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THE ROLE OF THE SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COMMUNICATION (SAARC): LIMITATIONS, CHALLENGES AND PROPOSED REFORMS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of SAARC in peace, stability, & political balance through an evidence-based approach. The study analyses the existing role of SAARC for peace and good office, makes a remedy and reforms, and identifies gaps in the framework to implement the goal of SAARC. The goal of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is to foster regional cooperation among its member states to further peace, stability, and socioeconomic growth. As a result, its advancement has been hampered by several obstacles and difficulties, such as regional conflicts, political instability, and a dearth of institutional structures. With an emphasis on internal conflicts, economic growth, and inadequate educational cooperation, this study explores the major causes that have limited SAARC's potential. In addition, the research examines issues such as geopolitical imbalance, inadequate infrastructure, and border restrictions. Based on these conclusions, the study suggests significant reforms to improve SAARC's performance, fostering better economic cooperation, stronger institutional mechanisms, and higher political resolve to transform SAARC into a more vital regional organization that can make Asia more effective.

Keywords: SAARC, South Asian regional cooperation, Regional integration in South Asia, SAARC challenges, SAARC limitation, SAARC reforms, Intra-regional trade South Asia

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

1.1. INTRODUCTION

A regional cooperation alliance named SAARC was formed in 1985. Initially this alliance consisted of seven South Asian countries named Bangladesh, India, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka. Afghanistan was made a SAARC member in 2007 at the 14th SAARC Summit. There is great diversity among the states in the region in terms of size, geography,

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population, caste, religion, and wealth. While SAARC member states are formed based on unequal partnerships among the SAARC countries, India is the largest and most powerful country while Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives are smaller, less powerful countries. Due to this, the lack of equality is observed in the distribution of natural and human resources in all these states. The population of this region is about 130 cores. About 75% of them live in India, 9.5% in Pakistan, 9% in Bangladesh and the remaining population lives in the remaining 5 SAARC states. The SAARC region is one of the poorest regions in the world. SAARC has not made significant progress in achieving its ambitious goals due to various reasons. Many feel that the reason for this is that there is more discussion within SAARC than taking any real actionable initiatives. Until the 11th SAARC Conference, SAARC's main activities were organizing seminars, workshops and short-term training programs undertaking cultural exchanges and sporting events. Although the four-phase negotiations in the SAPTA talks have played some role in trade liberalization, SAARC has not yet materialized as a regional economic alliance. The alliance could not achieve its desired goal of intra-regional trade in the region. In a word, the success of SAARC is far behind the success of regional organizations like ASEAN and NAFTA. Due to the obstacles of various bilateral issues existing among the member states, it is not possible to achieve the multilateral success that was possible through SAARC and the alliance is also failing to take any real steps towards development. It seems that SAARC needs more time to reach its desired goals. SAARC's progress depends on strengthening mutual trust and confidence by ending adversarial attitudes in bilateral relations among member states. A increasing trend towards other sub-regional organisations like BIMSTEC, political impasse, and poor economic integration characterise SAARC's current state. The tensions between India and Pakistan are the main reason why SAARC a regional forum that still exists, is currently far from functioning. SAARC is unlikely to reclaim its position as the main engine of regional cooperation in South Asia in the absence of substantial political reconciliation between these two crucial members. It appears that these sub-regional organisations rather than SAARC itself may play a bigger role in the future of the region given the advent of alternative platforms like BIMSTEC.

1.2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established in 1985, making economic, social, and cultural collaboration among its 8 member Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. SAARC was created with the hope of promoting peace, stability, and development in South Asia. The main goal of SAARC is to make a region home to nearly a quarter of the worlds' population based on some principles Regardless

of potential, SAARC has faced significant backlogs and challenges that have hindered the effectiveness of SAARC. Sorry to say, one of the primary problems is the persistent political tensions between member states, especially between India and Pakistan, which have often resulted in stalled progress and ineffective summits. The organization was made on the principle of unanimity, which has further slowed decision-making and implementation of rules. Economic cooperation of the member states has also been limited with intra-regional trade low compared to other regional countries. The organization's lack of strong enforcement mechanisms and reliance on consensus has further weakened the impact of SAARC. The SAARC authorities may take initiatives for strengthening economic integration, depoliticizing regional cooperation, and improving SAARC's institutional capacity. They also make the organization better address regional issues to uplift poverty, climate change, and terrorism by taking initiatives. Aftermath reforming SAARC could unlock the potential for greater peace and prosperity in Southern Asia.

1.3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

SAARC was founded for regional growth and cooperation but has encountered certain obstacles that have limited its efficacy. The main issue is making continuous hostilities between India and Pakistan as well as other member states' persistent political tensions. The conflicts have prevented SAARC's operations from being disrupted, which frequently leads to summits and meaningful advancements on issues of regional integration. The absence of economic integration among the member states is another major issue. Regretfully, SAARC is among the least integrated regional organizations in the world due to the persistently low level of intraregional commerce. These problems made SAARC more critical because of the region's varied economic structures and developmental gaps, which make it a vital organization to implement coherent economic strategies. Besides, SAARC's decision-making process has been a significant hurdle as it slows down the adoption of numerous initiatives. SAARC's weak organizational body and lack of enforcement mechanisms further exacerbate inefficacy in addressing regional issues such as poverty, terrorism, and climate change. This research examines these key factors of SAARC political tensions, lack of economic integration, and structural inefficiencies. Also seeks to explore potential reforms to make SAARC a more effective and legendary organization for regional countries.

1.4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study examines the limitations, challenges, and potential changes of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The study focuses on evaluating the

organization's impact on regional cooperation, economic conflicts, and social and political stability. It identifies the main obstacles hindering the development of SAARC, such as political instability, economic disparities, and bureaucratic inefficiency. It examines the way to structural and operational obstacles that SAARC must overcome. The study identifies strategies to improve the performance of SAARC, promote cooperation among member countries, and effectively solve various regional problems. Besides, analysis of the position of SAARC in the wider geopolitical context of South Asia. This comprehensive approach provides information for stakeholders, researchers, and policymakers.

1.5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study examines various aspects of SAARC. Here are some possible restrictions. Ongoing political tensions between member countries such as India and Pakistan hinder the cooperation and effectiveness of SAARC. Economic tensions between SAARC member countries and countries like India, which are much larger in terms of economic size, pose a challenge to cooperation. SAARC does not have a strong governance framework. Its ability to influence and disrupt local politics will be limited. Although a regional entity, intra-SAARC trade is limited compared to other regional organizations such as ASEAN or the EU. Trade restrictions and a lack of will help with this. Trans-border terrorism, regional security problems, and military conflicts often break the framework of SAARC cooperation. Member countries can sign bilateral agreements in SAARC, which limits the organization's ability to reform and develop the region. SAARC's requirement for consensus-based decision-making leads to deadlocks and difficulty in moving forward with a major project. The SAARC project has often suffered from being too broad or too ineffective and has not focused on the most important reforms or areas that could enhance regional peace.

1.6. LITERATURE REVIEW

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) established in 1985 aims to promote economic and regional integration in the South Asian region. SAARC has been less effective despite its potential due to several problems and limitations. This literature review includes studies on the limitations, challenges, and necessary reforms of SAARC. The main causes of SAARC's shortcomings are its guidelines and geopolitical imbalance. The ongoing conflict between India and Pakistan is one of the most discussed issues as it has made it more difficult for SAARC to make decisions and implement initiatives. The imbalance caused by India's hegemony makes it difficult for small governments to express their views within the SAARC framework.

