldly tackling with terrorism while the Sri Lanka has eliminated the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. There is a collective thinking in SAARC that the menace of terrorism can only be eliminated through collective efforts. Forces of globalization are pushing for regional integration throughout the world and South Asia cannot escape this pressure.

SAARC is being expanded by the entry of new countries like Afghanistan (2007). US, EU, China and Japan are joining as observers whose role is of tremendous effect. China and Myanmar are keen to become full-fledged members. While others like Russia are to join SAARC as observers, which shows their enhanced global interests in the South Asian region.

The researchers consider SAFTA and SAPTA as landmark achievements in the process of regional unification. In the recent few years from 2007 onwards, significant shifts have been seen in the behavior and approach of the member states. Especially the Indo-Pak relations are improving day by day. Other regional players are also committed to the task. The coming years are very important in the march towards prosperity and greater Integration.

What are the factors halting the way of SAARC to become a successful regional organization? The national and regional policies of regional countries are worth studying. To understand the success or failure of SAARC, this study focuses on the theory and practice of the organization. These crucial exclamations compelled the researcher to have an analytical study of SAARC, and find out solutions of problems. This effort is surely helpful in further understanding of the regional integration process in South Asia.

Following are the main objectives of the research: To evaluate the success and failure of SAARC; To identify the role of India and Pakistan in the success and failure of SAARC; To synthesize the challenges and their prospects for the region. In the process of research, the main focus is given to sorting out solution to the major research questions listed below: What is the success and failure of SAARC? What are the factors that keep out the South Asian nations to tackle political, economic and regional instability?

### **METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

It is Historical, Analytical and Descriptive research. This work deals with data related to the past occurrences, analyzes the present course and suggest some future guidelines. The process of research is based on analysis of the major questions that are related to main theme of the topic to find out their answers. Firstly, this study defines the problem, and further follows certain steps e.g. systematic collection of data, evaluation of data and production of verbal synthesis of findings or conformation/disconfirmation of hypothesis.

Both primary and secondary sources are consulted and utilized in the process and completion of research. As with a view of related literature the data is organized and synthesized and conclusions and generalizations are formulated. In summarization, logical analysis rather than statistical analysis is brought.

### **DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS**

#### **a. Politics and Economics**

SAARC is a reward of the regional economic and political compulsions. All the members who joined the organization were driven by their own political and economic constrains. Obviously, SAARC's progress and growth depends more on the domestic political and economic dynamics rather than international factors (Bhatta 2015, 188-189).

It is well understood that commonality in the behavior of member states is a requisite for the success of every regional organization SAARC indeed faces failure in evolving commonality of approach (Jabeen, Mazhar & Goraya, 2010). The iron curtain policy of India and Pakistan and vice versa is very anxious and dismantling the SAARC steps towards success. A writer has analyzed this scenario stating, two factors motivated Pakistan to join SAARC; first to strengthen its relations with

the geographically off South Asian neighbors and second to minimize the Indian influence in crucial times (Pattanaik, 2004).

Different researchers are obvious to state that both countries joined the organization for the pursuit of their own interests because India itself was anxious about her position and role in the organizational hierarchy of SAARC for she hoped a leading and dominant role and commanding position in South Asia while Pakistan wanted the sort of organized neighborly support for balancing her dominance. So this policy can be termed as 'Organized Deterrence' against a core state, which will surely be a fresh terminology fitted to South Asian regionalism.

According to Peter Lyon (2008), South Asia in some significant sense is a world of its own and yet indubitably a substantial part of the wider world, the planet Earth. The regionalism is also an attempt to unify the regional economic potential and achieve some bargaining power in the global system. Presently, economics might have become the most effective bargaining tool in the international system. Sometimes economic interests may have solutions for political disputes but this is just theoretical and politics as known to us can bring havoc to such theories. SAARC is likewise the most glaring example of it (Frontier Post, 1993).

India being the core state in the organization with huge resources and economic strength has the main role to play in mechanizing the regional cooperation. In the words of Cheema (1999), "it is her responsibility to have a lead in evolving an all accepting framework for cooperative relations." No one can deny the Indian lead in South Asian politics and economy and her military strength, which is all accepting but if positively dealt with this hegemonic character, India could be superbly beneficial, rightly progressive and satisfactory. So Indian greatness should not be that of disgrace but it must be of respect for the member countries.

