

A Report on

Studying Impediments to Harmony in
South Asia Region

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Abstract

South Asia is home to about one-third of the world's population and is a region with religious, ethnic, cultural, lingual, historical and historical similarities as well as diversities. The region has been characterized by conflict and violence among the states or within the states. Being at a very geostrategic position at globe, South Asia region has been influenced by the major powers to fulfil their interest from the history to contemporary times.

Thus, this study is thorough research on the impediments to harmony in South Asia as a whole. The study visits the political impediments through different layers as a barrier for harmony in South Asia, Moreover, the work deals with the historical and geographical barriers to peace and stability in South Asia.

In the study, the "*harmony*" is referred to as peace, stability and development in the South Asian regions. Thus as a whole, the report gives an overview of the political, geographical, historical, histo-geographical and other impediments to harmony in South Asia.

Keywords: harmony, impediments, political, geographical, historical, South Asia

Work Plan

Weekly Work Plan for each week started from Monday to Friday and was as follows. The guidance was sought on email on a number of times. The intern communicated the progress of work done on each working day by email in a minimum of 25 words by 7.00 PM. There was a weekly discussion with the intern as per the schedule notified on email.

Week 1: Searching the available literature and statistics

Week 2: Studying natural barriers as impediments to harmony

Week 3: Studying political reasons restricting harmony

Week 4:

- Writing and submitting an article (up to 1000 words) giving insights into the natural barriers as impediments to harmony in South Asia region
- Writing and submitting an article (up to 1000 words) giving insights into the political reasons as impediments to harmony in South Asia region
- Writing and submitting an article (up to 1000 words) on the holistic impediments to harmony in the South Asia region
- Final report writing and its submission for the issue of the internship completion certificate

Introduction

South Asia, as a continent includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. It is habitat to more than 20% of the world's population and is well-known for its unlikely cultural diversity. The region's huge population, along with its speedily growing industrial economy, is placing swelling demands on its natural resource base. As culturally rich, 91 eco-cultural zones have been inhabited by 4,635 major communities, speaking more than 1,500 languages in India alone. Thousands of ethnic groups and sub-sects are regulated around the Hindu caste system, which also contributes to the extraordinary cultural diversity of South Asia that is symptomatic of the richness of the area as a whole (Ramakrishnan, et al., 2012).

Despite the national alterations, individual can find transnational commonalities in cultures, languages and religions, which assured the people together by the mutual pre-colonial and colonial history of the South Asian countries. There is an indiscernible way through which religious and cultural dimensions contribute to the peace in South Asia. The harmony in the region can unknot the exceptional patterns of common cultural practices in the region to stress the connection between cultures.

South Asian region is distinctive in the sense that its social, political and economic problems and concerns have atypical nature. Despite swift economic growth through South Asia, international and subnational conflicts are still prevalent in many parts of the sub-continent. In recent decades, half of the countries in South Asia have experienced subnational conflicts. The harmony and peace in South Asia are the aims of each nation and each individual.

In contrary, South Asia has been plagued in conflict and violence leading towards underdevelopment and poverty. To this, several elements are hindering South Asian harmony. The relations between the states in South Asia after the independence from the colonial rulers but has been characterized by common suspicion, unfriendly relations and open conflict (Razvi, 2008). Most of the impediments to the peace in South Asia can be related to political terms but the main cause of these conflicts are geographical, historical or cultural. As South Asia share a common history of colonialism, most conflicts date back to the time of colonial rule. Also, South Asia is home to several world's religions and culture, and the region is naturally diverse in ethnical expression, but the region can be characterized through the growing threat to its pluralist character in the form of resurgent religious nationalism (Saiya, 2019).

As a whole, the impediments to harmony in South Asia can be defined through the historical, cultural, geographical and political perspectives.

Political Impediments to Harmony in South Asia

To study the political impediments, the post-independence conflict experiences of nation-states is important and common issues such as the 'poverty-conflict interaction', the occurrence of 'youth unrest' and its significance to conflict, the process denoted to as 'criminalization of politics', 'ethnic-nationalist impediments to nation-building', and the ramified impact of 'external interventions' in international and sub-national conflicts of the region is equally significant (The Asia Foundation, 2017). In South Asia, the political reasons for the conflict and less cooperation can be identified as- Extra-regional (those involving a South Asian nation-state and states outside the region; inter-state (conflict between national entities of South Asia); and intra-state (conflict between different groups within each national entity and anti-state insurrections) (Tavares, 2008).

Regarding the extra-regional influence in the region, the regional powers have been more successful in securing their way than global powers at advancing their global agenda at the regional level. The crucial factor of extra-regional actors' participation in South Asia is expected to continue to be the regional security outline of local powers much more than that of extra-regional powers. For example, Pakistan joins US-led SEATO and CENTO to countervail India during the Cold War. While China's South Asia policy remains predominantly India-centric and security-centric with ups and downs in the Sino-Indian relations. From aiding populaces in Kashmir in the 1960s and insurgents in North-eastern India in the 1970s indicated the low-point of Cultural Revolution radicalization of China's foreign policy. China's neutrality during the Kargil War (1999) was the essence of Beijing's pro-India propensities. India's neighbors, especially Pakistan, continue to be an important pillar of China's South Asia policy, contemporary through BRI.

So theses like 'String of Pearls' and encirclement of India continue to be an essential part of the examination on China's South Asia policy, often increasing skepticism in their mutual perceptions and policies. But this growing influence of China in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region is affecting the regional harmony. As China's relation with India has not been smooth because of the border disputes and regional power politics. China's Belt and Road projects have been one of the major reasons for increasing the skirmishes between India and China. New Delhi is further worried about the geostrategic implications of BRI's flagship initiative, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is a collection of infrastructure projects crossing disputed territory between India and Pakistan. China's flagship project in the Gwadar Port is also one of the major reasons deteriorating India's relations with Pakistan and China. Like Pakistan, China expect Afghanistan's to support counter-terrorism operations to stop terrorism from spilling over into bordering Xinjiang province (Grossman, 2020).