Regional cooperation is intensified. Further integration is hampered by the national sovereignty debate because member states are hesitant to give up their sovereignty to a regional body. SAARC agreements are inadequately carried out, and policies are obstinately put into effect. The process of regional cooperation has been traumatized by this resistance, and the majority of the plans are still only on paper rather than being carried out. Inadequate infrastructure serves as a significant barrier to accomplishing SAARC's goals. The area's potential has not been fully realized economically due to inadequate digital and physical infrastructure connectivity. Trade and investment in the region are still restricted as a result of inadequate communication and transportation networks

1.7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a qualitative approach to examine the constraints, obstacles, and possible improvements concerning the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Through a qualitative methodology, a thorough comprehension of the intricate factors influencing SAARC's effectiveness and the viewpoints of the diverse stakeholders engaged in regional collaboration in South Asia is facilitated. This section presents the research framework, methods of data collection, selection of participants, and analytical techniques employed. The study adopts a qualitative design focused on exploring personal experiences, viewpoints, and interpretations related to SAARC. This methodology is well-suited for grasping the complex social, political, and economic elements that influence the operations of SAARC and its efficacy as a regional institution. Utilizing a qualitative approach provides researchers with the ability to gather in-depth and comprehensive data reflecting the intricacies of regional collaboration. The main data collection method will involve conducting semi-structured interviews with key figures such as policymakers, scholars, and practitioners engaged in regional cooperation efforts within South Asia. The semi-structured nature of the interviews offers flexibility in questioning, allowing for more exploration of specific topics as they emerge during discussions. Additionally, the study will entail an examination of pertinent documents, including policy papers, meeting minutes from SAARC official reports, and academic publications. Analyzing these documents will offer valuable context to the insights gathered from interviews and aid in identifying recurring themes within the discourse surrounding regional cooperation. To gather insights on SAARC, a selective sampling approach will be utilized to recruit individuals with a direct connection to or knowledge of SAARC. Participants will be chosen based on their expertise and involvement in SAARC-related initiatives to ensure a diverse range of viewpoints. The objective is to incorporate perspectives from different member nations and sectors to obtain a comprehensive overview of the challenges faced by

SAARC and potential avenues for improvement. The qualitative data gathered from interviews will be scrutinized through thematic analysis, with a focus on interpreting the information in the context of existing literature on SAARC and regional collaboration. The results will be examined concerning established theories and prior studies to underscore their importance and implications

CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 ESTABLISHMENT OF SAARC

The rationale for the establishment of SAARC was to improve regional cooperation. Prior to SAARC's establishment, the matter of regional cooperation was raised in different conferences including April 1947 "Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi, May 1950 Baguio Conference in Philippines and April 1954 Colombo Powers Conference." Comprising mainly on four phases of evolution- "Conception (1977-80), the Meeting of Foreign Secretaries (1981-83), the Meeting of Foreign Secretaries (1983-85), of Foreign Secretaries (1983-85), and the Summits (1985-2016)" - the foremost proposal for the establishment of a framework for regional cooperation was put forward by the then President of Bangladesh, Zia ur Rahman, on May 2, 1980. The process started with the meeting between President Zia ur Rahman and newly elected Indian Prime Minister Morarji Desai on the agenda of regional cooperation. It is pertinent to discuss the efficacy of regional cooperation for Bangladesh at that time. For this, numerous developments which led to President Zia ur Rahman's resolve for the making of a Framework for regional cooperation (especially during the period of 1975-1979) are as following:

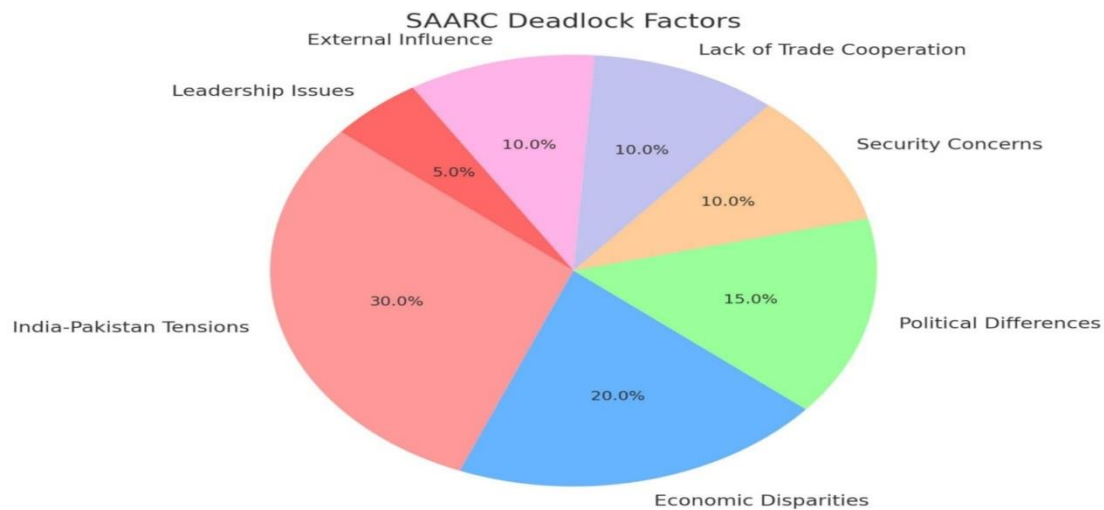
1. New South Asian leadership of that time was more prone to diplomatic solutions to various issues;
2. President Zia ur Rahman needed support to defend his coup d'état regime;
3. Second oil crisis of 1979 generated balance of payment crisis in South Asia countries;
4. Failure of North-South dialogues and increasing protectionism by the developed countries;
5. Identification of area of cooperation in a report by the Committee on Studies for Cooperation in Development in South Asia (CSCD);
6. United States and British assurance of economic assistance on water sharing projects; and
7. Soviet invasion in Afghanistan.

In this scenario, the establishment of a regional organization such as SAARC became a platform to discuss issues of common interest. The response from regional states remained mixed. As a

result of Indian concerns, the Bangladesh draft paper excluded security matters and allowed only non-political areas for cooperation. Finally, as a result of several meetings at foreign secretary and ministerial level, the first SAARC summit meeting of South Asian leaders was convened at Dhaka from December 7-8, 1985. "Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were its founding members." Australia, China, the European Union, Iran, Japan, South Korea, Mauritius, Myanmar and the United States (US) joined SAARC as observers between 2005 and 2008. But day by day SAARC became dormant in that time. The member countries not willfully deal the internal matters peacefully.

2.2 SAARC DEADLOCK

SAARC was established for a prime object to ensure peace, tranquility & Economic balance among the member states. Development, peace and reconciliation have all been facilitated by regional cooperation in different parts of the world. In terms of regional cooperation there is a high level of both regions. cooperation and mutual trust, as shown by good examples such as the European Union (EU). The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) a regional organization has not been very successful in achieving its development and welfare goals (Upreti and Shashi, 2012). Despite the above-mentioned achievements SAARC sometimes makes less structured plans to address problems and issues. This goal has also been achieved through bilateral meetings. The eight South Asian countries that make up SAARC have yet to unite to form an economic block, despite historical ties between them in the social, economic and cultural spheres. Of course, there are many variables to blame for this delay and lack of cooperation in this field. Therefore, the pace of development towards achieving cooperation in the region since the formation of SAARC has been slowed down by these measures (Das, 1992). Despite the proximity of geographical, cultural and historical features, this group has not been able to achieve its desired goals for several reasons. The problem is that the policies of local governments have not changed to use the ideas created as a result of these exchanges, or to reduce the suspicion that exists in each government. This is the problem. One can only hope that the work done on these interactions will one day pay off. Unfortunately, we are not there yet.



Unfortunately, most of the aforementioned objectives remained on paper as SAARC remained incapable in the effective realization of its promises. For example, SAARC Food Security Reserve could not tackle Bangladesh's 1991 disaster. The fact of the matter is that SAARC activities have mostly been limited by the SAARC members on issues of mutual interest such as eradication of terrorism, suppression of women and child trafficking for prostitution; however, commitments of mutual cooperation to prevent growth of these menaces usually remained trivial. Interestingly, even after SAARC recognized these loopholes in its 13th Summit that was held in 2006 wherein it "directed all SAARC institutions and mechanisms to work collectively towards a decade dedicated to implementation," mutual cooperation among SAARC members again remained insignificant. As a result there are some internal factors that made SAARC more inactive day by day. We can see some internal challenges that make SAARC more dormant to make peace among themselves.