One of the major dilemmas SAARC confront with is the weighty conflicts within the region which endanger the peaceful coexistence of the regional players which is vice versa the basic element for regional integration or otherwise regional confrontation. Some analysts like S. Pattanaik while elaborating the same issue argue 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 (Pattanaik, 2004).

The writer may be right in his judgment when he analyzes the Indo-Pak conflict (Kashmir) in bilateral context and argue that, if this conflict was not resolved by bilateral dialogue process then how this issue could be resolved by a multilateral organization (Pattanaik, 2004). Yet some other analyses proved that the complex bilateral issues (like Kashmir) are mainly responsible for the uneven progress of this multilateral organization. Many analysts see this issue (the Kashmir dispute) in the regional context and fix its implications for regional disintegration, according to Cheema, it is still much better than pushing the contentious issues under the carpet. Therefore, some researchers suggest there should be a conflict resolution mechanism for SAARC that could work in the auspices of SAARC and this elusion also finds support in the recommendations of the Group on conflict resolution mechanism under SAPNA Conference Declaration Islamabad April, 2006 and also the rhetoric of maximum South Asian elite (Shahid, 2006).

The analysis on regional integration suggests that integration becomes more meaningful and handsome when there are same political systems in the countries member to integration process.

SAARC can be said unfortunate because in the beginning there were dissimilarities in the form of governments of the member countries and only few countries could project democracies.

Visible changes struck the history of the evolution of regimes and forms of government in the region (Muni & Jetly, 2008). Pakistan has been experimental to various forms of governments i.e. Military dictatorships, Presidential cum Parliamentary democracy and quasi parliamentary democracy. Bhutan has remained a Monarchy which was replaced by a parliamentary democracy in 2007. Bangladesh is a flourishing parliamentary democracy yet had been scourged to political disturbances. The Indian parliamentary democracy has spoken at its glory but 1975-77 witnessed emergency aberration but almost satisfactory. Maldives has remained with one party presidential democracy yet there was great pressure for change in 2003 which installed new constitution in 2008.

Nepal has seen many different forms e.g. Constitutional Monarchy, Parliamentary democracy (after 1991), King-led rule 2002-05, direct King's rule and elected representative government in 2008. Sri Lanka has been victim to an all-powerful executive presidency. Now, there is a great imagination towards complete parliamentary democracy. Afghanistan who joined the organization just recently has experienced wars of succession and since the overthrowing of Taliban government by US, this multi-ethnic country has been running through presidential democratic type and adopted its constitution in 2004 but the political system is still rupturing.

It is very recently observed that democracy is felt all around in the SAARC region and Multi party systems are prevailing throughout which is looked at as a sign of goodwill and homogeneity. The democratization of all the SAARC countries will facilitate a broader political understanding amongst the regimes, creating a better atmosphere for negotiated and mutually advantageous resolution of disputes to drive them towards enhanced economic and social cooperation (Muni & Jetly, 2008). The research on the conflicts reveal that every dark has a light similarly every tension has some contention. South Asia is both dark and contentious but one can imagine now that the day is not too far to enlighten the region.

The Sun of Democracy is rising on the horizons of South Asia so quickly that it has lightened almost all the region, in contrast to that a portion of the world has suffered. Analysts think that there are three important drivers behind the democratic resurgence in South Asia: (a) the pressure of the civil society; (b) the world community; and (c) the common people. Whatsoever, the democratic environment is still fragile and vulnerable. The potentiality of regional integration in South Asia nevertheless is not promising compared to the European Union.

One of the breakers to its economic resurgence is Energy Shortfall. South Asia is challenged by the interrupted energy supplies in the member countries which is directly proportional to the regional economic crunch which affects the industrial output and also adds to inflation in the South Asian markets. This further intensifies less industrialization of the region, as a result, the South Asian states are dependent on western import of finished goods and machinery. To meet this challenge, almost all the member countries try to get support from outside. This puts pressure on all SAARC member countries to make sure the uninterrupted and dependable supply of energy in its different types. All the member countries have huge reservoirs of energy resources, and there is applicability of the cheapest renewable energy resources.

