

SAARC and Regional Integration

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ABSTRACT

SAARC is a regional organization of South Asian countries. It was established to improve trade relation among member countries and also solve regional issues and regional problems. SAARC provides a platform to make collective strategy to tackle climate change, water and food shortages. The member countries can negotiate on different issues of region from the platform of SAARC. This region of South Asia is facing many issues now days and the major issues are terrorism, water issues, health issues, climate issues and also trade issues. The trade among member countries is very low and trade unions facing many problems and terrorism and terrorist activities are increasing day by day. Water is also becoming the major threat for the future of South Asian people. Due to all these problems and to not solve these issues SAARC is becoming a weak organization to solve regional issues but there are some factors which are also responsible for the failure of SAARC and one the most important factor is the clash between India and Pakistan. SAARC cannot solve the regional issues due to lack of trust among member countries and due to all these aspects people of South Asia facing many current and future's threats of their survival. Despite that SAARC is becoming weak organization by not solving the major issues of the regional states but somehow trade improves between India and Pakistan from the platform of SAARC. This paper tends to find the trade volume between India and Pakistan and would also find that what are the reasons behind the low trade volume between India and Pakistan.

Key Words: SAARC, regional integration, India, Pakistan.

Introduction

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is an organization of eight countries which are the part of South Asia. The SAARC secretariat is based in Kathmandu which is capital city of Nepal. SAARC was established in 1985 and the first summit was held in Bangladesh. In this summit the representatives of South Asian countries signed the charter of SAARC. The collective economy of SAARC countries is the 3rd largest economy in the world based on the criteria of GDP after the United States and China. SAARC countries contain 3% of the world's area and have 21% of the world's total population. This region has diversity in cultural activities and also has great impact on the world politics. India is the largest country of this region in terms of population and area. India has 70% of the area from the whole area of South Asia. Pakistan is also another major state of this region and the member of SAARC. Both countries have great impact on SAARC and its policy making. The idea of regional, social and economic cooperation in this region was first time emerge in 2 May 1980 by Bangladeshi President Zia urRahman and the first summit was held in Dhaka on 8

December 1985. In this summit the regional countries signed the charter of SAARC. At that time there were seven members of this regional organization but now Afghanistan is also the official member of SAARC. The SAARC charter has aim to promote trade and economic activities in member countries, make good developmental policies and to increase social and cultural development in the region. After the establishment of SAARC, it provides a good platform for negotiation and to solve regional problems. From the platform of SAARC many regional issues were discussed like health issues, economic issues, cultural and social issues, environmental issues of region, trade issues and one of the most important is visa issues. Some issues were negotiated and solved from the platform of SAARC like environmental issues of this region. Member countries of SAARC established a committee to research on environmental and whether problems which were created by global warming. Committee has suggested the solution of this environmental problem. SAARC also provides a good platform for trade among member countries.

But we can say that SAARC is also proving itself as weak organization for not solving some major issues of this region. After her establishment, SAARC solved many problems of region but it failed to solve some major issues of South Asia. SAARC could not solve the health issues, water issues, territorial issues and one of the most important issues of this region is terrorism and militancy. Although, Sri Lanka has tackled the militant groups and terrorism but India and Pakistan both are facing terrorism and militancy and SAARC did not perform its effective role to tackle militant groups and terrorism. And on the other hand in my point of view, it is the responsibility of both major powers (India and Pakistan) to make SAARC a successful and powerful regional organization by making good trade relation. The trade between India and Pakistan is very low as compare to their trade with other states of the world.

Objective of Research

The objective of present research is to highlights the major issues of this region because these issues are the responsible of low trade between India and Pakistan and these issues can be the major threat for the future of SAARC countries. For example water issue is very important for member countries and especially for India and Pakistan. But SAARC is not playing its effective role to solve this issue. It is reality that SAARC depends on two major countries of this region which are India and Pakistan because both countries are major powers of this region and both countries have great influence on SAARC. But both countries are facing many internal issues like militancy and there are many militant groups which are fighting in both countries against their governments. So, the objective of this research is also to highlight why SAARC failed to established good relation among both countries and peace in this region and why it fails to improve trade between India and Pakistan. Are also highlighted. The causes of failure of SAARC to solve the issues of trade unions there are some issues between India and Pakistan which became the reason of low trade between both countries like Kashmir and Sir Creek

issues between India and Pakistan are very important and potential threat for the future of both countries. It is important that both issues can be solve through negotiation and dialogues and the solution of both issues is very important to established peace and to create social, cultural and economic cooperation between both countries. The causes that why both issue cannot be solving from the plat form of SAARC are also highlighted here.

Research Methodology

It is qualitative research based on the secondary sources like news articles, research article and web links.