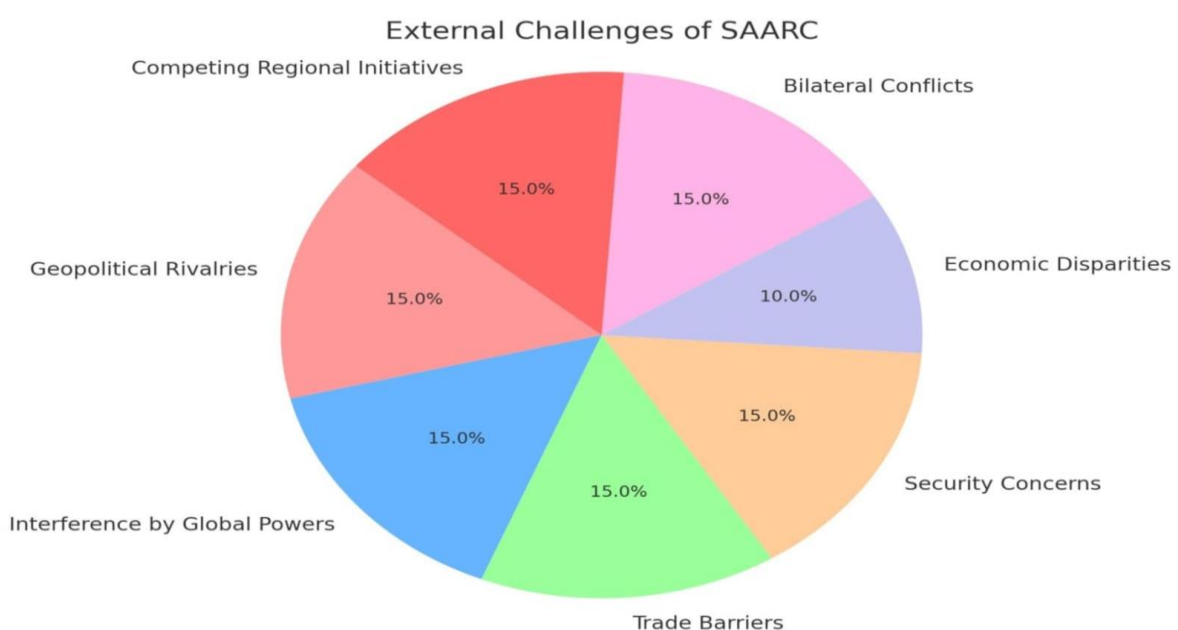
2.3 SAARC INTERNAL CHALLENGES & TENSIONS

Many internal issues that the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) encounters make it less effective. Among the most important ones are historical battles and border disputes have frequently caused tensions in relations amongst member countries, particularly between India and Pakistan. As a result, SAARC finds it challenging to agree on a number of regional concerns. The lack of commitment from member states has caused SAARC's progress to be modest. The organization's capacity to carry out ideas is constrained by the fact that national interests frequently trump regional collaboration. SAARC is made up of nations with varying

degrees of economic development. Because wealthy countries like India have different goals than smaller less developed states, this economic disparity makes efforts for regional economic integration and collaboration more difficult. Because all members of SAARC must agree on decisions at all times, it is challenging to enact policies or reforms when even one is opposed. SAARC has had difficulty putting important regional agreements or projects into action. The effectiveness of many efforts is diminished since they are either abandoned or not carried out well. SAARC finds it challenging to concentrate on growth and collaboration because of cross-border terrorism, internal instability and security risks in certain member nations. These problems divert focus from societal and economic objectives. SAARC's potential as a regional organisation for collaboration and development has been hampered by these internal issues. Therefore there are some external limitations such as China's impact, USA impact, US India relationship, Nepal's geopolitical crisis are the basic problem for making a good institution & Governance that help enshrine possible makeout.

2.4 EXTERNAL TENSIONS OF SAARC

SAARC faces several external tensions that hinder its effectiveness, influenced by geopolitical factors, relationships with global powers, and international disputes. Here are some key external tensions



1. China's Impact on SAARC: Among the SAARC countries especially India, China's expanding political and economic influence in South Asia, particularly through programs like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has caused worry. Although China is not a SAARC member, tensions are frequently raised by its growing sway over nations like Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, particularly with India. India sees China's significant investment in Pakistan through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a strategic threat because it has strengthened links between the two countries. Tensions between India and Pakistan, the two biggest SAARC members have escalated as a result.

US-India Relations: With the US and China at odds SAARC has also been subject to external pressure as a result of India's expanding strategic alliance with the US. India's alliance with the US is seen by certain SAARC countries, including Pakistan, as a possible danger to the stability of the region. As part of the U.S.-led "Quad" alliance with Japan and Australia, India is perceived by certain SAARC members as making a strategic shift from regional collaboration to addressing wider security issues in the Indo-Pacific region.

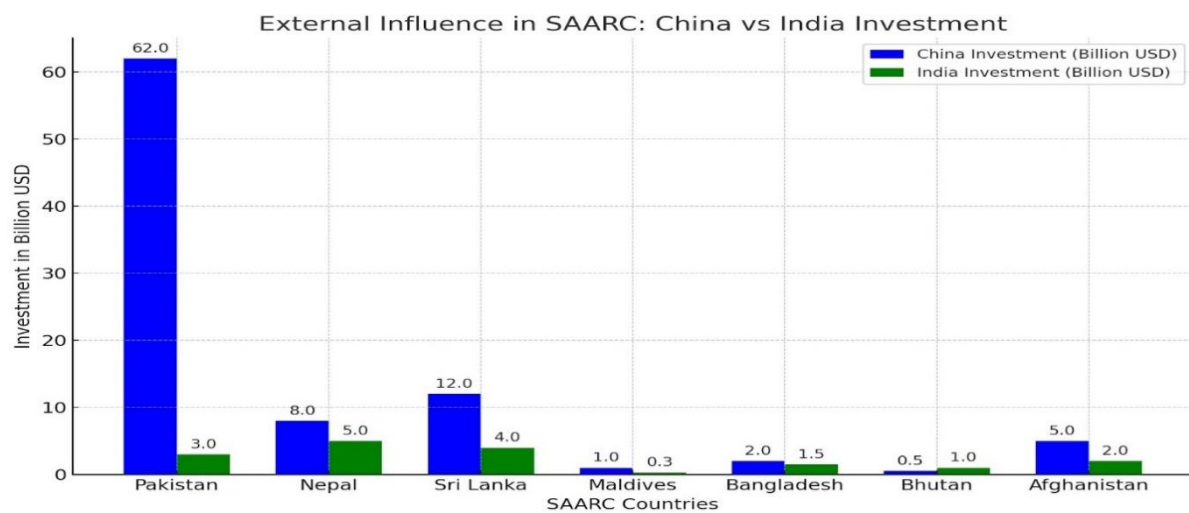
2. India-Pakistan Conflict:

Border conflicts: SAARC has been greatly impacted by the long length border conflicts between India and Pakistan particularly with regard to Kashmir. One external aspect that makes SAARC's operations more difficult is the internationalization of the Kashmir dispute and its effects on regional security. Tensions with Pakistan grew after India revoked Article 370 altering Jammu and Kashmir's status in 1990. Pakistan responded by reducing diplomatic connections, which put additional pressure on SAARC.

Global Power Intervention: External powers like China and the U.S. have had an interest in the India-Pakistan conflict, make them leading to interference that complicates SAARC's regional peace-building efforts. After the Pulwama attack in 2019 India conducted airstrikes on Pakistani territory & drawing global attention. External powers including China and the U.S. had to mediate to prevent escalation.