India is also worried that BRI is to inviting other South Asian countries, thus opening the door to India's potential encirclement by countries participating in the project. When the government of Sri Lanka transferred operations of Hambantota port to a Chinese majority-held joint venture for 99 years, serious security implications concerned India and India's relations with Sri-Lanka (Grossman, 2020). This has created a skeptic overview of India towards Sri Lanka and induced tensions between the two states. The smaller South Asian states have upheld different stages of engagement with China, reaching from Bhutan, which does not have a formal diplomatic relations with China, to Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, which have the sturdiest economic and military ties, respectively. Regardless of China's arms transactions to some of the states in South Asia, the central role applied by India in South Asia and complications in the India-China relationship have guaranteed that military links of smaller South Asian states with China remain limited (Samaranayake, 2019). But these growing relations with South Asian states in military terms are certainly affecting the harmony of the region.

Moreover, China's influence in the recent Nepal-India border dispute has affected the historical and friendly relations between the two countries. The increasing infrastructural projects in Bangladesh with military cooperation have made India, the major regional power to have a skeptic look at China's involvement. China's relationship with the Maldives is near-exclusively concentrated on leveraging BRI to develop the Maldives as well as to increase China's influence to counter India. China preferred Maldivian President, Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom, who was defeated in elections in 2018, and the current leader, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, is more agreeable to India's wishes (Nayal, 2018).

In total, China's increasing influence in South Asia has been economically strategic. Through the huge investment in South Asia through BRI, China wishes to maintain the regional influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean for China's economic prosperity and security. Through this increasing influence, China has been degrading the relations of India with other South Asian states and increasing the rivalry between states. Thus, growing China's influence is one of the major factors of impediments for harmony in South Asia.

Chinese interests in South Asia is far beyond simply upholding friendly relations in the region. Reasonably, China is unhappy at the LAC with India and is trying to recover the situation to its taste. Beyond India, China further practices its long-standing and profound relationship with Pakistan to protect itself from terrorism and to create a strategic position in a future Afghanistan (Grossman, 2020). Additionally, Beijing leverages BRI in nearly every country (except India), possibly with geostrategic implications, particularly at ports throughout the Indian Ocean. Going forward, all South Asian states should be mindful of what exactly Beijing is endeavoring to achieve in their region, and the probable long-term significances (Samaranayake, 2019).

For the USA, the vital American objective in South Asia has been to avert India and Pakistan from acquiring nuclear weapons, though this policy was intensely defeated in May 1998, when each exploded several nuclear devices. USA's regional engagement revolves around

in South Asia regarding the spread of nuclear weapons, the India-Pakistan conflict, India's emerging stature as a major power, and the dilemma of coping with a potentially chaotic Pakistan (Cohen, 2017). Also, Afghanistan provides a strategic aim for the US in South Asia. The fight against terrorism, especially after the 9/11 attacks, has led the USA to intervene in the South Asian Politics especially Afghanistan. After the end of the cold war, the US is intended to uphold its impact in South Asia and the Indian Ocean for strategic motives. The strategic coalition, QUAD, is designed due to a strategic conjunction among the states, mainly to pawn growing Chinese influence and power in the region. This has led to an implicit "Maritime Cold War" in South Asia (Hussain, Mustafa, Khan, & Azhar, 2018).

EU as an extra-regional actor in the region can be identified through the region's economic importance, increasing terrorism and violence, religious politics, promotion of regional integration and democracy. Through this aim, the EU in several instances has intervened in the state-level policies to influence the peace and harmony in the South Asian states (Bhargava & Reed, 2009). Likewise, the Russian influence in the region can be explained from the Indo-Soviet relations during the cold war. Pakistan's participation in the Baghdad Pact (later CENTO) in 1955 and, the South East Asian Trade Organization (SEATO) in 1954 developed a great concern for both India and the USSR. Russia sees Pakistan as an important partner in the fight against extremist violence, organized crime and drug trafficking, however, Moscow still has its serious concerns regarding Pakistan's counter-terrorism operations. Similarly, Russia's engagement in Afghanistan can be seen by its interest in Central Asia. Russia's expanded influence in Afghanistan re-emerge from its Soviet-era debacle in Afghanistan but now Moscow's relationship with Kabul has been experiencing some serious blowbacks owing to the negotiations with the Taliban since the legitimate Afghan government feels virtually bypassed and not involved in the pursuit of peace (Malek, 2020).

Another, political impediments to harmony in South Asia is inter-state conflict. In 1947, India and Pakistan were born to remain in conflict (Wolpert, 2011) and those calculations have turned into reality. After the partition of British India in 1947, the two states have fought three wars (1947–49, 1965 and 1971), one limited war over Kargil (1999), faced a series of war-like situations (1987, 1990 and 2002) and remain in constant tension. Moreover inter-state conflicts, the partition also produced intrastate strains because many distressed groups, which expected or even vocally call for sovereignty in 1947, were enforced to be a part of either India or Pakistan (Ranjan, 2016).

The social, political and economic development of South Asia has been seriously hindered by internal, or intra-state conflicts. It is also host to intensely rooted ethnic resentment, communal violence and many wars, both inter- and intra-state. Some conflicts, such as in Kashmir and Sri Lanka, are well studied, but many others obtain minimal response. During the period 1989 to 2000, there were conflicts in all South Asian countries except Bhutan and Maldives. For example, Bangladesh (Chittagong Hill Tracts) up to 1992; India (Kashmir) ongoing, India (Manipur) ongoing, India (Nagaland) up to 1997, India (Tripura) ongoing, India

(Jharkhand) only in 1993, India-Kashmir-Pakistan ongoing; Nepal (Maoists) (2006); Pakistan 1995 and 1996; and Sri Lanka: Civil War (2009) (Dahal, Gazdar, Keethaponcalan, & Murthy, 2010). The separatist groups inside the countries in South Asia have caused internal conflict in the states of South Asia.