Literature Review

- Jiali, Mia in his research article “SAARC Achievements and Challenges” says that SAARC proved itself a weak organization to solve the major issues of the region but it is also reality that the two major powers India and Pakistan also improve their bilateral trade from the platform of SAARC.
- Dubey, Muchkand in his article “SAARC and South Asian economic integration” says that we cannot say that SAARC is a fully failed organization because the member countries of SAARC improve their trade through SAARC. Although SAARC cannot play it’s effective role to solve the major issues of the countries but it also increasing its influence because Afghanistan also joined SAARC to improve its trade relation with member countries.
- Bhatnager, Stuti. Shahab Ahmad, Zahid in their article “SAARC and interests conflicts in South Asia. Prospects and challenges for region” say that SAARC is facing many problems because it could not play its effective role to solve some core issues of the region. The militant organizations are increasing their influence in both countries (India and Pakistan). This situation is very alarming for the future of SAARC.
- Mehmood, Tehmina in her research article “SAARC and regional politics” says that the two major powers of SAARC organization are responsible for the weak role of SAARC in the region. Both India and Pakistan are the major powers of the region but cannot solve their issues from the platform of SAARC.

Main Body

Like many others regional organizations, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established to provide a platform and forum to the people of South Asia where they could work on collectively for peace, development, social and cultural integration and economic cooperation in their region. However, the member countries of SAARC have close geographical,

cultural and historical relation but they cannot make their organization very effective and the organization has failed to achieve the desired results.

If we see the trade relation between India and Pakistan then we observe that the trade between both countries is very low. The trade somehow improves from the platform of SAARC after 2001. Before that we cannot observe good trade relation between both countries. After its establishment SAARC play somehow its little role to improve trade between India and Pakistan. In 1996 India give the status of most favorite nation (MFN) to improve trade relation. Same way in 2012 Pakistan also gave the same status to India from the platform of SAARC. Here we can observe the trade between India and Pakistan from given statistics.

Trade volume of Pakistan with India in (US dollars million)

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Imports	164.6	187.7	183.5	522.1	593.5	1235	1584.3	1772	1455.8	2235.8
Exports	69.6	33.9	68.1	79.1	165.9	286.5	286.7	372	272	248.4

These statistics show that the trade between India and Pakistan is improving with passage of time but its speed is very low. The current trade between China and India is almost 80 billion US dollars but the current trade between India and Pakistan is only 5 billion US dollars. So, the trade between both countries is very low and SAARC could not play its effective role to improve trade between both countries.

Now we will analyze that what are the main causes through which India and Pakistan could not improve their bilateral trade. Although, this region is facing many problems but one the most important issue is border disputes and Pakistan and India has confrontation on the issue of Kashmir and Sir Creek. Pakistan and India fought three wars but these issues cannot be solved till now. The Kashmir issue has great impact on regional politics of South Asia. Both India and Pakistan should make their serious efforts to solve this issue but Pakistan claims that Kashmir issue should be solved through the resolutions of United Nations but India claim that UN resolutions are not effective after Shimla agreement. However, we can solve this issue through bilateral negotiation and SAARC is becoming ineffective in this issue because we have signed agreement with India that we will solve Kashmir issue through bilateral talks and secondly the most important point which makes SAARC ineffective is that political issues cannot be discussed on the platform of SAARC because according to the charter of SAARC political issues cannot be discussed from the platform of SAARC. It is a major reason behind the failure and ineffective role of SAARC to solve regional issues and also for the low trade volume between both countries. Kashmir issue is one the most important issue between India and Pakistan and peace cannot establish in this region without solving the issue of Kashmir but SAARC cannot play its role to solve this issue.

South Asian region has great potential to become the effective actor in world politics as well as to increase their trade but to achieve this thing regional

organization should be very strong. At that point we can give the example of EU. After world war two Europe was totally destroyed but they move step by step. In 1950 they established European coal and steel community. It was first step to regional integration and then they established European Economic Community in 1970 and then finally, they established European Union. Now a day it is very powerful and very effective regional organization in Europe. EU made soft visa policies, they introduced same trade currency almost whole region and of the developed its member countries in the world. One time they were facing the condition of war but making this strong regional organization they got the status the developed countries of the world. But unfortunately, the South Asian countries could not make their regional organization very powerful to solve regional issues. The other more important reason of ineffective role of SAARC is that India wants to become the “Asian Tiger” and make its policies by keeping in mind the role of other major power of the region while Pakistan is not willing to accept such status of India. It is an important reason the ineffective role of SAARC because there is a power struggle between India and Pakistan and both want to become strong power of the region. They cannot give mandate to SAARC to solve regional issues. So, when you will not give power to organization then how organization can solve the issues of the region without having powers. So, if the both countries want to solve their issues then they have to give powers to SAARC and also compromise with each other’s because enemies can be change but neighbors cannot be changed.