3. Nepal's Geopolitical Balancing: China and India are currently engaged in a geopolitical conflict in Nepal. Although China has been providing more economic help through infrastructure projects, India has historically held a significant amount of influence in Nepal. The way Nepal strikes a balance between the two powers has an impact on SAARC regional cooperation. India

expressed concerns about China's growing influence in South Asia but Nepal has inked deals with China under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) for the development of infrastructure. This has hampered regional cooperation by causing diplomatic tension between Nepal and India.



The graph above illustrates the external influence of China and India on SAARC member countries through investment. It compares the investments (in billions of USD) made by China and India in key SAARC nations like Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and others. China has significant investments in Pakistan and other countries. Its geopolitical strategy through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). India while also investing in the region has comparatively lower investments in countries where China is more active. This visual representation highlights how the external competition between China and India plays a key role in shaping SAARC dynamics and regional cooperation.

4.Global Trade Dynamics: SAARC's efforts at economic integration face challenges due to global trade wars and protectionist policies. For instance, the U.S.-China trade war has impacted South Asia's economies by creating instability in global supply chains. SAARC members have been indirectly affected by tariffs and trade restrictions imposed by major economies like the U.S. and China, which impact regional trade flows and economic cooperation. These factors make SAARC more ineffective & countries decided to not take part in any kind of positive involvement. Regardless of these problems, SAARC took some initiatives for financial integration in the southern part of Asia. But for some unavoidable mistakes, these initiatives were haphazard in the first instance.

2.5 SAARCS INITIATIVES FOR FINANCIAL INTEGRATION

SAARC (Colombo, 1998) established a separate permanent body called SAARC FINANCE in its 10th summit. This bank is made up of the governors of the central banks of the member countries and their ministers of finance. The goal is to enable economic integration. In this vision, the establishment of a SAARC central bank with its regional branches is envisaged. In fact, the economies of Southeast Asia are dominated by the financial sector. Although the banking sector is little managed by national authorities, political governments develop legislative and budgetary policies according to their political agenda. The lack of coordination in the financial sector and the poor quality of the financial market constitute the main obstacle for the slow progress of the negotiations between the authorities and the member countries for the necessary changes in their macroeconomic policies towards economic integration and financial. For example, the harmonization of legal regulations of the banking sector, the creation of a progressive payment system in the region and the promotion of economic and financial research for the development of more policies in the macroeconomic sector in member countries. According to the Conference Resolution (Colombo, 1998), the President of SAARC FINANCE attends the meetings of the SAARC Council of Ministers and reports on all the activities of the institution. In addition, SAARC has established a promotion and promotional support agreement to promote regional FDI. But this contract has not yet been signed. According to the proposed model, the increase in interregional investment will bring prosperity to the region. Therefore, this agreement aims to create laws and regulations to create a favorable environment for investment from one contracting country to another. In this context, the agreement has been considered since its introduction as a safe haven for individual investors in accordance with international investment rules. All investments made by investors of a member country in the territory of another country are subject to the SAARC agreement. However, every country has the right to attract investment. To this end, it can adopt laws to ensure a favorable environment for investors from non-member countries and regulate them in its national assembly in accordance with its laws. (Devi, 2015) Most Favored Nation (MFN) and National Treatment (NT) Policies apply to the treatment of government investors under the contract. In other words, the investor from the member country should get the same amount as the investor from the non-member country, and in terms of return on investment and performance, the investor will be happy to be a member of all national facilities. The entrepreneur is good. This agreement ensures that if a political problem, mild or serious, arises in a member country, under these circumstances, the relevant government will pay compensation to the domestic investor and the investors of the member country in accordance with the law. To settle investment disputes, a dispute settlement body was established under the SAFTA model. However, India expressed reservations that the agreement should meet domestic

needs (Singh, 2016). Finally, after a long time, India has accepted the 'promote and promote' model. SAARC submitted the draft agreement in 2017 to eight members for final negotiations. It seems that although SAARC has taken several initiatives to develop financial and regulatory integration in South Asia, it is still far from reaching the limit. South Asian economies need substantial reforms in the macroeconomic sector to be ready to enter the process of financial inclusion. Aftermath SAARC authority took a initiatives named SAFTA. The critics says SAFTA was one of the finest policy for the third world countries.

2.6 ROLE OF SAFTA FOR EFFECTIVE TRADE COMMUNICATION:

SAFTA is one kind of free trade communication concept which is more reasonable & essential for the South Asian area. The member countries of SAARC are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Afghanistan became the eight member to sign a joint declaration at the 14th SAARC Summit held in New Delhi in April 2007. The SAARC Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) was signed in April 1993 and entered into force in December 1995. The objective of SAPTA is to promote mutual trade and economic cooperation among member countries. Free trade agreements between SAARC countries were signed by SAARC countries through transfer agreements. However, member states recognize the need to go beyond trade regulation and move to a higher level of trade and economic cooperation in the region. Accordingly, the SAARC Council of Ministers signed a framework for the South Asian Free Area (SAFTA) in Islamabad in January 2004. SAFTA entered into force on 1 January 2006. The rapid growth of international trade in the last two years has been achieved not by reducing trade barriers, but by changing production models and processes. The current state of the world is the specialization and fragmentation of production, the competition of companies and countries and the result of access to efficient, reliable and cost-effective supply chains. Transportation and other supply chain costs are greatly reduced due to the economies of scale benefiting from increased trade. This also encouraged trade. This circular relationship is missing in South Asia, as the SAFTA members are still struggling with the market for goods of interest and have not yet begun to open trade in services and other marketing updates. SAFTA's ability to contribute to economic growth and development in the region has been undermined by the agreement's failure to create real trade preferences to reach a low sustainable level of intra-regional trade flows. area, it will make a good change. Business becomes more business.

2.7. ROLE OF SAARC ANTI-TERRORISM MECHANISM

At the 31st Session of the Council of Ministers (Colombo, 27-28 February 2009) recognizing the imperative to forge deeper collaboration to address the growing menace of terrorism in the region and to convey the region's collective concern over the challenges posed by the current global economic crisis adopted a 'SAARC Ministerial Statement on Global Economic Crisis' and a 'SAARC Ministerial Declaration on Cooperation in Combating Terrorism. At the Sixteenth SAARC Summit (Thimphu, 28-29 April 2010), the Heads of State/ Government strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and expressed deep concern over the threat which terrorism continues to pose to peace, security and economic stability of the South Asian region. The leaders reiterated their firm resolves to root out terrorism and recalled the Ministerial Declaration on Cooperation in Combating Terrorism adopted by the Thirty-first Session of the Council of Ministers (Colombo, 27-28 February 2009). The Member States emphasized that the linkages between the terrorism, illegal trafficking in drugs and psychotropic substance, illegal trafficking of persons and firearms all continue to remain a matter of serious concern and reiterated their commitment to address these problems in a comprehensive manner. The Leaders emphasized the need to strengthen regional cooperation to fight terrorism and transnational organized crimes. The member states reaffirmed their commitment to implement the SAARC regional convention on counter-terrorism and its supplementary protocol and the SAARC convention on narcotic drugs and psychoactive substances. The leaders emphasized the importance of a coordinated and coordinated response to the fight against terrorism. In this regard, the leaders also recognized the value of the UN Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism and recalled the progress achieved in the final stages of the negotiations and called for the conclusion of this convention.