To elaborate another political impediment to harmony in South Asia, the failure of SAARC would be the relevant one. Regionalism in SAARC was possible through the establishment of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985 but has been unable to achieve its objects due to several reasons. It has not been able to upsurge trade between the member states regardless of the declaration of the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA). SAARC has been incapable to implement its plans for regional welfare separating much of the population in hostile socioeconomic conditions. The variety of internal issues such as internal threat, Indo-Pak inertia, focus on socioeconomic development only and lack of connectivity led towards the failure of SAARC (Falak, 2017).

The incapacity of SAARC to deliver a stage for conflict resolution has developed to be its greatest weakness. The fiasco of SAARC's failure has headed to the absence of trust, political tensions and unjustified distribution of costs and benefits. Additionally, this has steered to the failure of domestic institutional organizations, lack of government capability, domestic backing, and predilections of political and societal actors in the direction of regional cooperation. This has led towards a low-political conflict between the states in the region and has impeded harmony in South Asia (Muzaffar, Jathol, & Yaseen, 2017). A blurred understanding of multilateralism, rise in nationalism triggered by historic bilateral relations, and Pakistan's isolation (whether self-inflicted or regionally imposed), all contribute to the obstacles of collective regional mobility in South Asia (Sharma, 2017). Hence, these failures for regional cooperation, mobility, and stability have inflicted impediments for harmony in South Asia.

Also, one of the political impediments to harmony in South Asia is because of the high influence of the military in politics and economy of Pakistan. After 1958, the army became a key political force and increasingly influenced politics. Its infiltration into central political decision-making became rooted in the 1980s, while the greatest infiltration into the economy and society took place in the 1990s, and has not been overturned to date. The predominance of the military can be seen as part and parcel of predatory politics and a patronage system that characterizes all dominant classes in Pakistan (Giunchi, 2014).

The title role of the national security pattern in extenuating the military's strong point and its tentacular effect in society also highlights to the necessity for a reconciliation with Indian threat in precise to Afghanistan as well in South Asia, primarily through a solution of the Kashmir issue and border dispute with Afghanistan, while South Asia decision-makers should be mindful of the consequences for civilian institutions and democratic processes of their strategic imperatives and of the military aid that is provided to further them (Shah, 2017). Hence, the influence of the military in Pakistan's politics have severely affected the harmony of South Asia as well.

Similarly, the Taliban Issue has been a major political impediment for harmony in South Asia. The signing of the Doha Agreement between the Afghan Taliban and the USA in February 2020 indicated success for Pakistan, which had reinforced and worked towards providing diplomatic resolution to the Afghan War for years. Nevertheless, Pakistan-Taliban relations have their confines, and it remains uncertain. First, while the Taliban did not bring up the Durand line subject at the negotiating tabletop, their opinions are not predominantly dissimilar from other Pashtuns in Afghanistan (Batool, 2020). Even if the Taliban remains welcoming to Pakistan, their central ideology counterpoises the modest Islamic philosophy that Pakistan ventures outward, as the Taliban regime has in the past spread sectarianism, religious terrorism, militancy, and drug addiction in Pakistan. Thus, continuing the conflict in the area and delaying the harmony. The rise of new Afghanistan will change the regional geopolitical situation. Pakistan-Taliban ties have their limitations, and it remains unclear. India's footsteps are far behindhand to face the imminent security threat and must look for way out negotiations with the Taliban. Bangladesh as a Muslim majority state is expected to have an impact on the Taliban's victory. Sri Lanka had suffered a rise of Islamic fundamentalism after the atrocities committed by the Buddhist. This transports a very complex and entwined condition ahead concerning regional politics and harmony (Tourangbam & Dwivedi, 2020).

In this way, the political ongoing politics in South Asia are impediments to harmony and peace in South Asia.

Historical Impediments to Harmony in South Asia

Two major roots of South Asian conflicts have been their colonial inheritances and turbulent developments of post-independence nation-state building. Three sets of colonial heritages having significant conflict potential were:

- The creation of unnatural and absurd state systems,
- Unresolved boundaries of these states and,
- Undefined status of a diversity of its ethnic and religious minorities and social groups.

However, the partition of British-India generated an unnatural state of Pakistan as a two-piece unit, in east and west, separated by a huge chunk of Indian Territory. This irrationality was remedied only 23 years after partition and as a result of a fierce regional conflict when Bangladesh emerged as a separate sovereign, independent nation. The colonial mindset to keep India and Pakistan divided into many other forms as well.

One of the historical barriers in South Asia for harmony is the "*Treaties*". The colonial inheritance of unsettled borders also continues to keep South Asian associations conflict-prone. Two of the longest imperial boundaries of British India left unsettled were with Afghanistan (Durand Line) and China (McMahon Line). The territorial disagreements and the water conflicts

in South Asia are the consequences of the historical treaties signed by the colonial masters on behalf of them.

The recent territorial clash between Nepal and India also dates back to the *Sugauli Treaty* signed between Nepal and East India Company in 1816. The treaty delineates the boundary between two states to be Mahakali River but doesn't categorize the origin of the river, which have carried the dispute between the two neighborly states (Paudyal, 2015). Also, the border dispute between Pakistan and Afghanistan dates back to the Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 1919 where Durand Line goes through Pakistan and Afghanistan separating ethnic Pashtuns (Brasseur, 2011).

A major conflict in South Asia is between India and Pakistan. The conflict dates back from 1949 after the independence of both states. The disputes in the Jammu and Kashmir region, Siachen Glacier, Saltoro Ridge, Sir Creek and Ladakh are the historical disputes between the two countries (A.Kaw, 2015). Moreover, the water-sharing treaties between Nepal, India and Bangladesh are the main historical reasons still affecting the whole region's harmony at least once in a year, where treaties were signed by the states for mutual benefits but lack of understanding and proper implementation of the provisions of the treaties have led towards the conflict between the states (Malhotra, 2010).