The variety of available energy resources in all the South Asian countries has a significant possibility for inter-regional trade and cooperation in energy. However, the geopolitics involved and competition from alternative energy markets makes inter-regional energy trade a challenging proposition. An assessment of the (table 1) shows that amongst the member countries India and Pakistan have more reserves of natural gas and coal. Nepal and Bhutan have huge hydro potential. These energy resources are considered efficient enough to meet the requirements of these countries (SRETS, 2010).

Almost all the member countries except India and Pakistan rely more on one kind of commercial energy. Afghanistan depends on imported energy supplies. Maldives is oil dependent. Other countries like Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka are heavily dependent for the commercial energy on hydro power and imported petroleum. While Bangladesh among others, rely only on natural gas. The dependence on one kind of energy supplement has two implications for the region:

- (i) It creates limitations on the use of diverse energy resources;
- (ii) It increases the regional energy security concerns.S

According to the analysis by SAPNA on the theme of 'Energy Cooperation in South Asia,' the energy imports of south Asia figures from 27 to 87 percent of the commercial energy requirements (Shahid, 2006). The existing procedures need to be strengthened and channelized and the SAARC economic agendas should be seriously acknowledged.

Ahmad Saleem, the Secretary General of SAARC while delivering his message on the eve of fifth South Asia Economic Summit, expressed his satisfaction on the steps towards progress under SAFTA (Secretary General Message, 2012). He specially mentioned the sixth Meeting of SAFTA Ministerial council and the good decision of the two big economies of the region i.e. India and Pakistan to enhance trade. He expressed his satisfaction on reduction of sensitive lists for trade under SAFTA; the member countries would meet in the SAARC Secretariat to address the question of non-tariff barriers; while he also expressed his confidence on track II input. The trade volume between the two big economies of SAARC i.e. India and Pakistan remains negligible compared to their global trade (State Bank of Pakistan, 2013). The main reason behind low trade between these two countries according to different data analysis has been the abnormal relations. World Bank estimates highlight that if the normal relations exist, the trade volume would be relatively as high as \$ 1.85 billion (SBP Governor's Speeches, 2004). There are certain reasons of this informal trade e.g.:

- (a) Restrictions on import of certain items for different reasons like, religious, economic and health issues;
- (b) Transportations and tariff costs are very high which make it 'cost effective' when smuggling the goods within the country;
- (c) Imposition of non-tariff barriers and quantitative restriction;
- (d) Weaknesses of the 'rules of origin' in case of using the trade route of a third country;
- (e) Weaknesses in transit trade;
- (f) Imperfection of domestic trade policies and relatively low indirect taxes in a country, which encourages the illegally transported goods to the neighbouring countries.

In the analysis all the notes on SAFTA seems satisfactory because SAFTA above all is itself a very encouraging and satisfactory step yet mere satisfaction is not enough there's an urgent need to pave the ways for its proper implementation. There are various obstacles in the practicality of many projects which are described as having linked to the pre-SAARC relations of the South Asian countries. Dr. G. Corea (in Kalegama, p.5) highlighted the obstacles that shuffled regional economic integration in South Asia:

- (a) The SAARC was established with a hope to bring ease to the stress and tensions among the larger members in the region particularly India and Pakistan 'which suffered';
- (b) The low level of intra-regional trade is the result of the British Colonial legacy of trade orientation towards the latter, rather towards eachothers;
- (c) The low per capita income and low purchasing powers of the member countries have constrained utilizing the regional market;
- (d) Lack of infrastructure in the SAARC countries, the development of which would accelerate the SAARC;
- (e) There is a problem of bilateral agreements vis-a-vis regional arrangements; the bilateral arrangement should not be carried as substitute but as facilitator to regional integration;
- (f) All these impediments and obstacles need avoidance for weakening than for strengthening regionally integrated cooperation.