The 37th meeting of the Standing Committee (Thimphu, 25-26 April 2010) stated that all measures are being taken by the member states to implement the SAARC Regional Convention on Combating Terrorism and its Additional Protocol and proceed still the Law. It is decided by the member states. The involvement and patronage of Pakistani intelligence agencies behind the terrorist attacks in India and Bangladesh in the past is well known. Recently what Pakistan is doing with the Kashmir issue, there is a war situation between the two countries. Allegations against Pakistan are that the country is not cooperating with SAARC member countries in combating terrorism, violence and transnational crimes through regional cooperation. Rather, he is involved in terrorist activities in various ways. For these reasons Bangladesh, India, Bhutan and Afghanistan. It has refused to participate in the SAARC conference held in Pakistan on November 9 and 10,

2016. Nepal, Maldives and Sri Lanka are silent. So apparently the 19th SAARC summit has not been held. As a result the organization is heading towards crisis and it is because of Pakistan. Overall, it is time to rethink SAARC. Especially the role of Pakistan recognized as a terrorist state does not favor regional cooperation in any way. Rather, it is seen as a sign of hostility. The member countries made their decision on the basis of power politics. End of the day these activities divided them from peace making policy.

2.8 EFFECT OF BILATERAL CONFLICT ON COLLECTIVE DECISION MAKING OF SAARC

Bilateral conflicts between SAARC member countries especially between India and Pakistan significantly impact the organization's ability to make collective decisions. SAARC operates on the principle of unanimity meaning any conflict between member nations can paralyze its decision-making process, hindering regional cooperation. The ongoing conflict between India and Pakistan has had a direct impact on SAARC summits. In 2016 following the Uri terror attack in India which was reportedly associated with Pakistan, India opted not to attend the SAARC summit that was set to take place in Islamabad. India's decision prompted other nations including Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Afghanistan to withdraw as well resulting in the cancellation of the summit. This event illustrates how the bilateral tensions between these two nuclear-armed nations can hinder regional collaborative efforts. The cancellation of the 2016 SAARC summit was primarily attributed to India's stance on cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan. The Kashmir conflict has historically been a significant source of tension in India-Pakistan relations. The situation intensified internationally after India abrogated Article 370 in 2019, further straining relations. This escalation adversely affects SAARC's capacity to concentrate on economic and developmental matters. Pakistan has advocated for the inclusion of the Kashmir issue in SAARC discussions basically a proposition that India opposes resulting in a stalemate and inefficiencies within the organization. The SAARC foreign ministers' meeting in 2019 was largely dominated by the India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir with both parties engaging in exchanges of criticism and minimal advancement on wider regional aspect. Its allegations regarding Pakistan's involvement in cross-border terrorism have fostered a contentious atmosphere & adversely affecting not only their bilateral relations but also the dynamics within SAARC. India's persistent linkage of terrorism to regional cooperation has resulted in recurrent confrontations. In response Pakistan contends that India exploits these matters to hinder regional advancement. India has consistently voiced its

apprehensions about Pakistan's purported support for terrorism in SAARC discussions which has led to strained interactions and obstructed substantial dialogue on other critical issues such as trade and connectivity. Disputes over bilateral trade among SAARC nations particularly between India and Pakistan significantly hinder collective decision-making processes. For instance, despite the establishment of the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) agreement the two countries have not fully embraced trade liberalization, citing security and political concerns. This situation has compromised the overarching objective of economic integration within SAARC. The trade relationship between India and Pakistan has remained constrained with both nations imposing tariffs and non-tariff barriers. The inability to address these challenges has impeded SAARC's aspirations for a fully integrated South Asian economy. The claims made by India regarding Pakistan's support for cross-border terrorism have resulted in a strained atmosphere. It makes impact both their bilateral relations and the overall environment within SAARC. India's determination to associate terrorism with regional cooperation has led to ongoing confrontations. Conversely Pakistan accuses India of leveraging these issues to obstruct regional progress. India has frequently expressed its concerns about Pakistan's alleged backing of terrorism in SAARC forums, resulting in tense exchanges that have hindered productive discussions on other vital matters, including trade and connectivity. Bilateral trade conflicts among SAARC members particularly between India and Pakistan also impeded collaborative decision. For example, although the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) agreement exists India and Pakistan have not fully realized trade liberalization for citing security and political justifications. This has weakened the broader aim of achieving economic integration within SAARC. The trade interactions between India and Pakistan have remained limited with both parties imposing tariffs and non-tariff barriers. The failure to resolve these trade issues has stalled SAARC's goals for a fully integrated South Asian economy. The decision-making process within SAARC necessitates a consensus among all member states. Consequently, bilateral disputes, especially those involving India and Pakistan, can hinder essential decisions vital for regional collaboration, including projects related to infrastructure, disaster management, and economic integration. These ongoing conflicts have considerably obstructed SAARC's capacity to fulfill many of its core objectives. Significant agreements regarding free trade energy cooperation and transportation have experienced extensive delays due to the lack of consensus. In light of the difficulties SAARC faces in decision-making stemming from these bilateral tensions, member nations have increasingly turned to alternative regional platforms, such as BIMSTEC, which excludes Pakistan, to circumvent stalemates. India's intensified emphasis on BIMSTEC as a venue for regional cooperation highlights how internal conflicts within SAARC compel nations to seek different avenues for engagement. The bilateral

tensions, particularly between India and Pakistan severely impede SAARC's ability to reach collective decisions thereby undermining its aim of promoting regional cooperation. These disputes frequently result in the postponement or cancellation of crucial summits and meetings, hindrance progress on essential matters such as trade, security and development. Consequently SAARC's effectiveness is significantly constrained leading to a rising interest in alternative platforms like BIMSTEC. In spite of hundred troubles SAARC has some success & Powerful initiatives that make sub continent more powerful in economic, technology, reduce terrorism. Hereinafter we can't deny the godsend of SAARC itself.

2.9 SAARC SUCCESS & PRESENT CONTEXT

One of SAARC's greatest successes has been to move India and Pakistan closer to holding talks on their Kashmir dispute. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee of India and President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan took a constructive stance towards one another at the January 2004 SAARC summit conference in Islamabad, marking the first time since the 1999 Lahore Declaration. 25, In a joint statement, they promised to start state-level negotiations on. 2005 saw the ratification of the Additional Protocol on Suppression of Terrorism, which was signed by the member states during the same SAARC summit. Ultimately, the outcome of the Indo-Pakistani dispute over Kashmir and the intricate security dynamics between India and the smaller SAARC states will determine whether or not there is any real practical cooperation. Recent events imply that both nations have started to move towards settling the differences. A significant development in the field of economics was the SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) Agreement, which was signed in April 1993 and came into effect on December 7, 1995. This agreement allowed for a certain increase of intra-SAARC trade, 28 The key to SAPTA's success was its acceptance of the SAARC members' varying degrees of development. The SAARC governments were able to propose goods for preferential trade treatment under SAPTA, and the agreement also included special concessions. All of the SAARC countries would profit from commerce with India thanks to these efforts. Although the overall numbers for intra-SAARC commerce remain depressing, the quantity of goods has increased significantly. Pakistan's commitment to sustaining SAPTA was reinforced by the shared trading interests and relative success of the organisation with the other SAARC states, even in the face of Pakistan's concerns about India's economic might. During the January 2004 summit meeting, the foreign ministers of the SAARC countries also signed the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) Agreement, which became effective on January 1, 2006. thirty

The SAARC states are required by this agreement to lower or do away with tariffs. Within seven years, tariffs on goods from Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka will be lowered by up to 5%. The SAARC Social Charter was signed at the same meeting such issues as population stabilization, empowerment of women, youth mobilization, HR development, promotion of health and Tranquillity.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 CHALLENGES TO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SAARC:

SAARC's progress has largely been hindered by lingering regional contentions. In other words, its ineffectiveness is embroiled in the regional security complex of South Asia. Though SAARC has completed almost 38 years since its inception in 1985, it could not learn to benefit from its geo-strategic location in the world politics and remained poorest, when compared with other regions. Regrettably, it has continuously been showing downward trends in previous years as well. The causes of less progress of SAARC in South Asia are many; nevertheless, Indo-Pak rivalry and India's negative politics to isolate Pakistan in the SAARC region are noteworthy. With the purpose of distancing other SAARC countries from Pakistan, India is promoting the sub-regional grouping through the "Bay of Bengal Initiative" for Multi- Sectoral Technical and Economic Co-operation (BIMSTEC), which provides a BBIN-plus platform. countries: "Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and two from south-east Asia, Myanmar and Thailand. With the exception of the Maldives, Afghanistan and Pakistan, the other five SAARC countries are included in BIMSTEC. BIMSTEC has pruned its priorities down to five major areas: trade and industry, transport and connectivity, counter- terrorism, energy trade and climate change. The Indian government also invited the leaders of the BIMSTEC countries to attend the 8th Summit of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) as its observer. Moreover, another regional body, "South Asia Sub-Regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) was established in 2001. It comprises of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka." Trade, transport and energy projects are the priorities in its Operational Plan 2016-2025 that is worth billions of dollars. In their regional initiatives, SASEC countries have endeavored to implement projects pertaining to "energy, economic corridor development, transport, trade facilitation, and information and communications technology sectors worth more than \$9 billion in the. The initiative, in this regard,

is expected to increase mutually beneficial trade between the seven SASEC countries. Another initiative "the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN). But all the initiatives fallen vain in cause of poor leadership. Leadership is one of the big deal for the regional institution as SAARC.