The friendship treaties or the treaties for trade and commerce, though for the mutual benefit and harmony between the states have been considered the main reasons for the conflicts and disputes among the states because of the unequal nature of the treaties. Hence, the NO-revision of the past concluded treaties are the main causes of the disputes between the states.

The administrative system in most of the South Asian states is the bequest of the colonial era. Bureaucratic models were embraced in South Asia without putting them into a test of the circumstantial realities and historical qualifications (Haque, 1997). The qualities that can be credited to the bureaucracy of the British are- centralization, rigidity, elitism, secrecy was very much a part of the post-colonial states in South Asia. The colonial rule had marginalized politics in the past and continually dejected the checks and balance over the bureaucracy by the political institutions. The subordination of the political tool and the subsequent political vacuum gave scope to the civil and military bureaucracy. This gave rise to the new powerful 'bureaucratic-military oligarchy' in South Asia (Alavi, 1972).

Before the colonial history of South Asia, the vast landmass of South Asia was ruled by the Mughals. The notion of decline deals with the Mughal state as a state of perfection, efflorescence, harmony, and unity, and to corruption, moral degradation, and loss of ethical standards, philosophies, and customs (Pardesi, 2019). The 6th ruler of the Mughal Empire, Aurangzeb Alamgir, reigned for nearly half century, from 1658 until 1707, the last great regal power in India before British colonialism. According to many, he destroyed India politically, socially and culturally. He is viewed as a person who destroyed culture, indifferent to the astonishing sculptures of South Asia, and even antagonistic to them. Over his nearly half century

of his reign, Aurangzeb possibly demolished a total of a few dozen Hindu temples. Today and the religious conflict or identity politics of religion in South Asia can also be drawn to the Mughal reign, an era in which a Muslim minority reigned over a Hindu majority in South Asia, humiliates Hindu nationalists (Faruqui, 2013).

This history of the Later Mughals permits sympathizing the intrinsic illogicalities that succeeded under the Mughal Empire, which eventually led to the advent of British colonial rule in India, and well along became the mark of historical barrier that has swollen up and dissociated the whole South Asian harmony today (Sohoni, 2016).

Geographical Impediments to harmony in South Asia

Geography of South Asia as a whole and South Asian states are the impediments to harmony and peace in South Asia. The three landlocked states of South Asia, namely Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal, are a product of the colonial era when these territories on the periphery of British India served as buffer zones. Landlocked states have been historically dependent on coastal neighbors for crucial transit facilities that have impacted their economic development. Landlockedness has also shaped substantial political impediments, characterized as the interaction between landlocked states in South Asia and their coastal neighbors that echoes an asymmetric political relationship determined by pre-colonial provisions and enduring political supremacy on the part of coastal powers. This is predominantly noticeable in the case of Nepal's relations with India and Afghanistan's with Pakistan (Bhatnagar & Ahmed, 2020).

Similarly, island economies of Sri Lanka and the Maldives, are separated by 1,035 kilometers of Indian Ocean. Similarly, Sri Lanka, a large tropical island off India's southeast coast, and the other is the Republic of Maldives, an archipelago off the southwest coast of India are also geographically isolated states. The Maldives is most affected by climate change and the rise of the sea level. The Maldives encompasses nearly 1,200 islands that hardly rise beyond sea level; the highest altitude is simply seven feet and seven inches. Only about two hundred islands in the Maldives are populated. The intra-regional trade of Maldives and Sri Lanka are the lowest regarding other states (Sinha & Sareen, 2020).

The sub-continent of South Asia was shaped by the Indian Plate colliding with the Eurasian Plate. Damaging earthquakes and shocks are recurrent in this seismically vigorous realm causing life and property of hundreds. The Indus River, the Ganges River, the Brahmaputra River are the largest rivers in India and the other rivers such as Gandaki, Koshi, and Kali receives seasonal reversal of winds called the monsoon arrives every year, there is heavy flooding and its effect on the infrastructure of the region is disastrous. Every year hundreds of people lose their lives and property in several parts of India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan, and the worst-hit places are along the coast of the Bay of Bengal. The extensive Thar Desert in western India and parts of Pakistan, conversely, do not receive monsoon rains. Much of

southwest Pakistan, a region called Baluchistan, is dry, with desert conditions, this brings a greater problem for farmers and agriculture production of the states (Kafle, 2017).

Moreover, the mountains on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan extend through Kashmir and then meet up with the high ranges of the Himalayas. The Himalayas have created a natural barrier between India and China, with the Nepal and Bhutan acting as buffer states with Tibet. This has blocked the trade between the states.

In this way, geographical landscapes of South Asia have been a barrier for development and the natural disasters every year have claimed lives and property. In the long run, there are also the impediments of harmony in South Asia.

Histo-Geographical Impediments to Harmony in South Asia

Water resources in South Asia have been straightly connected to national sovereignty and security for many reasons. The growing demand for water due to overpopulation, rapid urbanization and scarcity of the resource has increased the intensity of the conflict.

Teesta river basin, one of the most underdeveloped areas of South Asia and deals with numerous concerns covering areas of economy, governance, politics, environment, security and its riverine ecosystem. The basin is identified for the lack of an agreement between India and Bangladesh over its waters sharing. There are added internal disputes and significant matters connected to the bilateral relations between the two states.

Before the partition in 1947, the Teesta River streamed as a single unit through the then princely state of Sikkim and the province of Bengal under British India, and there was a dispute of trans-boundary governance and sharing. During the partition, the All India Muslim League come out with a dispute by demanding for Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts to be merged in East Pakistan on the basis that they were the catchment areas of the Teesta River. The motivation was that with the entire middle and lower Teesta basin lying in East Pakistan, the state would prosper with the position to use it for the old and future hydropower projects. However, due to their non-Muslim composition, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri were handed over to India (Parry, 2020).