There are limitations on trade cooperation in South Asia though the global traditions of trade and economic cooperation influenced the South Asian policy makers to adopt some procedures like SAPTA yet, they still lack proper implementation. There are some positions that it was slower to come up with SAPTA the South Asia Preferential Trade Arrangement in 1993 and its first negotiations 1995.

Some analysts consider SAPTA a mere confidence building measure rather than a real trade cooperation. The negotiations round under SAPTA limit its operation to somewhat colloquial economic cooperation. The agenda for SAARC economic cooperation remains very much a discussion between government officials, researchers and limited participants from the private sector.

The SAARC economic cooperation is no warranty, it suffers from more political ups and downs than the trade compulsions. The nuclear dominance policy of India and nuclear deterrence policy of Pakistan de-tracked the SAARC economic agenda in 1998. One writer concluded these trends as:

- a) Bilateral economic cooperation has been more successful in terms of bilateral free trade and other regional grouping having any such trends
- b) The regional groupings that dwell on the globe have had a starting point from agreed base for cooperation they took to collective decisions either for exiling regional integration or enrolling new entrants to their blocs.
- c) In case the entry of new members into the organization, the existing member would set specific guidelines and time schedule and potential member have to meet some fixed targets

to qualify for the request and this is the established norm of the successful regional blocs of the world e.g. ASEAN and European Union.

The researchers also criticize the FTA's for its bilateral nature by putting that all the FTA's Free Trade Area's arrangement in the banner of SAFTA like Indo-Nepal FTA and Indo-Lanka FTA etc shows its bilateral nature which is not fruitful for regional economic integration in South Asia. South Asia inhabits one fifth of the world population but its share to the world GDP is only 1.5% (fpcci.com.pk).

The exported goods of the region are almost the same in kind, that's why there needs diversification in the production and finished goods. The member countries have adopted different measures for the extension of their industrial output and diversification of the economies. This motivation will affect the primary production and manufacturing goods. The trade volume between the South Asian countries is less while its high with the outside world.

**Table 1: Trade percentage of SAARC**

Indicators	Statistics
Total population (Million), 2004	1432.1
GDP (US \$ bn), 2006	2992.2
Average GDP per capita (US \$)	\$ 988
Total imports (US \$ bn)	186.04
% share in world imports	1.73%
Total exports (US \$ bn)	123.05
% share in world exports	1.18%
Total trade (US \$ bn)	309.089
Total share in world trade	1.46%

**Source:** [http:// www.fpcci.com.pk/products/subcat\\_pdf\\_105.pdf](http://www.fpcci.com.pk/products/subcat_pdf_105.pdf)

Similarly, the member countries of SAARC have to compete for market for the export of goods and services that is disturbing SAARC progress (The News, 1995). Regional gains could be secured if SAFTA is properly implemented with the following measures:

1. Reducing transaction costs and creating more efficient regional transportation and infrastructure networks;
2. Increasing the scope for intra-regional trade in energy;
3. Improving road, rail, and air links within the region and building modern border custom crossings.



So at this stage, one can rightly analyze that bilateralism is greatly concerned with SAARC's disorganization and the countries must avoid this one-to-one procedures like SAPTA, SAFTA and the most wanted economic cooperation which is hidden in the most familiar multilateralism.

#### **b. The Expansion and Adjustment**

The expansion of SAARC and the presence of non-members or observer states in its meetings is the providence of satisfaction for the analysts who prospects the progressive existence of SAARC. The fate of observer states is motivated by a number of factors like colonial heritages, economic interests, political compulsions, cultural linkages and regional homogeneity.

Answering to a question regarding the role of observers in SAARC, Shivshankar Menon the Indian foreign secretary replied, "There could be cooperation between SAARC and these countries in trade, counter-terrorism and social and economic sectors (SAARC Summit, 2007). Explaining a query about the role of US in SAARC, Richard Boucher the assistant secretary of state for South Asia stated, "We are examining the areas that we can support the likely are trade and education – we would try to support the organization towards its goals" (SAARC Summit, 2007).