From the platform of SAARC, member countries can talk on health issues, economic issues, cultural and social issues, environmental issues of region, trade issues and one of the most important is visa issues however, the most important issue which now a days is faced by almost all member countries is terrorism and militancy in their territories. All these issues can be solved only from the platform of SAARC. The most important issue is terrorism and every member state of SAARC is facing this issue and the most powerful countries of India and Pakistan also facing are terrorism and terrorist organization can be countered only making collective anti-terrorist policies because there are many terrorist organizations which are carried out different terrorist activities in different countries. So, this factor of terrorism can be countered through the platform of SAARC by making collective policies to counter these terrorist organizations. But both major powers are blaming each other to supporting directly or indirectly to these terrorist organizations to weak each other. In this way Pakistan claims that India is interfering in the current condition of Baluchistan and India also claims that Pakistan gives support to religious terrorist organizations to carry out terrorist activities in India. By doing this kind of activities both countries are directly violating the charter of SAARC. The Art:1 of the charter of SAARC clearly says that every member country should ensure that they will not interfere in the internal affairs of the other states. So, in this situation how is it possible that SAARC can solve the regional issue? So, both countries should give mandate to SAARC and follow the charter of SAARC practically to solve regional issues and regional

conflicts because presently SAARC does not have powers that is why it is not in condition to solve regional disputes.

All nonpolitical issues can be discussed and solved from the platform of SAARC but political issues like water issue and border issues cannot be discussed on the platform of SAARC and that is why these issues can be solved in a very difficult way. Another reason which makes SAARC an ineffective regional organization is that SAARC is not a sovereign organization but it is dependent on the two major countries of the region, India and Pakistan. Due to the conflicts of both countries and dependence of SAARC on both countries, SAARC has become a weak organization of the region. Here, I want to give the example of the 18th session of SAARC. The PM of Pakistan and PM of India totally ignored each other at the beginning of the first session and also on the 2nd day. A perception came out from the behavior of both PMs that this conference of regional organization will fail but during the last session the Sri Lankan president tried to improve relations between both PMs. At the end of the conference they met with open hearts and everyone was happy that the conference became successful while both PMs were totally ignoring each other during their speeches. It seems that SAARC is dependent on both major countries of the region. The future of SAARC is totally dependent on the relation of India and Pakistan. If both countries solve their issues then SAARC will become the strong organization of the region because when there would be no conflict among both countries then both countries will try to do work for the development of the region and also they will focus on better educational facilities, better health facilities and also provide a better living standard to the people of this region. When both countries can solve their issues then SAARC will become the powerful because when there will not be a serious issue in the region then SAARC can effectively follow its charter to improve trade relations, improve social and cultural harmony and one of the most important to make soft visa policies for all member countries of SAARC to improve trade relations. At that point, by making soft visa policies member countries of SAARC can increase their trade and business activities and also can develop the region of South Asia.

Water issue is another major issue among Pakistan and India. The Indus Waters Treaty is a water-sharing agreement between India and Pakistan with the help of the World Bank. According to this treaty three eastern rivers go in the share of India and three western rivers go in the share of Pakistan. But now according to Pakistan, India is violating the treaty by making dams on western rivers. It is a major and potential future threat for the survival of Pakistan. But Pakistan cannot raise this issue on the platform of SAARC because of the same case as above that political issues cannot be discussed on the forum of SAARC. These phenomena make SAARC a very ineffective regional organization because it is not able to solve major regional issues. SAARC is not able to solve political issues of the region but the major issues of the region are political issues.

In this point the theory of functionalism which is the theory of international organization is also rejected because functionalist scientists say that cooperation in economic and cultural fields can lead to cooperation in the political field. They say that first we should develop cooperation in economic and cultural fields then political

issues can easily be solved. But this theory fails at that point because Pakistan and India also have cooperation in economic field. The trade is increasing between both countries. The cultural cooperation is also there in both countries and many sociologists of both countries visit every year in each other's country. Many Sikh visitors also visit Pakistan every year but both countries cannot solve their political issues. Because we cannot talk on political issues on the forum of SAARC, this thing makes very ineffective regional organization. There are two main causes of weak role of SAARC in region. These two main reasons are that SAARC has not mandate to solve political issues and even political issues cannot be discussed in SAARC and the second and most important is the confrontation between India and Pakistan. These reasons are behind the ineffective and weak role of SAARC.

Conclusion

SAARC is a regional organization of South Asia. It was established in 1985. The SAARC secretariat is based in Kathmandu which is the capital of Nepal. From the platform of SAARC member countries can discussed many regional issues like issues of trade, cultural and social issues, health and disease issues, environmental issues and visa issues among member countries. After its establishment, SAARC provides a good platform to increase trade and also work on environmental issues. But there are some factors and issues which become the causes to prove SAARC a weak organization. South Asian countries are facing terrorism and thousands of people are being killed every year in this region just because of terrorism but SAARC is not playing its effective role to counter the terrorist organizations by making collective policies among member countries. This region is also facing many political issues like Kashmir and water issues among India and Pakistan and just because those political issues cannot be discussed at the platform of SAARC; SAARC cannot play its effective role to solve these major issues between the major powers of the region. It is the main reason behind the ineffective role of SAARC of not solving political issues of the region.

The other main reason to make SAARC ineffective and weak organization is the confrontation between India and Pakistan. Both countries are directly violating the charter of SAARC by interfering in personal affair of each other. While Art:1 of SAARC clearly say that member countries will not interfere in the internal affairs of the state. These both reason have great impact behind the ineffective and weak role of SAARC.

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