After the partition, Sikkim unrelentingly became a protectorate of India until its merger in 1975. During the 1950s and 1960s, Indian and East Pakistani executives began talks over the damming and sharing of Teesta. At the same time, India and Pakistan were negotiating agreements on the Ganga and Indus rivers due to which the Teesta issue took a backseat (Parry, 2020). After signing the Indus Water Treaty in 1960, the two countries turned their focus on negotiations on the Ganga River, and the Teesta issue was left. East Pakistan outlined a plan to build a barrage on their side of the Teesta, which India opposed. Signifying 'other rivers' for

fulfilling India's irrigation and other needs, East Pakistan decided to go ahead with the plan, though, it was in 1990 that a barrage was completed on the Teesta in what was now Bangladesh.

The dispute is that, as a lower riparian state, Bangladesh is reliant on India, the upper riparian, for maintaining minimum flows in the Teesta River. India has been one-sidedly building a series of barrages up north which have decreased the river's flows during times of drought, significantly affecting the livelihoods of thousands of farmers, fishermen and boatmen in Bangladesh. Contrariwise, in the rainy season, Indian dams on the Teesta discharge excess water, causing heavy floods and again disrupting thousands of livelihoods in Bangladesh. This has caused a scenario of conflict between India and Bangladesh (Sinha, 2016).

Similar to that of Teesta River between India and Bangladesh, Nepal and India also share the same fate. In the monsoon season, most of the Bihar and Southern plains of Nepal get affected due to the floods. At the official level, water cooperation between Nepal and India does not have a pleasant history. There have been treaties signed on major rivers like Koshi, Gandaki, Karnali or Mahakali, fundamentally for great hydroelectric and irrigation ventures by constructing dams or for barrages. No project but the Koshi barrage has been completed so far. Smaller rivers have been ignored (Ranjan, 2016). Water sharing arrangements with India and political relationship has influenced each other. Nepal alleges India for exploiting its water resources for their benefit. This is a reason why most of their bilateral water-sharing treaties have been either re-negotiated or not been started or engaged a lot of time to come into result.

Another histo-geographical conflict in South Asia is the Indus river conflict between India and Pakistan. During the partition in 1947 and the formation of the two states, border lines were drawn following what was defined as the "Indus watershed". The position of the lines indicated that India extended control of upstream barrages, which controlled water flow into Pakistan. As the boundary amongst India and Pakistan cut across many of the river's branches, an upstream-downstream power structure arose, which has been the cause of strains between the two states, mainly in response to dam projects in Indian territory (Mirza, 2016).

Reservations of future water shortages for the reason that of the construction of dams are generating diplomatic rigidities between India and Pakistan. Troublesome political narratives in both India and Pakistan are usually seen to upsurge the probability of conflict. In India, a narrative of Pakistani-affiliated Islamic terror cells attacking civilians has been used to validate backing away from diplomacy and even threatening to reduce Pakistan's water supply (ECC Platform Library).

Water issues in the Indus Basin are mostly regulated through the Indus Waters Treaty. But observers from both sides have criticized the treaty as outdated and for being an obstruction to the effective exploitation of the Indus River's resources, as it limits possibilities for storage. Thus, this has increased the conflict between the two states ultimately affecting the whole region.

Addition to the geographical impediments, China-Bhutan recent dispute including the Wildlife Sanctuary has fueled the conflict. China has positioned its claim on Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary, which covers an area of 650 square km and lies in Bhutan's eastern district of Trashigang. Though Thimpu has rejected China's claim mentioning the land of the sanctuary as an integral part of Bhutan. As at Doklam, it is likely to be India and China rather than Beijing and Bhutan that could end up butting heads over the Sakteng area (Ramachandran, 2020).

Other Impediments to Harmony in South Asia

Likewise, migration and the refugee crisis are one of the major factors for impediments for harmony in South Asia. South Asia is home to approximately three million refugees and their long-term presence brings enormous challenges. South Asia's history of colonialism, little economic growth, and intra-and interstate skirmishes have backed to the huge refugee movement and the lack of capability to address the problem (Ahmed, 2019). Rohingya crisis in the present is one of the major problems for Bangladesh and India, whereas, in the past, the intra-state conflicts such as the civil war in Sri Lanka induced lots of refugee to India, and similarly Bhutanese refugee to Nepal. This has been a serious problem between the states and inside the state because of decreasing employment rate and increasing crimes because of the high refugee influx.

Also, porous borders and cultural, lingual and religious homogeneity have led to illegal migration of criminals, terrorists and others. This has created a network of terrorism and trafficking routes inside South Asia (Ahmed, 2019). Hence, the issue of illegal migration is one of the top-most impediments for harmony in South Asia.

Sandwiched between the "Golden Triangle" and "Golden Crescent", the main global producers of psychotropic drugs, the South Asian region is the major transit route for psychotropic drugs. The trafficking of heroin that is smuggled to western countries, added to locally produced drugs like cannabis and opium are the key drugs in the states of the region. The strong connection between the terrorist organizations, drug-traffickers and money launderers in South Asia has deep-rooted this threat. Porous borders between the countries and negligent plus corrupt surveillance and monitoring mechanisms have worsened the trafficking and abuse of drugs in the belt extending from Southeast Asia to Central Asia. Most of the states in the region are party to one or the other of the UN Conventions on drug trafficking, but their provisions are not integrated into the domestic legal structure. Therefore, the legal provisions applicable in these states are not adequate to deal with the complexities of this trade (Manoharan, 2013). This has become a major obstacle and root of the cause of violence and conflict in South Asia.

Likewise, religion and faith are vital to the lives of ordinary people in South Asia. The tumultuous history of the societies that composes the South Asian region confirms the fundamental role that religion and particularly its politics has played in shaping ideas of nation,

state and citizenship. Policies and politics, predominantly concerning minorities in one state, opt to have its effects across borders. If Hindu minorities are attacked in Bangladesh or Pakistan, this tends to have impacts in India. So, the minorities in one country are connected by ethnicity or religion to neighboring states. This often hurts the situation of minorities in these states (Shaikh, 2012).