In the new era of economic power syndrome, some analysts of the India China relations view that the economic compulsions have changed the Chinese policy towards India from foe to friend (Kasuri, 2013). The Chinese have great commitment for a closer interaction with SAARC and is wishful for permanent seat in the organization. Stressing that Chinese foreign minister said, "China as a close neighbor of SAARC enjoys traditional relation of friendship that is a strong base for our further cooperation (Kasuri, 2013)."

The admission of observers and consideration of the cases of membership to Iran, Myanmar and China speaking out about the attraction of the organization for the non-members vis-à-vis adds to the region's economic and political benefits. Probably this could be a stepping stone for SAARC to attain a global image like ASEAN, APEC and other forums in the near future.

The grant of membership to Afghanistan would bridge South Asia with resourceful Central Asia and there are possibilities of marginalized trade in energy between the two regions. The IPI or Iran Pakistan India gas pipeline project is the proof of Iran's goodwill and cooperation towards the region. Some analysis hints that the presence of mighty observers on its platform can minimize political tensions and scrutinize economic uplift. But others are of the view that SAARC could also face some consequences, for the observer themselves hold their own political agendas and economic or political goals that can generate a new power game in the region (Ahmad, p.16).

For deepening regional cooperation in the region, following steps could be beneficial.

1. SAARC secretariat must be empowered with executive and legislative powers to make it capable for regional development initiatives and executing political decisions.
2. Common negotiating position of SAARC countries should be formed not only on trade, economy and environment but also on security and monetary problems.
3. There is an urgent need to create SAARC Task Force on Migration of regional workers.
4. SAARC Social Charter should be effectively implemented; while facilitating the demands and recommendations of South Asian public capacity building of track III is essential.

5. For awareness and projection of regional cooperation in the member countries, the regional media has to play its role.

The SAARC Charter does not allow discussion on bilateral issues, while the time the SAARC was launched was a crucial time because the member countries were not fully committed to South Asian union. They were hesitant and held their own reservations about the future course of their relations within and beyond the region. For that reason, the SAARC Charter was kept limited to agreed areas of cooperation. The two general provisions which have been impeding the SAARC progress are; 'unanimity of decision' and the 'exclusion of contentious bilateral issues' from its deliberations.

Many scholars stress that the time is ripe to amend the SAARC charter. Both the provisions halting the progress if cannot be amended, at least be modified relating to discussion on contentious bilateral issues. Another scholar advised that the charter should be seriously reviewed keeping in view the experience of the past years to modify the 'shortcomings' and 'out dated' elements. He also suggested reviewing the following: (a) Principles of cooperation; (b) Inter governmental structure; (c) Financial agreements; and (d) General provisions concerning decision making.

The thesis of a writer held that though the bilateral and contentious issues were excluded from SAARC table of discussion yet the regular meetings of the heads of the member countries provide a formal and occasional opportunity to discuss bilateral and contentious matters outside (Lyon, p. 152).

### **c. Security and Stability**

The most intolerable challenge for South Asian resurgence is the regional insecurity. Commenting on Security architecture for South Asia, a commentator held that despite having many common aspects e.g. historical, cultural and religious, South Asia had remained one of the least integrated region of the world, either in terms of security cooperation or economic integration; the recent initiatives by SAARC to tackle regional security issues were encouraging yet there is a lack of security architecture similar to ASEAN or African Union vis-a-vis many of its deliberations do not qualify for application (Hafeez, 2012).

South Asia has become a very sensitive spot for world's peace and security since the events of September 11, 2001. According to analysts, the region has become strategically important area in the present world order because of some important factors (a) Al-Qaeda hide out in Afghanistan and its bordering areas with Pakistan; (b) the Talibanization in Pakistan and the suspected links of Pakistan based Taliban with Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan (c) the perceptions of Al-Qaeda access to the nuclear arsenal of Pakistan; (d) the imagination about the spread of the terrorist network bases to the Asian neighborhood which have already been established in some Arab and African countries.

Due to these factors, two important member countries of SAARC Afghanistan and Pakistan suffer from the most expensive war on terror. Mr. I.K Gujral says, "Terrorism speaks at its length in South Asia and the international community is aware that merely fighting terrorism or nuclear non-proliferation would not guarantee the international stability; the world community is sensible to involve this huge populace in important decisions regarding peace, security and development (Thakur & Wigen, 2004)."