3.2 LEADERSHIP CRISIS OF SAARC

SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) has had several examples of leadership crises which have hampered the organization's effectiveness. The root cause of SAARC's biggest crisis is the long term political conflict between India and Pakistan. Many SAARC summits have been canceled or delayed due to this internal conflict. For example the 19th SAARC summit was supposed to be held in Islamabad in 2016 but India refrained from participating in the summit after the Uri attack (in Indian Jammu and Kashmir). Later, Afghanistan, Bhutan, and Bangladesh also refused to participate leading to the cancellation of the conference. Internal conflicts and political instability among member states have undermined SAARC's effectiveness. For example, prolonged political instability in Afghanistan and civil war in Sri Lanka have undermined SAARC cooperation efforts. Geopolitical influence of powerful states inside and outside SAARC is also a major factor in the leadership crisis. Even as India seeks to extend its influence disputes with Pakistan and China's role have complicated SAARC leadership. China sought full membership in SAARC but India did not support it further exacerbating SAARC's leadership crisis.

3.3 ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE AND THE STRUCTURAL WEAKNESS OF SAARC

In principle it is difficult to achieve the goal of reducing poverty. As one of the poorest regions on the planet, the task is enormous. The total population of eight South Asian countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) is more than 1.6 billion of which more than 40% live below the poverty line. poverty, with an education of more than half. As data from previous years show South Asia's GDP per capita is even lower than that of the world's most deprived sub-Saharan Africa. In recent times, although some countries have made significant progress in economic development, the impact is still limited. In general, daily comfort expectations in South Asia are still low and living conditions for many

residents are still poor, with access to food, clean water, health services and a standard of education which is far below normal. For a single country, the civil war in Sri Lanka has just ended and the war in Afghanistan has been going on for a long time, while Pakistan is caught up in extreme natural and man-made challenges. We have to admit that SAARC cooperation in the fight against poverty is an obstacle (SAARC 2015, April 8). Second, economic and commercial participation is very difficult. Based on its size and monetary development. Globally, there is significant reciprocity between South Asian countries. However, most countries carry a significant external debt burden and their foreign trade is Development reserves and countries must receive aid and advances from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund every year, as do some newly created countries. Economic cooperation, especially in the fields of industry and finance, faces major challenges. Interregional trade in South Asia has gradually increased due to various factors. Third, weak bilateral relations limit cooperation. According to the SAARC Charter, SAARC does not deal with bilateral issues and disputes. For historical and geopolitical reasons bilateral debates between South Asian countries are numerous and difficult to define. The elements of the discussion regularly include the necessary interests of the countries concerned, and the two sides will not easily give up their cause, which has a real effect on the development of territorial cooperation. Addressing ethnic, religious, water and border issues takes time. Fourth, South Asia is a problematic region when it comes to terrorism. SAARC has failed to curb cross-border terrorism to a large extent. The problem of eradicating terrorism and the damage it causes remains a serious challenge.

3.4 INSTITUTIONAL LIMITATIONS INHIBITING THE DEVELOPMENT OF SAARC

There are serious limitations that undoubtedly hinder the development of South Asian cooperation. Some of these obstacles can be described as follows:

3.4.1 INTERSTATE DISPUTE IN SOUTH ASIA

One of the main obstacles to cooperation among SAARC members is mistrust, perception of mutual security and hostility. All members of this organization feel in one way or another a threat to their political, economic and territorial stability from neighboring countries. It means loss of property, lives, identity and community violence. Their cooperation may suffer due

to community and terrorist threats. The stakes are always high when you try Fear of Indian domination. Another important reason for the failure of SAARC is the fear of India's hegemonic role in the region. India's desire to participate in the region's decision-making process as a leader has raised concerns among neighboring countries, particularly Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. the member country

3.4.2 CLASH OF CIVILIZATION

Professor Samuel Huntington mentioned in his book Clash of Civilizations that SAARC was a failure because according to him, the countries that belong to the organization like the EU belong to the same culture, but the SAARC countries are the ones that their cultures are different. India and Pakistan are enemies of each other, they argue about small things and then how these countries support each other

Organization No country in the region feels that it belongs to another country.

3.4.3 FINANCIAL SITUATION

The weak financial position of member countries has also created an uncertain future for this organization. This weak financial position is reflected in trade imbalances between member countries. SAARC member countries are not very developed financially and economically. This situation is not favorable for the economic integration of South Asia. Most of the member countries export similar products and India also plays a major role in this field. This situation encourages less developed countries to seek aid and engage in extra-regional trade, which is not conducive to regional economic interaction. SAARC member countries do not complement each other but actually compete. Mutual exchanges are very weak. The low level of interregional trade in South Asia has frustrated the objective of this organization.

3.4.4 ASYMMETRY BETWEEN INDIA AND MEMBER STATES

There is an economic, technological and demographic imbalance between India and other SAARC member countries. India, larger in size, economy and with advanced technological infrastructure,

dominates the other members. India accounts for more than three-quarters of the region's GDP and technological infrastructure, and two-thirds of the region's global exports. Smaller South Asian countries feel uncomfortable in their trade relations with India because, under the current tariff structure, India runs a large trade surplus with its neighbours. Also, the volume of India's informal trade with most of its neighbors is quite large. All South Asian countries look to India to share their large markets due to its size and geographic location, with 80% of intra-regional trade in South Asia being to or from India. India blames Pakistan for the failure of SAFTA, but this is not true at all because SAFT requires Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka to reduce tariffs to 20%. Also, India is geographically connected to all other member countries as it is located in the center of the region and the others are on the outskirts. It can be said that without India, the other member countries it cannot progress because India unites all the members. Lack of trust between member states.

3.4.5 LACK OF TRUST:

There is also a lack of trust among SAARC member countries, which does not bode well for the future development of this regional organization. They still live in the fabric of history, and rivalries and mutual distrust have already taken their toll. The elites challenge each other mainly because of their nationalistic feelings, personal interests and interstate conflicts.