This also relates to the decade long civil war in Sri Lanka. The Tamil-Sinhalese politics in Sri Lanka impacts the Sri Lankan policy towards India and India's towards Sri Lanka. India-Pakistan relations affect Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Gujarat, the India-Nepal relations will have its effect on Bihar, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Sikkim, and West Bengal of India and Terai region of Nepal (Robinson, 2017). Also, India-China relations will invade upon Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Jammu and Kashmir, and India-Bangladesh relations will have its fallout on West Bengal, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Assam. Moreover, India-Bhutan relations affect West Bengal, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, and Assam, India-Sri Lanka relations will have its consequences on Tamil Nadu, and India-Maldives relations will spill over to the Minicoy islands (Suryanarayan, 2013).

Thus, the cultural and ideological homogeneity in South Asian region is one of the reasons that certainly have brought out the cooperation, but the effect of minorities in one state significantly affects the harmony of the other leading towards disturbing in harmony in the region.

Conclusion

South Asia, despite common historical, cultural, religious, and ethnic commonalities, people-to-people interaction among regional states is minimal, with least sense of belongingness of being South Asians (Snedden, 2016). The susceptibility to the ethnic, sectarian, religious conflicts and incessant cross border terrorism is, due to the inadequate necessities or facilities.

The lack of harmony, peace and cooperation in South Asia can be examined through the political, geographical, historical and cultural lenses. Most of the conflicts in the region have the root cause leading towards these areas. The political impediments to harmony in the region can be analyzed through the influence and interest of extra-regional in the region. The inter-state conflicts and intra-state or internal conflict within the state. Moreover, the failure of SAARC, the influence of Pakistani Military in the politics and economy of the state and Taliban issue are some of the barriers to the peace in the region.

The historical impediments can be traced back to the colonial past and its inheritances of several legacies like treaties and bureaucracy, and many others. The hostile activities of the Later Mughals are also one of the impediments for South Asia. The geographical barriers include the natural condition and states of the resources. The natural disaster in South Asia is not an individual problem of a state, but it is the mutual or communal problem, so while solving these

problems require a common solution. But these have been a reason for conflict among the states. For example, the water sharing among the states in the region has been a big source of problem barricading the harmony in South Asia. Likewise, other impediments include the migration and refugee crisis, and the drug trafficking problem in the region.

In conclusion, harmony and peace in the region are possible. Peace and harmony in South Asia cannot be achieved unless there is peace between India and Pakistan, the two regional and nuclear power. Peace and stability are prerequisites for development, and thus requires cooperation and solidarity through a regional organization like SAARC. Therefore, armed conflict or a war between the states or within the states would have a detrimental impact on the development of the whole South Asian region. Instead of upping the ante, all the states should ease tensions between them and start discussions at the earliest to end the current stalemate and work toward building a lasting peace for the benefit of not only themselves but the region and the world in general.



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Appendix

Article I: *Natural/Geographical Impediments for Harmony in South Asia*

The South Asian geography extends from the southern part of the Indian Ocean, and the main boundaries of South Asia are the Indian Ocean, the Himalayas and Iran. The Arabian Sea borders Pakistan and India to west, and the Bay of Bengal borders India and Bangladesh to the east, and the western boundary is the desert where Afghanistan shares a border with Iran. The countries of South Asia include Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, Maldives and Afghanistan.

Through history, South Asia has been characterized by violent conflicts. The peace and harmony in South Asia is the aim and goal of the states in the region, but different impediments have been barricading the South Asian harmony. One of the obstacles of the South Asian harmony has been the diverse geography within and the strategically located geographic location of themselves in the globe.

One of the parameters of the harmony is development, and the underdevelopment of South Asia is among the reasons for the conflict within the region. Regarding this, there are three landlocked states in South Asia- Nepal, Bhutan and Afghanistan. One of the impediments for development is caused by the landlocked geography. The trade and the other economic activities are blocked because of the landlocked nature. The geographic, economic, and social factors have contributed to the internal violence in Nepal and Afghanistan. Similarly, Sri Lanka, a large tropical island off India's southeast coast, and the other is the Republic of Maldives, an archipelago off the southwest coast of India are also geographically isolated states. The Maldives is most affected by climate change and the rise of the sea level (Bhatnagar & Ahmed, 2020).

Moreover, most of the South Asian continent is made from the land in the original Indian Plate. Pressure from tectonic action against the plates causes the Himalayas to rise in elevation by as much as one to five millimetres per year. Destructive earthquakes and tremors are frequent in this seismically active realm, which has cost lives and property in the region in the past years. As a natural impediment to development, it has also affected South Asian harmony. The major rivers of South Asia and the birthplace of the human civilizations such as the Indus, the Ganges, the Brahmaputra River, and other rivers such as the Kali, Gandaki and Koshi gets recurrent reversal of winds called the monsoon which arrives every year, and there is heavy flooding and its effect on the infrastructure of the region is disastrous. Every year hundreds of people die in the Northern and Northeast region of India, Southern Plains of Nepal, and Bhutan. The worst-hit places are along the coast of the Bay of Bengal, such as in Bangladesh which affects Bangladesh's economy and infrastructure (Kafle, 2017).

The extensive Thar Desert in western India and some parts of Pakistan, conversely, does not receive monsoon rains. Much of southwest Pakistan, a region named Baluchistan, is waterless, with desert conditions. This makes the worst conditions for farmers and the economy of the South Asian states.

The mountains on the boundary between Pakistan and Afghanistan spread through Kashmir and then meet up with the high ranges of the Himalayas. The Himalayas make a natural barrier between India and China, with Nepal and Bhutan pro tem as buffer states with Tibet. Such natural barricades are the hindrances for trade among the states. Also, the topography of the South Asian states has positioned them in a geostrategic location. Nepal, as a landlocked state, is located geo-strategically between the two Asian giants, India and China. Similarly, Afghanistan faced an upsetting destiny because of its geostrategic location connecting Central Asia, South Asia and the Middle East (Bhatnagar & Ahmed, 2020). Equally, Sri Lanka as an island state enjoys the geostrategic location, owing to its deep harbors and trade-friendly location. Bangladesh is also one of the major and important states in the Bay of Bengal. As a result of these geo-strategically important locations, the states face a tremendous amount of interference and clash of interest of the major powers from all around the world (Bhatnagar & Ahmed, 2020).