Terrorism and nuclear possession are the most formidable challenges not only for the South Asia but also for the whole world. Strong measures should be taken to contain terrorism from spread in the region and in the outside world. Also, there is a continued arm race (nuclear arm race) between India and Pakistan which is negatively impacting all the neighborly countries for attaining the same capabilities. "South Asia must be brought into mainstream with global economy – and a peaceful, cooperative and dynamic South Asia is in the interests of international community (Thakur & Wiggen, 2004)."

Analysis of the ongoing violence and terrorism in South Asia make three categories to identify the terrorist or violent groups' motivations.

- (a) Nationalistic political movements
- (b) Religious extremist movements
- (c) Ethno-nationalistic or separatist movements

In the first category the most serious challenge often cited is Kashmir issue between India and Pakistan which has involved direct confrontation, use of force and belligerence. About the growing anxiety among the Pakistani public over the US droned in the 'Federally administered Tribal Areas' (FATA) of Pakistan some leading analysts has noted that "Afghanistan and the border areas of Pakistan would replace the still unresolved disputes between India and Pakistan—it may bring a resolution on Kashmir or confront the Pakistan's army to decide two fronts (Robin & Rashid, 2008)." The Nepalese Nationalistic struggles under the Maoist or communist party are for bringing equality, installing justice and eliminating caste system. The CPI-M or Maoist party of India is believed to be active in seventeen states of India out of twenty-eight; The type of nationalistic tendencies are also noted in Bangladesh, where the terrorist activities of leftist groups sometimes exceed than, or equal to that of Islamist.

Today mostly the Muslim communities are labeled with religious extremism and the most cited examples in South Asia are Afghanistan and Pakistan. The geographical area under the influence is Afghan-Pak border.

Religious extremism is not only confined to these two countries, echoes are heard almost throughout the region. In 2005, sixty-four district of Bangladesh were taken out by some 400 bomb blasts for which Jamatul Mujahideen was held responsible—violent religious militant groups who protested women rights reported to have cache and stockpiles of explosives materials. South Asia is not facing one kind of the type, in India the religious militancy of Rashtriya Swayamsevek Sangh (RSS) is working behind the exposure of Hindu state and their identity and some other associates of the group like Vishwa Hindu Parishad or VHP has been suspected of the decade long communal and religious extremism (BBC News, 2005).

The ethno-nationalistic separatist groups are seemingly active in almost all the suburbs of South Asia. They are so influential that even the metropolises are under their sway.

In Pakistan the provinces of Baluchistan (Quetta) and Sindh (Karachi) are taken over by such separatist groups, similarly the Bengals Chittagong Hills tracts and Indian Punjab and some Northeastern provinces are held by strong nationalistic separatists. The ethnic minorities have close affinities with their kinfolks in the neighbors, it is natural for one ethnic group to get support

of co-ethnics from the neighboring states that is noted in the approach of the states who blame each other for assistance to separatist groups on their soil.

Many scholars have drawn implications of these separatist trends for the whole region because these tendencies add to instability of the region and fuel the enmity among the neighbors which is very harmful for the successful existence of SAARC and its matching with the changing realities of regionalism in twenty first century.

A number of states in SAARC have extremist and terrorist organizations broadly subscribing to either Maoist, separatist or extremists religious ideology with cross-border links” – “terrorism further jeopardized the regional states’ sovereignty and territorial integrity and poses threat to sustained neighborly relations that could impact the evolution and effectiveness of SAARC.

## CONCLUSION

One cannot ignore the steps taken towards economic progress, cultural homogeneity, technical collaboration and social and scientific progress because all these steps provide a roadmap for further progress, neither can one criticize SAARC negatively for what it is today. Certainly, it is a hope of a better tomorrow for millions of South Asians! More aggressive steps are required in the approaching years for implementing all SAARC Action Plans, Strengthening of SAARC Secretariat, SAARC Bodies, and SAARC Regional Centers and quickening their operations. Moreover, the member states should increase their share to SAARC budget, these are crucial and important steps for SAARC to be beneficial for its largest populace.

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