3.4.6 EXCLUSION OF CONTROVERSIAL DOCUMENTS FROM THE SAARC CHARTER

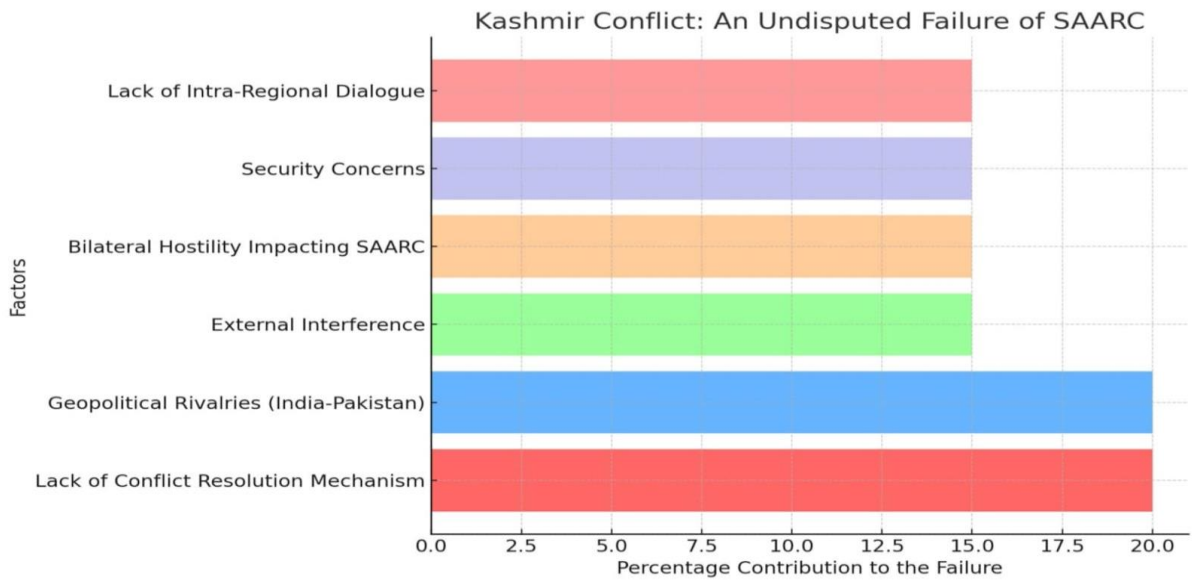
The SAARC Charter itself has some self-imposed anomalies as its charter says that in the face of such conflicts, we cannot expect this regional organization to develop on a sustainable basis. On the one hand, it calls for more intensive cooperation and exchanges and, on the other hand, it avoids negotiating bilateral disputes. The Charter also requires that all decisions be taken unanimously, which becomes very difficult. This clearly shows the instability of interstate relations regarding the equal participation of South Asian people in policy making. Apparently, the Charter itself denies the true purpose of the organization. In such conditions, we cannot say that it develops on solid foundations. All South Asian countries have different political systems, which also explains the failure of SAARC.

3.4.7 DIFFERENT POLITICAL SYSTEMS

South Asia has never been a strong democratic region. Like democracy in India, there is a transitional democracy in Pakistan a monarchy in Nepal and a presidential system in Sri Lanka. Most countries have been unstable. The conflict between the two countries, namely Pakistan and India, over the Kashmir issue never allowed these two countries to expand and put aside their differences in the SAARC forum. India is also in conflict with other member countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal, which is not helping SAARC to achieve its goals. The above problems are mainly the structural and institutional weaknesses of SAARC. Even after all these years of establishment, SAARC has not been able to get out of the economic adversity according to its eligibility criteria. Along with the geographical instability which drags SAARC back one step of development. These type of political mandate Couldn't make peace among the member states. Reason behind the catastrophe is weak visionary leadership ;For this reason Kashmir issue is being undisputed.

3.5. KASHMIR CONFLICT :AN UNDISPUTED FAILURE OF SAARC

The Kashmir conflict Since the two states have already fought more than three wars (1948, 1965 and 1999) over the Kashmir issue, territorial disputes in the region continue to be the most pressing issue in the subcontinent and the main source of enmity. The partition of the subcontinent in 1947 is the root of the current problems in Kashmir. After that, Pakistan and India claimed to speak on behalf of the people of Kashmir in any case neither country was ready to respond to the request for independence made by a large number of cacheminiés. India believes that Kashmir is an indisputable part of its territory while Pakistan says that the acceptance of the State Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir of India's entry into the international law of the Criminal Court it lacked a solid legal basis and was never recognized by SAARC.



In addition, the United States, China and Great Britain are among the many powerful countries that agree that Kashmir is disputed. Pakistani officials say India's annexation of Muslim-majority JandK districts defies the logic of partition and that Kashmir remains an unresolved issue since the 1947 partition. Pakistan believes that instead of rejecting the reality of Pakistan and its hegemonic ambitions India should give up on these issues to reach a peaceful solution (Chari, Cheerna, & Cohen, 2009). "Regional security and stability are threatened by the frozen conflicts that continue to exist within our borders. They endanger minorities, fundamental freedoms and human rights; they destroy lives and physical and social infrastructure. Terrorism, radicalism and collapse state can result from the conflict. They offer opportunities for organized crime. Undisputed Kashmir issue make a terror friendly environment for the India & Pakistan both. The third party take the opportunity to make it easy to create a hegemonic massacre between the two States. For the lacking of positive will the Kashmir demand never be stopped. Hereinafter the people of Kashmir have been suffering most for 7 or 8 decades to get pragmatic freedom but the activities of the SARRC leaders have made no tremendous solution for the Azadi people of Kashmir.

CHAPTER FOUR

RECOMMENDATIONS

People in South Asian regions that were impacted by the use of force to combat terrorism and impose law and order were not able to experience socioeconomic progress. That's why it's essential to deploy both the troops on the ground and political and economic tactics. So, construction of CPEC and BCIM corridors will strengthen inter-regional connectivity among South Asian countries as well as their intra-regional association. Because South Asian states are so close to one another if conflict resolution, combating terrorism and seamless trade are the goals of South Asian leaders, then cross-border cooperation is a must. Through SAARC, Nepal and Bhutan have the potential to be key players in regional integration. Both countries have an abundance of hydropower but in order to grow, regional economic cooperation is required. Both goals can be accomplished by working together on economic initiatives. The functioning of SAARC could become more stable with China's full membership. It can undoubtedly lessen India's influence in politics and the economy. In addition, China has previously made investments in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and the Maldives through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and other similar projects. Most crucially, without regional cooperation, peace in Afghanistan is not feasible. Pakistan would play a key part in it. However, SAARC members might contribute to maintaining peace initiatives like the Heart of Asia project and operational using energy and commercial corridors benefiting both Afghanistan and South Asia as a whole. The failure of member countries to synchronize their domestic agendas with SAARC agendas is the primary cause of the organizations sluggish growth. For improved SAARC communication, normalisation of political ties amongst SAARC members particularly between India and Pakistan should be promoted. India generally argues that "SAARC is slipping into irrelevance". Critics of SAARC point to the causes of SAARC's failures mentioned above as an argument to look for options beyond SAARC and find substitutes for regional cooperation. Interestingly, these arguments or criticisms are also correct. This does not mean that SAARC should be abandoned but that more efforts should be made to rethink regional priorities and enable SAARC to keep its promises and not the other way around. Therefore, the main question that needs to be asked here is: why is it important for South Asian states to be connected through a regional organization like SAARC? The answer is simple: regional cooperation. It is only through connectivity that South Asian states can increase their economic growth rate in the face of a growing population. Just maintaining the rate of economic growth is not enough to meet the standards of human security. Countries must now continuously increase their socio-economic development by increasing the rate of economic growth due to the increase in the threats

of non-traditional security in the region, such as climate change. Similarly, to tap into South Asia's growing manufacturing sector, states in the region need to connect with each other through gas pipeline projects, as they are seen to play a vital role in the energy imports of Central and Western Asia. In addition, Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) and Iran-Pakistan (IP) are also important for energy supply. Although these extra-regional initiatives are promising, it is unlikely to hope for a breakthrough in the near future since India has already withdrawn from the IP and the future of the TAPI pipeline is linked to lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan. Second, the connectivity of South Asian states is also a prerequisite to attract more investments from the outside world. If the region is economically integrated projects like "Make in India", "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)", Bay of Bengal Initiative and a network of corridors connecting Chabahar with Central Asia and similar networks will be launched in Myanmar with Chinese and Indian investment will not only multiply internal investment but also their profits through the reduction of the trust deficit and associated barriers. Similarly, the process of the Corso Asia bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan will also attract investment and facilitate the implementation of economic projects, transit trade and existing energy. After observing the loopholes we recommended some strategy by following these the dormant SAARC can get life for South Asian Development.