One of the major geographical reason for conflict in South Asia is water resources and their sharing. Water resources in South Asia have been straightly connected to national sovereignty and security for many reasons. The growing demand for water due to overpopulation, rapid urbanization and scarcity of the resource has increased the intensity of the conflict. The Teesta basin which is identified for the lack of an agreement between India and Bangladesh over its waters sharing have added internal disputes and significant matters connected to the bilateral relations between the two states (Malhotra, 2010).

Similarly, another histo-geographical conflict in South Asia is the Indus river conflict between India and Pakistan. Though the water issue is regulated through the Indus Water Treaty, it has been criticized for being outdated. Thus, this has increased the conflict between the two states ultimately affecting the whole region. Also, the Koshi Treaty and Gandak Treaty between India and Nepal for the sharing of the waters between the states have been controversial so that there has been sour relation between the two friendly states (ECC Platform Library).

Thus, the geography of South Asia has highly impacted the harmony, cooperation and comprehensiveness in the region through the conflict in the interest among the states because of the natural resources, or due to natural barriers and lack of cooperation in natural resources sharing. In conclusion, more than purely geographical or natural impediments, the geography has created a diverse range of culture, history religion and population which are also the impediments for cooperation in South Asia.

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Article II - Political Impediments for Harmony in South Asia

Peace, harmony and development in South Asia have been hindered by the conflict and violence between the states or within the states. The main reasons for the conflict and violence are the political causes, or historical, cultural and geographical conflicts turned political. In South Asia a wide-ranging group of violent inter-group hostilities can be recognized- extra-regional (those involving a South Asian nation-state and states outside the region; Inter-state (struggle between national entities of South Asia; and Intra-state (fight between different groups within each national entity and anti-state insurrections) (Snedden, 2016).

To discuss the political impediments, the study of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, after the post-independence conflict experiences of these nation-states is important and common issues such as the 'poverty-conflict interaction', the occurrence of 'youth unrest' and its significance to conflict, the process denoted to as 'criminalization of politics', 'ethnic-nationalist impediments to nation-building', and the ramified impact of 'external interventions' in international and sub-national conflicts of the region is equally significant (Joshi, 2013).

The failure of SAARC especially due to the political reasons, to promote cooperation and solidarity among the South Asian states is one of the key reasons for impediments in South Asia. The national interest over the regional interest by the states have put regionalism's effort in South Asia to promote harmony. The sub-regional organizations and even their failure to keep regionalism intact in South Asia has moved the South Asian harmony away from the people (Muzaffar, Jathol, & Yaseen, 2017). A blurred understanding of multilateralism, rise in nationalism triggered by historic bilateral relations, and Pakistan's isolation (whether self-inflicted or regionally imposed), all contribute to the obstacles of collective regional mobility in South Asia (Chan, 2017).

Likewise, migration and the refugee crisis are one of the major factors for impediments for harmony in South Asia. South Asia's antiquity of colonialism, little economic growth, and intra-and interstate skirmishes have contributed to the huge refugee movement and the lack of capability to address the problem. The influx of Rohingya refugees to Bangladesh and India, the intra-state conflicts such as the civil war in Sri Lanka induced lots of Tamil refugees to India, and similarly, Bhutanese refugee to Nepal is the major inter-state political problems in South Asia (Ahmed, 2019).

Also, porous borders and cultural, lingual and religious homogeneity have led to illegal migration of criminals, terrorists and others. This has created a network of terrorism and trafficking routes inside South Asia. Sandwiched between the "Golden Triangle" and "Golden Crescent", the main global producers of psychotropic drugs, the South Asian region is the major transit route for psychotropic drugs (Dahal, Gazdar, Keethaponcalan, & Murthy, 2010).

In South Asia, because of the cultural, religious and political homogeneity, policies and politics, predominantly concerning minorities in one state, opt to have its effects across borders. If Hindu minorities are attacked in Bangladesh or Pakistan, this tends to have impacts in India. So, the minorities in one country are connected by ethnicity or religion to neighbouring states.

The Tamil-Sinhalese politics in Sri Lanka impacts the Sri Lankan policy towards India and India's towards Sri Lanka. India-Pakistan relations affect Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Gujarat, the India-Nepal relations will have its effect on Bihar, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Sikkim, and West Bengal of India and Terai region of Nepal (Cohen, 2017).

Moreover, the military influence in the Pakistani politic is one of the major political barriers for harmony in South Asia. Their role in Pakistan's politics and economy justifies Pakistan's rapprochement with Indian threat in particular and points to Afghanistan as well (Giunchi, 2014). The Taliban Issue has been a major political impediment for harmony in South Asia. In February 2020, USA and Afghan Taliban signed an agreement in Doha which guaranteed the Taliban's assurance of halting future attacks and the US to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. The appearance of new Afghanistan will change the regional geopolitical scenario. Pakistan-Taliban ties have their limitations, and it remains unclear. India's footsteps are far behindhand to face the imminent security peril and must look for backdoor discussions with the Taliban. Bangladesh as a Muslim majority state is expected to have an impact on the Taliban's victory. Sri Lanka had writhed a rise of Islamic fundamentalism subsequently after the mayhems committed by the Buddhist. This brings a very complex and entangled situation ahead regarding regional politics and harmony (Batool, 2020).

Importantly, another major political impediments for harmony is the influence of the extra-regional actor. Because of the strategic location of South Asia, the influence of the extra-regional actors has been prominent in the region to promote foreign interest. China, through BRI, is increasing its influence in Bay of Bengal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and other small South Asian states. China's "string of pearls" is one of the impediments regarding the encirclement of India and South Asia as a whole (Grossman, 2020). The USA, another actor in the region has a greater influence. The recent India-US partnership can bring a different scenario in the regional power politics and politics of the extra-regional actors. Japan is another extra-regional actor in the region with a heavy amount of infrastructural investments to counter the Chinese influence. The QUAD partnership the Indian Ocean Region can be taken as the extra-regional actors' active activities in the region. Also, Russia during the Cold War has had an interest in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region (Hussain, Mustafa, Khan, & Azhar, 2018).

In this way, the political impediments to harmony in South Asia can be described through the extra-regional, inter-state and intra-states conflicts.

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THE RISE

Article III - Holistic Impediments for harmony in South Asia

International relations in South Asia, since the achievement of independence by some of the South Asian states, have been characterized by common suspicion, unfriendly relations and, at times, open conflict (Razvi, 2008). The reasons for conflict in South Asia can be characterized by acute security lenses. Though most of the reasons may end up being political, the root causes for the conflict are geographical, historical or cultural. South Asia share a common history of colonialism which have inflicted a root for interstate conflict in the region. As a home to a number of the world's religions and culture, and naturally diverse in ethnical expression, but also witnessing a growing threat to its pluralist character in the form of resurgent religious nationalism, the South Asian region provides a significant location to examine the relationship between pluralism and peace (Saiya, 2019).

Thus, as a whole, impediments to harmony in South Asia can be defined through the historical, cultural, geographical and political lenses.

In South Asia, the political reasons for the conflict and less cooperation can be identified as- Extra-regional (those involving a South Asian nation-state and states outside the region; Inter-state (conflict between national entities of South Asia); and Intra-state (conflict between different groups within each national entity and anti-state insurrections) (Tavares, 2008). The failure of regionalism and sub-regionalism in the region is the political impediments that have affected regional cooperation and solidarity. A blurred understanding of multilateralism, rise in nationalism triggered by historic bilateral relations, and Pakistan's isolation (whether self-inflicted or regionally imposed), all contribute to the obstacles of collective regional mobility in South Asia (Chan, 2017).

Importantly, major political impediments for harmony is the influence of the extra-regional actors. The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the Bay of Bengal are the areas of South Asia that have a significant influence of the major powers such as China, USA, Japan, Russia, EU and others. It is a potential area of conflict for the region. Also, the geostrategic location of the South Asian states makes them vulnerable to foreign influence in the region. China through BRI has been investing in Pakistan and other small states of South Asia, the USA through Indo-Pacific strategy and Russian stakes in South Asia may be subordinate to interests in neighboring regions, but not null (Paukert, 2003).

Some of the historical impediments, it can be traced back to the colonialism. The India-Pakistan rivalry, the Bangladesh-Pakistan cold relations, Pakistan-Afghanistan difficult relations and Nepal-India fluctuating relations can be drawn back to colonialism. The regional security complex was formed based on a unique civilization, after the end of British colonial raj. The partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 is itself a root and main cause of conflict in the region, whereas the separation of Bangladesh in 1971 is another historical reason for conflict in the present days. The states still are not able to cooperate for a regional harmony because of the historical enmity they had during the period of colonialism or the independence of the states

(Joshi, 2013). One of the main reasons for violence is the border disputes between the states which have been because of the former colonial masters who left the region with this problem.

Likewise, the South Asian region is culturally and religiously plural states, there are people of many races and creed in the region. The cultural barriers have induced mostly the intra-state conflicts in the region affecting the harmony of the states and the whole region. The religious movements and increased militancy have been major impediments to the harmony in the region. The Hindu Nationalist Groups, Taliban, Mujahedeen, ISIS and others are some examples of religiously motivated groups causing terrors. The separatist movements in Northeast India and the civil war in Sri Lanka are some of the examples of culturally motivated unrest in South Asia. The Islamization of Pakistani society and the subduing of religious pluralism are some examples as well. The Islamization of Pakistani politics and society, seen most acutely in the state's draconian blasphemy code, has directly fed Islamist vigilantism, which has become a major security threat to the region (Saiya, 2019).

The geographical impediments of the region can be explained through the geographical isolation of some of the states because of the landlocked nature such as Nepal, Bhutan and Afghanistan and island states like Sri Lanka and the Maldives blocking the trade and development of those states. Moreover, the whole region is prone to natural calamities such as earthquake, floods and tsunamis which take hundreds of lives and destroy property every year. The monsoon rains are advantages but cause hundreds of lives due to flood, the same fate is for the deserts (Gaiha & Hill, 2019). The geostrategic location of the whole continent and the states in South Asia has led to a tremendous amount of interference and interest of major powers of the world.

Inline to the political reasons, the region has been plagued with the impediments such as migration and the refugee crisis. The influx of Rohingya refugees to Bangladesh and India, the intra-state conflicts such as the civil war in Sri Lanka induced lots of Tamil refugees to India, and similarly, Bhutanese refugee to Nepal is the major inter-state political problems in South Asia. The porous borders and cultural, lingual and religious homogeneity have led to illegal migration of criminals, terrorists and others (Ahmed, 2019). In South Asia, because of the cultural, religious and political homogeneity, policies and politics, predominantly concerning minorities in one state, opt to have its effects across borders.

Pakistan's military influence in Pakistan's politics and economy is one of the major political reasons for the lack of harmony in the region. Terrorism in South Asia is also a major impediment. South Asia is the second most region inflicted because of terrorist activities (Giunchi, 2014). Hence, the Taliban issue in Afghanistan is a historical impediment from the time of the Soviet occupation and relevant to the conflict in contemporary times as well. Other terrorist organizations such as ISIS, mujahedeen and others are the major region for instability and violence in South Asia.

In conclusion, there is barely any noteworthy harmonization between the core and periphery in this region, most of the South Asian states cooperate predominantly with the outside world and only secondarily with states within the region. In other words, intraregional harmony is

in a stage of infancy. The geographical, historical, cultural and political impediments equally have contributed as the impediments to the harmony in South Asia.

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