4.1 IN THE POLITICAL FIELD

a) Role of India, Pakistan

India & Pakistan should not play its big brother role but a full partner for stability and cooperation in South Asia. SAARC is not an insignificant forum but one that has grown in importance in the face of changing global and regional patterns. So India & Pakistan should be aware of this scenario. Most of the conflicts in South Asia are Indocentric. Therefore, India & Pak must adopt a low profile to gain the trust of its smaller neighbors.

b) Formation of conflict reconciliation groups

CCGs can be formed to resolve bilateral disputes when all parties to a particular dispute agree to seek assistance from SAARC to investigate the matter or to conduct a fact-finding study. The composition of the CCG may include a representative from each of the parties seeking assistance from the group, as well as one or more representatives from other member states to ensure impartiality. These groups can conduct studies on problems related to the

exploitation of women and children and other problems on which the countries of the region agree to act.

c) Discussions on international issues

The SAARC Charter should provide for discussions on international issues among the leaders of the member countries, especially those related to common issues of international peace and security, trade, environment and technology transfers, etc. Currently, the existing structure does not allow for such discussions, with summit statements being made and written by bureaucrats long before the summit meeting. Such an approach allows these leaders to discuss international issues affecting the region as a whole. Take the example of the Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) negotiations in Geneva. India and Pakistan, despite their caution on nuclear issues, had similar concerns about the proposed CTBT. Instead of working together, the two countries deliberately clashed in Geneva, diluting the collective strength that could have helped.

d) Settlement of bilateral disputes

SAARC, as an emerging organization and having the potential to connect the dynamic economies of South Asia, should include in its provisions the peaceful settlement of bilateral disputes and the provision to take all decisions simultaneously without affecting bilateral disputes instead of being eradicated.^{xxi} this is not very easy to start, it must be done because without this step the general development of this organization has no meaning. The principles of respect for territorial sovereignty, political independence and non-intervention should not be ignored.

e) The role of political governments: The role of the governments of the eight member countries is very important to strengthen SAARC. Lack of trust and sincere efforts have hindered any development in this organization. If all measures are taken with a constructive thought and vision for regional integration, then there is no doubt that SAARC can go much further than the European Union (EU). Several wars in the region and a constant flow of accusations from most countries of illegal cross-border violations have led to the arrest of hundreds of nationals. A SAARC fact-finding team may be established and may, in collaboration with the International Red Cross, visit prisons and other detention centers to investigate allegations.

4.2. ECONOMIC INITIATIVES

a) Monitoring policy changes In the face of rapid trade liberalization, it is necessary to monitor policy changes such as the introduction of tariffs or price controls at the regional level for better coordination and a more effective response to the challenges of trade.

b) Creation of South Asian identity Create an identity of the South Asian region in terms of quality, brands, standards, investment regimes and other areas where a common approach would be beneficial for all member states.

(c) Cooperation at smaller subregional levels: Cooperation at smaller sub-regional levels such as the West, to create the conditions for sub-regional growth.

d) Interaction between citizens. There is a need to facilitate trade between the citizens of South Asia by improving road, rail and air transport. For example, there is no easy air connection between major cities in South Asia. You have to go to Bangkok to reach Colombo from Dhaka. Similarly, Pakistanis have to travel to Dubai or Bangkok to reach Kathmandu. All these practical obstacles reduce the chances of interaction between South Asian people. Increasing joint venture initiatives in the service and education sectors is a need of our time. Today, Bangladeshi and Nepalese students and patients flock to Indian educational and medical institutions. This certainly helps bridge the cultural gap. However, this at the same time contributes to the trade imbalance in the services sector. In addition, joint venture initiatives in these sectors can provide another form of interpersonal cooperation.

4.3 INSTITUTIONAL INITIATIVE

a) Structural changes in the Secretariat

Structural changes are needed to make the Secretariat more responsive to existing conditions and for a faster implementation of policies. Among these structural changes, the size of the Secretariat is expected to increase to deal with the wide range of issues being addressed by SAARC under the IPA. To finance the increased activities of the SAARC Secretariat, all member countries have to pay, in addition to existing contributions, for example a percentage of their defense budget as an additional levy.

b) Organize more meetings

Another important structural change should be for the Secretariat to include in its calendar at least three summit meetings of foreign ministers and heads of government each year, which would increase the level of interaction in various fields between member countries. There should also be more frequent meetings with ministers.

C. SAARC Secretariat : The Secretariat should have complete freedom to prepare position papers on multilateral issues of interest to the region itself. These documents may initially be limited to matters for which the countries concerned authorize the Secretariat to carry out research activities.

d) SAARC Parliament To achieve the objective of a well-integrated economic community, the SAARC Parliament may be established. The formation of the SAARC Assembly can be considered as an achievable goal. This assembly, initially, could only have consultative and non-legislative functions.

e) Coordination with NGOs

The SAARC Secretariat should engage with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to coordinate and scale up economic and infrastructural assistance. There would undoubtedly be a large number of NGOs willing to do this.

CHAPTER FIVE: REMARKS ON FINDINGS

CONCLUDING REMARKS

SAARC established in 1985 with the objectives of economic cooperation, poverty reduction and promotion of regional cooperation has not made much progress in more than four decades. The administration has made a good start to sign agreements like SAFTA to promote intra-regional trade and progress towards its goals. Over the years this organization has changed its structure to suit countries outside the region. Globalization and other international trends are important for the acceptance of countries and organizations outside the region as observers. These countries and legal organizations have given SAARC the ability to communicate globally. Basically, SAARC was created during the creation of a region with close cultural and historical ties. Currently,

SAARC faces many other challenges, although the region has clear objectives in poverty reduction, economic development and promotion of cooperation in other areas. However, this region is one of the least integrated and poorest regions. Although some countries in the region have made progress, the region has not been unified. In the economic field, most of the SAARC countries are doing little and the total trade of SAARC accounts for only 5% of the total trade of the region. After successful regional integration and fruitful trade agreements like SAFTA, relations between SAARC member countries, especially India and Pakistan, have been strained. The rivalry between India and Pakistan dates back to the era of independence and the conflict over the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. Two SAARC members have nuclear capabilities. They have faced each other four times since his reign. There are tensions between other neighboring SAARC countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh. Conflicts and issues may lead to cancellation or cancellation of the SAARC summit and eventually hinder the progress of SAARC. Also, India faced many problems in SAARC because of its size, economy and military power. Smaller countries in the region see India as a threat and many accuse India of taking an aggressive stance. Despite its leadership, the Indian majority must hold its ground if China is to gain the favor of smaller countries. Recently, Pakistan has also been affected by China's influence in several important SAARC projects. The 2016 SAARC summit, which was scheduled to be held in Islamabad, Pakistan, has been postponed for a long time due to the Uri camp attack. Meanwhile, India has expressed interest in another regional organization BIMSTEC. Although this organization has existed since 1997, it has become popular recently. This is due to many events and changes in sub continent politics such as the shift from Look East to Look East policy in the new NDA government formed under PM Modi. The development of India's eastern region, the poor performance of SAARC and the rise in cross border competition and terrorism; all these factors have made India, Pakistan & Bangladesh a better candidate for BIMSTEC this time. The EU organization for crisis management and planning (CMPD). Though it has numerous shortcomings, SAARC has not been idle. But we have to make sure that power struggles in the area don't impede its advancement. There is still more to be done in this area. However, deficiencies can be transformed into opportunities by implementing reasonable and durable solutions. Developing trust amongst the nations of South Asia, particularly between India and Pakistan would be the primary task. Pakistan is upbeat about SAARC's future and always eager to support regional integration for the area's economic development and poverty alleviation.

Here is a sample **bibliography** for the research title "**The Role of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC): Limitations, Challenges, and Reforms**". The references

include books, journal articles, official documents, and reports relevant to SAARC's role, performance, challenges, and prospects for reform.

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